THE CIVIC REFORMATION IN COVENTRY, 1530-1580

by

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Abstract

This thesis considers the civic elite in Coventry during the Reformation, from 1530-1580. It describes how the presence of a longstanding civic and political culture, dating back to the late middle ages, helped to mitigate religious change and bring other economic and social priorities to the fore during this period. The thesis looks at contemporary understanding of ideas of the city, including civic history and political power, as well as the economic forces which shaped the civic government's interaction with other political hierarchies and the broader social world of the kingdom. It is argued that, although the corporation was keen to protect and define the political and physical boundaries of the city, they lived in an environment that was permeable to outside influence and the presence of geographically broad social and political networks. Urban political disputes are also examined, with the aim of elucidating those principles which ensured the smooth running of civic government and the control of the city by the corporation and the civic elite. Religious disagreements during the 1540s and 1550s are examined in detail, to show why, despite the potential for turmoil, the city never saw the breakdown of order or the political hierarchy. The spread of protestantism during later decades is dissected, alongside attempts to maintain urban religious provision at an acceptable standard, and to preserve the structures and hierarchies of civic religion. The thesis concludes that, even in cities like Coventry, where the effects of the dispute and dissonance that came with the growth of a new religion were strongest, it was possible for the traditional moral rules of urban governance to ensure that the city was an ordered and successful society well into the latter half of the sixteenth century.

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Abstract

This thesis considers the aims and motives of the civic elite in Coventry during the period of the English Reformation, from 1530-1580. It examines how the civic elite developed a governing ethos based on traditional principles, as well as new ideas of civic humanism. The thesis demonstrates that these principles led to a practical method of conducting civic government which amounted to collective government by a small group of the civic elite. It has long been suggested that the changes of the Reformation led to an entrenchment of urban oligarchy, as challenges to the power of urban corporations by bodies such as monastic institutions were removed, and the civic elite gained access to large amounts of ex-monastic land. This thesis seeks to prove, not simply that this led to an oligarchic culture of 'bourgeois collectivism', as some urban historians have described, but that civic thought and rhetoric was employed to justify this system of politics and government in Coventry.

The introduction deals with sources and methodology. Traditional urban historiography of this period has largely employed local material in the form of the administrative records of corporate towns. While this material is present for Coventry, there are a number of significant gaps in the records of the corporation, most notably the absence of Leet records from 1555-1585. There is considerable evidence of the economic condition of the city, in the form of civic surveys and the accounts of the craft guilds, which allows a detailed examination of the social and economic context for elite civic politics. However, information which bears directly on the thoughts and intentions of the aldermen is sometimes lacking. Fortunately this missing evidence suggests other approaches. The records of the courts of equity in London, as well as personal papers and a detailed reading of wills, have enabled a prosopographical approach to be taken. This has allowed for a clear enunciation of the aims and motives of the civic elite as well as a broader approach which examines the corporate county and the region as well as its interactions with the city.

Chapter 1 explores the way in which the civic elite defined their city. This chapter shows that they used humanist rhetoric to define their geographical and legal jurisdiction and their relationship to the state as well as the surrounding region and landscape. The chapter looks at the construction of civic history and the contribution that it made to the contemporary understanding of politics and government by the civic elite. It also notes the boundaries of the corporate county of Coventry and the efforts of the aldermen to defend these boundaries. The chapter also examines the career of Thomas Gregory and his son Arthur, both clerks to the corporation over a period of 40 years. The attempts of these men to set up rival courts baron, which impinged upon the jurisdiction of the city's Leet, are examined as well as the corporation's defence against this attack. The chapter shows that the civic elite were seeking a clearer definition of the extent of their power.

Chapter 2 examines the economic interactions of the city of Coventry during this period. Extensive use of statute merchant recognisances is made in an attempt to quantify these interactions. It is shown that the porous boundaries of Coventry and the status of the city as a regional centre for trade and population movement added to the potential for disturbance and instability. The chapter shows that the civic elite tried to control trade and industry through the promotion of cloth-making projects and gain control of natural resources in the county of Coventry.

Chapter 3 looks at civic and political culture in the city. By examining statistical evidence of guild membership and the attendance at civic funerals a detailed picture of the continuity of political life in the city has been drawn. Disputes within civic government and the mayor's council are also examined, as well as the trajectory of individual civic careers. The rhetoric surrounding political disputes in Coventry stressed the need to maintain an undivided corporate body as well as revealing the desire for consistent civic values which accorded with the traditions of the city. By examining these traditions an understanding of early modern ideas of civic virtue has been obtained. All of this evidence has helped to divine the principles which governed the collective authority of the corporate body of aldermen.

Chapter 4 looks at urban projects and problems. It has often been argued that spiritual and moral regulations, as well as schemes for urban improvement, were either direct responses to events or a

product of an elite puritan religious culture amongst the aldermen. In fact, although projects for regulation and urban improvement do show the civic elite reacting to specific problems, it was largely the sense of responsibility towards the city, fostered by the humanist ideas and values of the urban elite, which brought about and rationalised responses to urban problems. In this chapter responses to plague and the grain shortages of the 1550s are discussed as well as changes to the allocation of common land. The civic government viewed itself as an autonomous self governing commonwealth, run for the benefit of the commonweal. It was these political principles which governed its responses to civic problems.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on religious change. The thesis shows that when the religious divisions of the Reformation arose in the 1540s, religious factionalism was present amongst the civic elite and the townsmen, as visiting preachers caused considerable tension and highlighted religious dividing lines. Chapter 5 focuses on heresy prosecutions in the 1540s as well as the continuing religious tension in the city. This tension was increased by a number of outside influences, including the local gentry and the presence of a number of conservative preachers who had previously been involved in religious controversies in other towns. Chapter 6 concentrates on religious changes during the period from 1550 to 1580. Despite the Marian reaction and the further heresy prosecutions of the 1550s, the growth of evangelical religious belief amongst the civic elite meant that there was a greater degree of consensus about the need to restore religious provision to the city of Coventry after the effects of the dissolution. It was primarily the challenges of making religious provision for the city which dominated the religious thoughts and actions of the urban elite in this period. Coventry was one of the more divided towns in the English Reformation, with considerable evidence of evangelical groupings. However, this thesis argues that it was primarily the stable and homogeneous nature of civic thought and government that prevented any great degree of religious infighting, rather than the influence of royal control. The thesis concludes by arguing that despite the social and political division present in the city, arising from the dividing lines of Reformation thought and theology, the civic elite were successful in maintaining harmony and control in the city. They did this by emphasising tradition and creating and defining new modes of civic virtue and service. These touchstones of political culture helped to maintain an undivided corporate body which adhered to a set of common principles.

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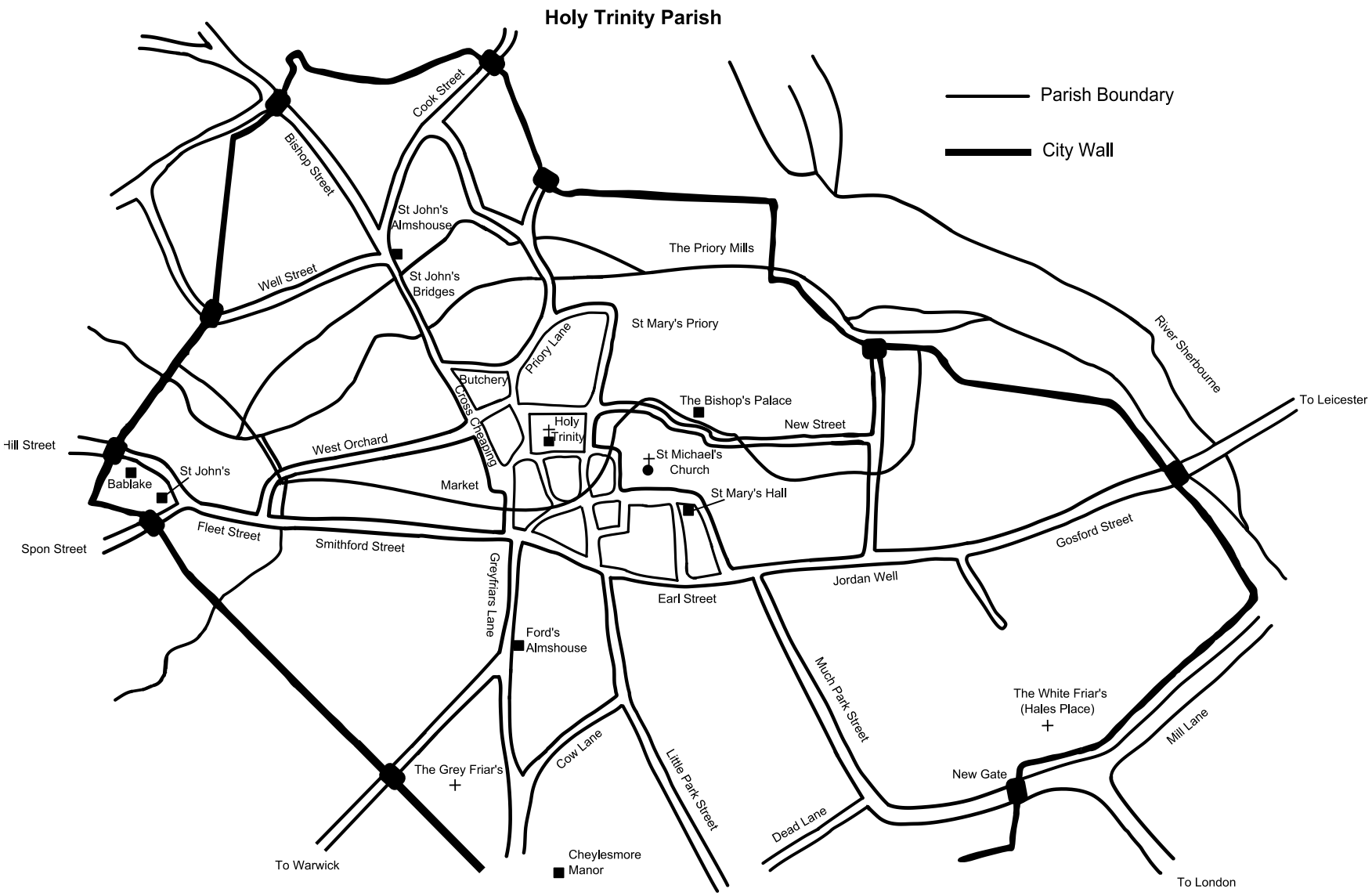
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The Grey Friar's
New Gate
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To Warwick
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St Michael's Parish
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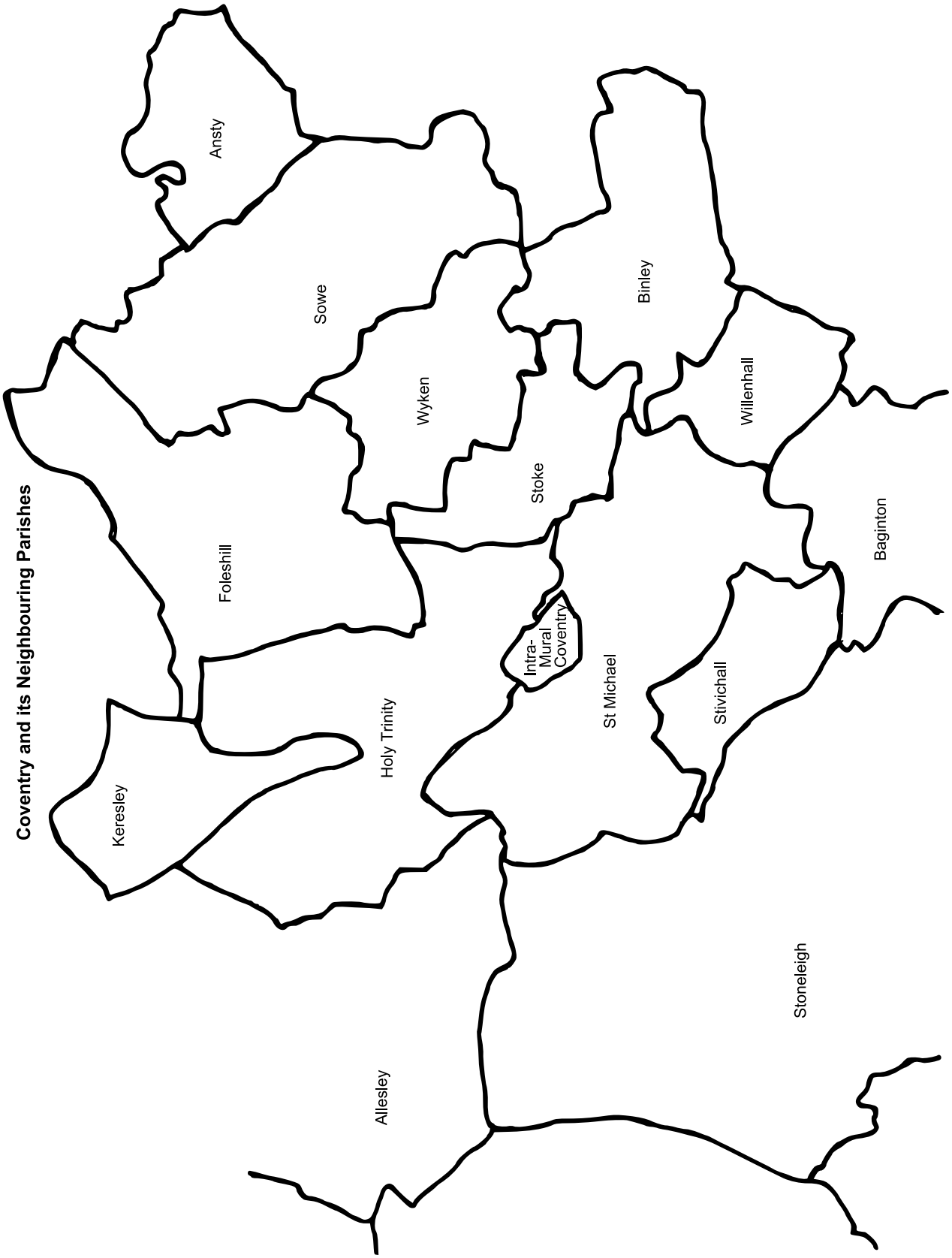
Coventry and its Neighbouring Parishes
Ansty
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Binley
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Willenhall
Stoke
Foleshill
Baginton
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Mural
Coventry
St Michael
Stivichall
Holy Trinity
Keresley
Allesley
Stoneleigh

Abbreviations

ASC – All Souls College

CCCC – Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

CRO – Coventry Records Office

CSPD Eliz – Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580: Preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office, ed. Robert Lemon (7 vols., London, 1856-1871).

CSPD Mary – Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Mary I, 1553-1558, ed. C. S. Knighton, (London, 1998).

DP – *The Dudley Papers, 1559-1590; Longleat House Collection* [Dudley Papers, Microfilm, Comprising: DUI-V].

EETS – Early English Text Society

L&P – Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII: Preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum, and Elsewhere, eds. J. S. Brewer, James Gardiner and R. H. Brodie (21 vols., London, 1862-1932).

Leet Book – The Coventry Leet Book, or, Mayor's Register, Containing the Records of the City Court Leet or View of Frankpledge, A.D. 1420-1555, ed. Mary Dormer Harris (EETS, Oxford, 1907-1913).

LRO – Lichfield Records Office

NUL – Nottingham University Library

ORO – Oxford Records Office

SBTRO – Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office

TNA – The National Archives

TRHS – Transactions of the Royal Historical Society

WRO – Warwickshire Records Office

Charts and Diagrams

Introduction

The traditional narrative of the Reformation in the English towns, encompassing the growth of Protestantism, has remained remarkably consistent over time. Although reformed ideas arrived late in England in comparison to other European reformed movements, the standard narrative of Protestant growth shows how these ideas were nurtured in predominantly urban settings.[1] The major contribution of revisionism has been to move some of the chronological boundaries of the Reformation and to question the strength of anticlericalism. Where we once had only one Reformation we now have many partial and incomplete movements - at least in terms of the different monarchs who tried to impose widely diverging religious changes on urban communities.[2] The English Reformation has long been studied in the national context; however, the focus on religious change in the local setting is newer. Urban historians have used anthropological and sociological ideas, and the tools of these disciplines in the hope that, when applied to discrete historical communities, they could explain political and social interaction between townsmen. Many studies of early modern English towns were also concerned with the economic forces ranged against the towns in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. In these narratives, religion and Reformation were simply other factors in a mix of destabilising events. [3] Economic and social change still dominates urban historical studies; however, in recent years, religious change, as an urban phenomenon, has received considerably more attention. Studies have shown that despite the focus on economic dislocation and decline, the English towns remained permeable to economic, social and religious forces, because of their role in trade, their large comparatively wealthy class of elites and the large numbers of educated clergy residing within them. Notwithstanding the contentions of revisionism, the Reformation did have an early popular expression in urban society, especially those towns in the south and the midlands. Consequently, during the 1540s and 1550s,

[1] A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989), pp. 325-8; Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (New York, 1988), p. 38.
[2] Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 12.
[3] D. M Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979); Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and The Urban Crisis of The Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979); T. S. Willan, *Elizabethan Manchester* (Manchester, 1980).

urban elites emerged who were interested in the new evangelical ideas. The study of these changes has had consequences for the way in which the sixteenth and seventeenth-century urban context is perceived by historians.

The idea of a dynamic Reformation, as a set of ideas that became attractive to a powerful elite, is particularly persuasive because of its explanatory power. This model of change primarily concerns religious attitudes of the civic elite, but has profound consequences for the way social relations in the town are perceived by historians. Firstly, it leads to a presumption of conflict amongst the civic elite. Leaving aside the religious predilections of royalty, which had a great effect on the eventual course of religious change, the urban centres of England might be said to have been the cradle of the English Reformation. A corollary of this line of argument, for many historians, was that religious change led, necessarily, to religious dispute. With strong evangelical as well as traditionalist groupings amongst the civic elite in many towns, political dispute seemed to be a natural product of religious change and the hardening of religious identities.[4] Because of the wide-ranging nature of religious ideas and dispute in the early modern period, religion always seemed to have a political dimension. Clark has come closest to suggesting that national political tensions could find an outlet within local urban settings in his study of Kent, in which townsmen are shown to be directly involved with courtly politics.[5] However, even if this view is not widely held, there is no doubt that historians have shown that religious and political factionalism did affect urban elites and mirrored some of the religious controversies at court. In an echo of earlier work, Shagan has argued that religious change and local politics are fundamentally interconnected and that the boundaries between religious and political culture were not always clearly delineated.[6]

[4] Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England,* pp. 28-60; Mathew Reynolds, *Godly Reformers and their Opponents in Early Modern England: Religion in Norwich 1560-1643* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 32-3, 83-107; Martha Skeeters, *Community and Clergy: Bristol and the Reformation, c.1530-c.*1570 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 34-57; Mark Byford, 'The Birth of a Protestant Town: The Process of Reformation in Tudor Colchester 1530-1580' in Patrick Collinson and John Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 30-2.

[5] Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640* (Hassocks, 1977), pp. 34-68.

[6] Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 18-25.

Secondly, it has been argued that, in many towns, civic elites emerged in the later sixteenth century as 'godly' Protestant rulers, who took a great deal of their moral and political direction from an increasingly puritan religious faith. According to this view, religious faith controlled diverse aspects of civic culture from how the elite perceived themselves, as godly magistrates building a 'city on a hill', to how they dealt with the diverse problems of civic infrastructure and demographic crisis.[7] Again, this opinion is convincing, because it helps to explain the growth of Protestantism in the English towns, as well as the forces of religious dispute which created division within ruling oligarchies. Thirdly, for some historians, the presence of a powerful religiously committed elite also explains the attractiveness of schemes for urban improvement, both in terms of urban infrastructure and the social control enacted by important townsfolk, acting in concert with each other. The idea of an ideologically driven puritan elite even had the power to explain why certain towns, and their oligarchies of aldermen and burgesses, came to support the parliamentary forces in the civil war.[8] These explanations were influential within a historiography that was searching for long term causes of the civil war and developing the idea of the 'long Reformation'.

However, while this narrative explains religious change well, it does little to deal with some of the continuities of urban life, in terms of social structures and government, and has little to say about the way in which urban politics managed to proceed despite disagreement. Historians have tried to address this problem by examining the way in which corporations and magistrates practised de facto toleration in their own communities or prioritised stability in the face of religious disagreement, economic crises and social problems.[9] Another way of approaching the Reformation in an urban context has been to examine its effect on material culture and resources. In an argument that has been largely separate from the debate about religious change, Tittler has shown

[7] Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, pp. 29-31; Paul Slack, 'Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666' in Peter Clark and Paul Slack (eds.), *Crisis and order in English towns 1500-1700* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 164-203.

[8] Peter Clark,' "The Ramoth-Gilead of the Good": Urban Change and Political Radicalism at Gloucester 1540-1640' in Peter Clark, A. G. R. Smith, Nicholas Tyacke (eds.), *The English Commonwealth 1547-1640* (Leicester, 1979), pp. 167-87.

[9] Muriel C. McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and The Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford, 1999); Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991).

the positive effects that the Reformation had on elite civic culture, strengthening the power and wealth of corporations and consequently their grip on oligarchic power.[10] Moreover, civic politics had its own internal logic that sometimes seemed quite separate from many of the religious and factional considerations that it was supposed to possess. Suggestions for the roots of this political behaviour have multiplied with the increased interest in urban life and government. It has been posited that elites in urban life created a group identity through their possession of economic privileges which resulted in a common political culture.[11] Categories of involvement in urban political life, such as that represented by citizenship and the membership of craft guilds, form the basis for this argument. More broadly it suggests that there were more important factors at play in creating cooperation in urban settings. Common religious belief and practice has often been posited as a necessary part of creating order in urban societies and a cohesive urban government. Religious guilds were observed to have played this role in medieval Westminster and elsewhere, in other English towns.[12] However, other issues were also crucial. In this vein, Withington has suggested that there might have been other guiding moral principles in elite civic politics, including classical models of virtue, civility and collective government, which helped shape the development of urban corporations and urban political culture well into the seventeenth century.[13] Demonstrating these other priorities, as well as the survival of the traditional principles of urban government formed in the medieval period, is an important goal of this thesis.

There are also other compelling reasons to study Coventry. Phythian-Adams's book on Coventry describes a society and urban government built on carefully constructed ceremony, which declined in the late medieval period, primarily for economic reasons.[14] However, this view gives the impression that the city experienced catastrophic change. Yet, the city was a regional capital and

[10] Robert Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998).
[11] Jonathan Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism, Urban Association and the Middling Sort', Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (London, 1994), pp. 84-113.
[12] Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200-1540* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 281-94.
[13] Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 3-12.
[14] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 3.

despite some economic decline it remained in the top ten towns in England, in terms of population. Phythian-Adams's account does little to show us how the urban hierarchies survived, and the city prospered in the sixteenth century, despite this crisis. Other studies of sixteenth-century Coventry focus primarily on economic factors and changing commercial and industrial relationships.[15] Very little has been written on the social and religious changes which impacted Coventry during this period. Notable amongst the chronologically later works connected with the city are Ann Hughes's examinations of Warwickshire during the civil war; however, these only deal with the seventeenth century.[16] Therefore, there is a need for a study which explains the continued stability of urban government and society during the sixteenth century. There is also need for a full account of the substantial and destabilising religious and economic change and the factors which helped to defuse some of the resultant tensions, such as the survival and enhancement of traditional civic values. This provides a new view of Coventry and a different perspective on the nature of urban change and religious division in the English towns. Consequently, a study of Coventry during this period also fills a considerable hole in our historical knowledge.

Studies of urban societies present some of the procedural difficulties that beset other 'local history' projects. While the methodological problem with some studies of urban life and government is a tendency to emphasise the local and the specific, a study of religion in Coventry can seem to fit too easily into the conventional narrative of early Protestant growth and conflict. The city experienced an expansion in the Protestant grouping within the elite during the late 1540s, and this group would eventually come to dominate the spiritual life of the city. As with many urban areas, economic decline took its toll on religious life, providing the opportunity for outside influence on the urban religious environment. Consequently, the city underwent a period of disturbance as a result of religious changes and vigorous arguments made from the pulpit. Coventry's preoccupation with late medieval heresy is well known and is illuminated by wills as well as the records of

[15] Ronald M. Berger, *The Most Necessary Luxuries: The Mercers' Company of Coventry, 1550-1680*, (New York, 1993), pp. 1-12.
[16] Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987); Ann Hughes, 'Coventry and the English Revolution' in Roger Charles Richardson (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 69-99.

prosecutions in the Lichfield Court Book in the diocesan archive. During the early part of the Reformation, further turbulent religious debate was sparked by the crown's attempts to impose changes to traditional religious practice and doctrine and the presence of prominent clerical figures in the city. This period is illuminated by a series of Star Chamber cases and a prosecution under the Act of Six Articles. Throughout the 1550s and later in the sixteenth century the civic elite supported Protestant ministers and preachers, as evidenced by the records of the Office of First Fruits and Tenths and other sources. Moreover, Coventry experienced considerable dislocation for the period of Mary I's attempt to return the country to Catholicism. At this time several prominent citizens were executed and others forced into exile because of their religious opinions. Other aldermen supported the reinstatement of traditional religion. During the later half of the sixteenth century the city was a centre for radical puritan ideas which were popular amongst the aldermen. However, despite this, conflict and factionalism never came to be the defining method of political engagement amongst the civic elite during the sixteenth century. As the study will show, political culture was based on other traditional moral urban ideas and developing modes of civility, not simply a factional conflict. Some of the lack of attention to urban political culture in the historiography of early modern England has been as a result of methodological difficulties, particularly deciding upon acceptable chronologies. Even significant projects dealing with long historical time-spans, such as the Cambridge Urban History, tend to divide between early modern and medieval subjects. This has led to a separation between the medieval and early modern period which often stops historians examining political culture as if it represented a continuity of moral and religious ideas about town governance.[17] Attempting to demonstrate this tradition of political involvement has consequences for the methods and sources used.

One of the aims of this examination of urban life was to uncover the politics of religious change amongst the civic elite. Consequently their interactions have been considered on an individual level. This required the examination of the lives and careers of a number of individuals in the civic

[17] *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, eds. D. M. Palliser, Peter Clark and Martin Daunton (3 vols. Cambridge, 2000).

elite, as well as their political interactions, without reducing the whole study to an act of statistical prosopography. Some studies have been very effective at establishing exactly who belonged to this elite class of urban rulers and their interrelations using this statistical method.[18] Nevertheless, this thesis seeks to understand the Reformation in the context of elite behaviour and attitudes which are best seen through individual examples of conflict and cooperation. Consequently, all of the extant wills for Coventry between 1520 and 1580 have been examined, both from the records office in Lichfield, which represented those proved by the prerogative court of Coventry and Lichfield and from the wills proved at Canterbury, for richer landed individuals. However, although it was sometimes fruitful to use statistical methods, applied to the group as a whole, when examining the economic context of the city and its rulers, this was not the main thrust of the investigation or the most illuminating way to use these wills. Again, statistical analysis of wills to map the ebb and flow of reformed belief has been employed before with much larger samples than were available for this period in Coventry and there are numerous caveats to using wills in this way.[19] Therefore, throughout this project wills have been used cautiously, largely to animate individuals or small groups with social and religious connections to each other, rather than to map the progress of the Reformation as a whole. Wills have also been used to examine urban custom with regard to burial and civic life and politics during this turbulent period.

One of the more fortunate survivals amongst the records of the city of Coventry are the papers of the town clerk, Thomas Gregory, which are preserved in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office.[20] Gregory held numerous civic offices during his 40 year career working for the city, including clerk to the corporation, coroner and clerk of the statute. Consequently, his papers include some working documents for acts of Leet and other civic business as well as draft subsidy returns which Gregory prepared in his role of commissioner. They also include an account book from the 1550s that records personal purchases, loans of money and books, as well as legal

[18] Colm Lennon, *The Lords of Dublin in the Age of Reformation* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 64-91.
[19] Caroline Litzenberger, *The English Reformation and The Laity: Gloucestershire, 1540-1580* (Cambridge, 1997).
[20] SBTRO DR10; Robert Bearman, *The Gregorys of Stivichall in the Sixteenth Century* (Historical Association, 1972).

business and trades in wool and cloth. It also demonstrates his commitment to the Protestant cause during the 1550s, and his involvement with other reformers in the city and elsewhere. As with many town clerks, Gregory had trained as a lawyer in one of the Inns of Court. His papers reveal the progression of his legal career including his work for local families. Gregory came to Coventry in the 1530s, in the service of Henry Over, one of the more wealthy aldermen, and lived in the city until his success and ambition eventually led him to acquire a manorial estate near Coventry. While this was hardly a typical route of civic advancement – most aldermen rose through their connections to trade – it does give an important window on some of the politics of civic life. Arthur Gregory took on the position of town clerk from his father after his death in 1572, but was less competent and committed to the role than his father, as his other offices, such as feodary of Warwickshire and his legal work in London, took him away from civic business. There was also disagreement with the city over the family's newly acquired land and their manorial jurisdiction. Here, the Gregory papers are particularly significant as, along with Star Chamber cases in the National Archives, they reveal a clash between the interests of the Gregory family and a newly confident civic elite trying to define the city against its surroundings and protect their material interests. It has long been suggested that the changes of the Reformation led to an entrenchment of urban oligarchy, as challenges to the power of urban corporations by bodies such as monastic institutions were removed, and the civic elite gained access to large amounts of ex-monastic land. The Gregory family papers help to illuminate the growing confidence of towns and civic oligarchies after the Reformation that typifies the mood of the period. In addition to this, the language of acts of Leet and other documents belonging to the corporation helps to display a contemporary construction of civic history and the contribution that it made to the understanding of politics and government by the civic elite. The corporation were interested in their history and traditional modes of conducting civic politics. Consequently, this thesis has sought to prove that civic thought and rhetoric were employed to justify this system of politics and government in Coventry.

The records of the corporation are also an important source. The first book of the Leet court, which encompasses most of the late medieval period, is available in a published edition.[21] This book ends in 1555 after which the evidence for acts of Leet and civic decision making is recorded only sporadically until the 1580s, when the second Leet book begins. However, there are other documents that help to tell the story of civic government during this period of religious change, including a mayor's book, which details corporation business and expenditure. There are also numerous civic accounts, such as the chamberlains' and wardens' accounts, which not only show the financial problems of the city, but also the recovery of civic finances in the latter half of the sixteenth century and expenditure on the upkeep of the city walls, churches and civic architecture, such as the new mayor's parlour and its kitchens. The city kept a separate account book for its manor of Cheylesmore, as well as the corporation loan books which recorded monies left to the city for the purpose of promoting young men in trade. The corporation was preoccupied with social problems and the effect of the Reformation on civic charitable resources as well as religious change. This issue is examined through the use of the corporation's records of civic charities, such as the almshouses, which they fought hard to preserve.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate important continuities in civic political life and communal traditions despite the religious changes of the Reformation. Therefore, the records of the craft companies, detailing their position within urban political life as well as their customs and practices, are important sources. These records include some surviving sixteenth-century account books for the Carpenters' Company, the Weavers' Company and the Cappers' Company, as well as some of the order books belonging to other craft companies. The accounts of the Drapers' Company survive in an incomplete transcript made by the Coventry antiquarian Thomas Daffern. Other evidence from lost account books and order books survives in the transcriptions made by Thomas Sharp, in his notebooks, which are now in the Bodleian Library. Although far from comprehensive, these sources give an idea of the extent of political involvement from the members of the

[21] *The Coventry Leet Book, or, Mayor's Register, Containing the Records of the City Court Leet or View of Frankpledge, A.D. 1420-1555*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris (EETS, Oxford, 1907-1913).

companies as well as change and continuity of ceremonies and political ideals throughout this period of religious change. Rather than providing a complete picture – which would be difficult for any early modern town – these sources help to exemplify modes of political interaction when contextualised by other documents.[22] They also help to explain why, despite disagreement and the potential for religious violence and conflict, the city continued to remain a prosperous and successful community with a thriving political culture during the sixteenth century.

[22] *Records of Early English Drama; Coventry*, ed. R. W. Ingram (Manchester, 1981), xxxi-xlviii. [For a detailed discussion of some of the original Coventry sources and antiquarian works].

1. Defining the City

During the sixteenth century, urban oligarchies, such as that represented by the corporation and aldermen of Coventry, suffered from the destabilising forces of economic and social change as well as the religious division of the Reformation. In a bid to provide much needed political strength, the civic elite found ways of conceptualising urban life and government. The easiest way of defining urban political power was to look to those who participated in the formalised governmental and legal structures of the city and how they conceived of their role. Participation in civic government and the act of holding office were markers of political involvement. Despite all that has been said about the burdens of civic office, the willingness to serve was still seen as a virtuous characteristic and was often a route to personal honour and profit. This idea of civic service accorded well with contemporary late medieval Italian descriptions of the *vita activa* and civic virtue which gradually made their way into English. A translation of Buonaccorso's *De vera nobilitate* was made as early as 1481 along with the publication of several other humanist works in English.[1] Conceptualising the qualities of a good citizen was already a prominent concern duringthe late fifteenth century. Yet, a full understanding of urban culture and identity must also entail broader definitions of the city, as it existed within its landscape and nation. In literary studies urban culture has been understood in dialectic opposition to its surroundings and 'urban' and 'rural' have been treated as different analytical categories. Some have suggested that physical features like the city walls marked the boundaries of two different literary conceptions of society.[2] This categorisation of civic and urban culture is unhelpful in so much as it draws definite dividing lines through a disparate set of economic and social relationships which defy such simple categorisation. Instead, for some theorists the city was a socially realised concept, produced through flows of capital, labour and commodities.[3] Therefore, an analysis of how townsmen came to explain their own commercial

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[1] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Vol. 2 : Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 224-5.
[2] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973), pp. 47-54.
[3] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991), pp. 77-8.

freedoms through an evolving sense of civic history is important. Coventry had to situate itself within a gradually changing kingdom and the broad economic networks of which the city found itself part. Much civic rhetoric was increasingly geared toward this end. The geographical boundaries of the city were still important. However, they were often defined and redrawn by conflict and economic imperative. Personal relationships, self-interest and economic disputes amongst the civic elite were just as important in defining urban political culture and civic power.

In examining ideas of early modern Coventry much weight has always been placed on its foundation myth. Fox quotes it as one of the more remarkable civic myths and an example of oral tradition and custom. It was, as Fox states, 'refreshed' in the minds of the people of Coventry by the medieval image in the south window of the Trinity Church in the city.[4] The window depicted Earl Leofric granting Coventry the freedom from tolls after Godiva's ride through the city. [5] The story was intimately connected with the cloth industry and trade in Coventry. The action occurred in the market place and explained Coventry's freedom from tolls, which was granted by Earl Leofric.[6] As Leland noted and most people believed, the city's wealth had been based upon the cloth industry and the trade in caps.[7] Moreover, the legend was of rhetorical use in trading disputes and in the fifteenth century it was repeated to protest against a new tax on wool.[8] As a foundation myth it was important because, along with important documents such as the city's charter it could help to trace the origins of civic freedoms, and therefore also the political power of the aldermen and freemen, to a single tangible point in history. In a culture where tracing a right since 'time out of mind' was often enough to prove a privilege to a court, civic foundation myths were elevated above the level of mere fables. As with much oral culture it is hard to understand the nuances of this legend and the ways in which

[4] Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2001), p. 267.
[5] Thomas Sharp, *Illustrative Papers on the History and Antiquities of the City of Coventry,* ed. W. G. Fretton (Birmingham, 1871), p. 107.
[6] K. L. French, 'The Legend of Lady Godiva,' *Journal of Medieval History,* 18 (1992), pp. 3-19.
[7] John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543*, ed. L. T. Smith (5 vols., London, 1906), v, p. 108.
[8] *Leet Book,* p. 567.

it was utilised by the people of Coventry and the civic elite. There is certainly enough in the story itself to suggest that some of Coventry's reforming civic elite might have regarded it with some mistrust later in the century. The legend had associations with the Virgin Mary and had become part of traditional civic religious celebration. The cappers' accounts record the attendance at mass during 'Dame Goodyves Day' during the sixteenth century.[9] Yet, the south window of the Trinity Church survived the Reformation, and in 1586 the townsmen even commissioned a painting of Godiva to hang in St Mary's Hall.[10] These myths, based on a continuity of civic tradition, were important in creating and maintaining the idea of the city of Coventry. Moreover, during times of change, complex narratives of civic history came to the fore which explained Coventry's place within the nation.

Also associated with the freedoms of the city were the Hock Tuesday celebrations. Hock Tuesday was a celebration of the defeat of the Danes in which the women of Coventry played a large role. Although the Hock Tuesday plays were put down in 1561 they continued to be performed at the visit of Elizabeth to Coventry in 1566 and the visit to Kenilworth in 1576. In 1576 the drapers and the weavers made payments to put men in harness on Hock Tuesday and, for this reason, some have speculated that the Queen's interest kept civic drama alive in Coventry longer than it would otherwise have survived.[11] As befitted a royal occasion many of the celebrations were given a contemporary national relevance. Robert Laneham, a London mercer viewing the celebrations at Kenilworth in 1576, sent a letter to a friend describing the plays and giving an account of the players. Laneham suggested that the Hock Tuesday plays were chosen for performance 'bicauz the matter mencioneth how valiauntly oour English weemen for love of theyr cuntree behaved themselvez'.[12] In this case, praise of the city was mingled with praise for the country and nation. The aldermen and the civic elite remained

[9] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 171, 219; CRO PA1494/20 fo. 34r.
[10] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers,* p. 107.
[11] *The Victoria History of the County of Warwick, eds. H. Arthur Doubleday and William Page (8 Vols., Oxford, 1904-1969)*, viii, pp. 208-21; CRO PA154 fo. 34v; *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* ed. R. W. Ingram (Manchester, 1981), p. 279.
[12] *Robert Laneham's Letter,* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (Ballad Society, 7, 1871), p. 27.

interested in descriptions of civic heroism which helped to define the place of the city within the nation.

Common to many contemporary attempts to define the city were economic explanations for the political powers of the corporation and the Leet court. Many men saw the economic and trading privileges that townsmen possessed, through their status as freemen and members of the craft companies, as the touchstone of political power and the very definition of what it meant to be a citizen. Those who fell out with the corporation, or failed to achieve the prominence that they believed that they deserved, were sometimes driven to foment division and conflict over these urban political values. In 1538, the Coventry fuller, Humphrey Reynolds, made a lengthy complaint to the King in which he detailed the social and economic problems of the city of Coventry and suggested his own remedy. Moreover, using contemporary anxieties, Reynolds attempted to tie the economic plight of Coventry, and his own political ambition, to this rhetoric and also royal interests regarding the reform of religious houses. Reynolds had failed to make his way in the Drapers' Company and in the political hierarchies of urban government. It was the anger and sense of grievance resulting from this that resulted in his petitions to royal authority, and his attempts to use the effects of the dissolution to his advantage. His urban career tells us much about the competing attempts of the city to define itself.

Humphrey Reynolds was born around 1500 into a moderately wealthy Coventry family. As he complained later, his status as a younger son, the inability to get a foothold in the cloth trade and the potential costs of civic office had prevented him from advancing far in civic politics.[13] Reynolds felt that he had been denied the political and economic freedoms which should have belonged to him by virtue of his birth in the city. His complaint was an effort to define the city's political class in a manner which included men like himself. However, his failure to make friends in civic politics had caused a sustained attack upon his status as a freeman and citizen by the corporation and the civic elite. Reynolds's association with outsiders, such as his patron Sir

[13] TNA PRO SP 1/141/ fo. 35 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47].

Francis Bryan, had caused many to question his motives. By 1533 he had already made enemies of the priory and the recorder of the city. Roger Wigston, the recorder of Coventry mentioned Reynolds alongside 'certeyn besy and troblous p[er]sones of the citie of Coventrye to the nombre of v or vj' who 'hauve in secret subtle & malicious man[ner] conferderate them self... ageynst the p[ri]or of the monastery in coventre, the mayre of the citie, me' and 'the com[on]alitie' by 'p[re]tending the c[o]menweal'.[14] Reynolds was denied political association with the civic elite on account of his clumsy attempts to manipulate and redefine civic politics and the city by force, through his complaints to the King. Yet, in other ways, and despite many of his own claims to the contrary, he was adept at using his political connections in Coventry and in the kingdom.

Besides the mayor, his council of senior aldermen and the Leet court, along with the rest of the political and commercial hierarchy, which included other officeholders and members of the craft guilds, there were other sources of authority in Coventry. Before the dissolutions the city was physically dominated by the presence of the Benedictine priory of St Mary's, and the influence of the prior, who held much of the available land in the city.[15] When the prior of Coventry died in 1537, Hugh Latimer wrote to Cromwell recommending two monks of Westminster, Galton and Clarke, for the post.[16] As well as being a source of patronage for wealthy and well connected figures at court, the position of prior was also an important political appointment for the city and one which could play into urban rivalries. In the end it was Sir Francis Bryan, Reynolds's patron, who interested himself in the matter on behalf of his friends in Coventry, writing that he had heard that 'the same house is in grete dete' and recommending his own candidate.[17] It seems that Reynolds cleverly used the effects of the changing political environment, and the influence of his patron, to his own advantage in the city. Bryan offered to present a monk to Cromwell who would tell him of the state of the house in Coventry. Bryan's

[14] TNA PRO SP 1/74 fo.14 [*L&P*, v.6, 18].
[15] J.J. Scarisbrick, 'The Dissolution of St Mary Priory, Coventry', George Demidowicz (ed.), *Coventry's First Cathedral 1043-1993: The Cathedral and Priory of St Mary* (Stamford, 1994), pp. 158-68.
[16] *The Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, ed. G. E. Corrie (Parker Soc. xxvii, 1845), pp. 388-9.
[17] TNA PRO SP 1/241 fo.287 [*L&P*, Addenda v. 1,Pt II].

preferred candidate, Thomas Cameswell, seems to have prevailed, ensuring that many of the coveted monastic leases went to his brother Michael Cameswell in the last years of the priory. Buoyed by this apparent success, Reynolds went on to petition the King in 1538 with a complaint which proposed an all-encompassing reform of monastic life and landholding in the corporate county of Coventry. Reynolds's career proves that the city was as much a political entity as a geographical and material one. The failure to make friends and the process of courting influence from outsiders had damaged his reputation. However, it did not stop him using the rhetoric of urban life, and his own ideas of the city, to achieve his goals.

Reynolds's fear of the costs of undertaking civic office figured heavily in his complaint to the King, as did his dispute with the mayor and the civic authorities.[18] The most remarkable aspect of the plan is the provision for a military college headed by a captain, with fifteen gentlemen with grooms, harness and horse all 'able to do y[ou]r grace S[er]vice in your warres'.[19] This was surely a political move, and a reaction to his rejection by the aldermen, designed to undercut the authority of the mayor and the corporation and provide a radical reconfiguration of urban life and politics. Reynolds attacked his contemporaries in civic government, providing his own analysis of urban political virtue and morality and complaining about those in the corporation 'who dryveth out his tyme as others have doon' and officeholders who 'care not what they doo'.[20] This was a complaint about the economic decline of the city and the costs of office-holding, but also a personal attack upon certain members of the corporation. Feeling marginalised from political life and trade in the city, Reynolds eventually acquired the stewardship of the dissolved priory of Stoneleigh in 1546, and the lease of Milbourne Grange to the south of the city.[21] The grange was granted to John Hales by letters patent in 1545 along with other lands in Coventry and it is possible that Reynolds sought his patronage.[22] Reynolds

[18] TNA PRO SP 1/141 fo. 35 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47].
[19] Ibid fo. 43.
[20] Ibid fo. 50.
[21] *Abstract of the Bailiffs' Accounts of Monastic & Other Estates in the County of Warwick under the Supervision of the Court of Augmentation for the Year Ending at Michaelmas, 1547*, ed. W. F. Carter (Dugdale Soc., 2, Oxford, 1923), p. 3-10.
[22] *L&P*, v. 20, 39.

may have even carried on the trade of fulling cloth there. Stoneleigh contained many fulling mills alongside fast flowing streams which were outside the boundaries of the authority of the Leet court. In the late medieval period the abbot rented 'walk-mills' to tenants in the area.[23] Stoneleigh was a minor centre for the production of cloth outside the jurisdiction of the city and the Leet court.[24] In 1547 a 'walk mill' or fulling mill, called Rabcroft at Stoneleigh, a mill at Cryfield and two other Stoneleigh mills were granted to Katherine, duchess of Suffolk.[25] Due to his pursuit of unregulated economic activity outside the city, and thus outside the sphere of influence of the Drapers' Company in Coventry, Reynolds had alienated himself from civic life during the 1540s.

It is hard not to see Reynolds's pleading to the King as a highly personal document of self-absolution, or at least justification for his later actions. Reynolds talked of how a man who had no prospects of advancement or was terrorised by the costs of civic office, like himself,

sueth to an abbey for a convent sealle or goeth to a farme in the Countrue and ther occupieth both his occupacion and husbandry to the great hynderance of the citie and the undyng of the poor husbondmen.[26]

Reynolds was shifting the blame for his own actions to the gentry and the civic elite who had prevented him rising in the social hierarchy. In his will made in 1553 Reynolds left the Coventry merchant and alderman, Henry Over, 'the Covent seale of myn of his howeses and groundes', acquired by virtue of his position.[27] The commoners of Stoneleigh and Finham who had common pasture on Dalley Heath and Milborne Green claimed that Reynolds had cheated them out of their right to common lands. According to their complaint, made in 1550, he had the reversion of the land sold to James Cruse at the original asking price, rather than at the

[23] SBTRO DR18/1/60.
[24] Andrew Watkins, 'The Medieval Abbey; Its Lands, Its Tenants' in Robert Bearman (ed.), *Stoneleigh Abbey* (London, 2004), pp. 197-214.
[25] SBTRO DR18/3/47/5; *Abstract of the Bailiffs' Accounts of Monastic & Other Estates in the County of Warwick*, ed. W. F. Carter (Dugdale Soc., 2, Oxford, 1923), p. 7.
[26] TNA PRO SP 1/141 fo. 58 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47].
[27] LRO B/C/11 (Humfrey Reinolde 1553).

improved rental value which was then being obtained on the land.[28] This was usually twenty years' purchase during the 1540s, in other words twenty times the net annual rental. The petition argued that James Cruse agreed to pay Reynolds £6 13s 4d per annum for helping him to obtain the land. It was also argued that Reynolds erased evidences from a Stoneleigh custumal in his possession and that Cruse had offered the tenants money to remain in possession of the common.[29] In essence Reynolds's predictions about the decline of Coventry and the personal necessity to find a living elsewhere, and the damage that it might cause to the commonweal, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. By falling out with the corporation, and then mounting an aggressive strategy of rhetorical complaint, Reynolds had fallen foul of the traditional political values of the city, which prized unity and order.

Through his complaint he was also able to tap into the common tensions that the corporation fought against. The rioting of 1525 which took place in the city was a powerful memory in Coventry. Reynolds companied that, of the 'iiij substanciall men' involved in putting down the disturbances, there was only one remaining in Coventry.[30] The disorder of 1525 had been precipitated by an incident when the city's chamberlains opened the breaches in the walls to allow cattle onto the commons of the city, as they did every year.[31] In 1538 a plan was put forward by the Leet court under the mayor, William Cotton, which proposed the reformation of common landholding in the city. It was designed to make common landholding fairer by renting out land to individuals and putting the resultant monies in the 'common box' of the city. This was supervised by men elected from the wards, bringing the increased participation of the commons to the management of civic property.[32] Enclosing the common land also had the effect of filling the hole in the city's finances and was followed by further enclosure of the commons in 1541. In 1548 the process was reversed and the commons were opened at lammas time as

[28] R. B. Outhwaite, 'The Price of Crown Land at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century', *The Economic History Review*, N. S., 20:2 (1967), p. 230.
[29] SBTRO DR10/1785 fo. 1-2.
[30] TNA PRO SP1/141 fo. 57 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47].
[31] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 51-69.
[32] *Leet Book*, pp. 728-37.

they had been before.[33] Despite the later easing of tensions over lands and finances, the 1530s and 1540s were a time when fears over the availability of land and the consequent potential for civic unrest were at their height. Although Reynolds's complaint was designed to be destabilising, it proved that he had a good knowledge of urban political culture, and the way in which the civic elite saw themselves.

Reynolds used these fears in his complaint and played on the fear of disorder which came from disputes over landholding. He claimed that the priory had 'As goodlie and p[ro]fitable lands as be w[it]in the Realme' and yet they cannot 'keip theme self out of dett'.[34] Continuing in this vein, he argued that the monks 'p[ro]mise ther sealle borthe for ther farmes and ther offices to iij or iiij p[er]sones whreby they sett men at varience'. He stated that the priory would 'reise a c m[ar]kes or on[e] c li' through entry fines which caused 'dissencion betwene p[ar]tie and p[ar]tie that god is n[othing regarded]'.[35] Hindle and others have described how acts of communal memory, such as beating the bounds of the parish, could forge a social and geographical cohesion in a community.[36] The caveat to this is that economic disputes between individuals could often undercut this current of communal cohesion and produce contested memories and contested boundaries. Traumatic periods in the existence of the city could also provoke complex emotions such as fear and anxiety over moral values. Reynolds talked of the 'dysyng carding and bowling' and the 'poor folke and vagabondes' that resulted from the decline in industry in Coventry.[37] Mentioning parliamentary efforts to deal with the problem, he stated that 'Where as actes be made to punishe vagabondages it were expedient to fynde a meanes how they myght be set to worke'.[38] The city's conception of itself was based on these traumatic events, and fear of disorder, just as much as it was based on civic myths.

[33] Ibid pp. 764-5, 788-9.
[34] TNA PRO SP1/141 fo. 35 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47].
[35] TNA PRO SP 1/141 fo. 37 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47].
[36] Steve Hindle, 'Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory, and Identity in the English Local Community, c. 1500–1700' in M. Halvorson and K. E. Spierling (eds.), *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 205-27.
[37] TNA PRO SP 1/141 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 47] fo. 55.
[38] Ibid fo. 55.

Nevertheless, Humphrey Reynolds's disagreement with the corporation and aldermen, in the 1530s and 1540s, demonstrated that the city relied on a set of traditional values and negotiated solutions to civic problems. Although he had broken no law or written rule, his actions had fallen outside the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for most of the civic elite. The use of external patrons and the aggressive pursuit of land and economic activity outside the prescribed bounds of the city's jurisdiction helped to further the impression that he was subverting the ordinary political hierarchy of urban life. As the complaint to the King demonstrates, Reynolds had an intimate knowledge of civic politics and the economic workings of the city. However, ultimately his complaint was an attack upon the corporation and the civic elite. The attempts to ostracise Reynolds by the corporation proved that the definition of the city was based on carefully constructed and regulated behaviours as well as the more tangible legal and physical boundaries of urban life.

Rather than trying to make mischief, as Reynolds did, most attempts to use civic and commonwealth rhetoric endeavoured to allay commonly held fears and strengthen the city. Several acts of Leet exemplify this idea. A document which is a draft of an act of Leet, made in 1557, to enclose some of the common land sought to reassure through its moralising tone. The plan, in the hand of the clerk Thomas Gregory, differs considerably from that implemented by the city's Leet court in 1538, both in its details and rhetoric. The preamble justified reform of landholding as being,

first for the encres and avanceme[n]t of godes hono[ur] And secndalie for the welth of this o[ur] natural Citie/ but also to abolyshe all such thynges as either vaynlie charge orelles do corrupt and hurt the same and for that that the p[or]ewtie at this pa[r]te is great and yet nevertheless dyvers vayne thynges rathor for pleasure then otherwise [are] still meyntayned so that Charges therof nothing dymynsshed.[39]

Gregory then outlined his plan, which, as well as the measures pertaining to the common land, argued for the cessation of civic pageantry. The money saved by the craft companies was to be put to 'founde iij p[r]istes wherof on to S[er]ve in seynt michaells charge another in the Trinite

[39]SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 1r.

church And the thirde in the lait white fr[iars]'.[40] Before it was appropriated for use as a grammar school by John Hales, the city made an attempt to turn the dissolved Whitefriars' Church into a parish church for the use of the citizenry.[41] In Gregory's plan, as well as a partial reform of common landholding, part of the city's manor of the park and lands of Chelysmore were to be 'tilled and sowen w[i]t[h] Rie... to be sold in the market to the [...] poor of this citie'.[42] There were also attempts made to prevent other civic celebrations taking place. In 1538, in a petition to the king, William Cotton, the mayor, asked for special dispensation to reduce the charges of civic office. He argued that the mayor and officeholders were put to a great cost by the duty of civic hospitality, so that even the craft companies 'use suche excesse'. Cotton related that 'moch exclamcon is maid to me being meire by the co[m]ens for reformacon therin and I w[ith]out thassent of my bretherene cannot help it'.[43] Both plans, Gregory's more extreme proposal, as well as the one implemented in 1538 by the Leet court, expressed the desire to deal with the combined economic and moral failings of the city.

Thomas Gregory's plan placed the notion of civic service and participation in the commonwealth of the city at the heart of his understanding of the city. Gregory stated that,

he is an evill ma[n] an unkinde ma[n] an unkynde cityene yee no cityene in deide that he will not help to encreas the welth and comoditie of his countrey or ^citie ~~com[on]welthe~~ whereby he liveth.[44]

As well as lamenting the state of Coventry, the statement also seems to speak of the economic vitality and possibility of the city. The conflation of the idea of family with the city, commonwealth and religious faith would seem to fit well amongst later Protestant narratives of

[40]Ibid fo. 2r.
[41]TNA PRO SP 1/136 fo.161 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 394]; TNA PRO SP 1/137 fo. 238 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 613]; TNA PRO SP 1/138 fo. 58 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. II, 731].
[42]SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 3r.
[43] TNA PRO SP 1/142 fo. 66.
[44]SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 1r.

civic virtue.[45] However, despite the different possible interpretations, this was a description of the city which relied on models of political virtue to create an idealised political community.

The city was also thought of in a more practical manner, in terms of complex social networks, often by the same individuals who helped to conceptualise a model urban society. Despite the differing purposes of their rhetoric – one to attack the corporation and the other to provide stability and reassurance from within the urban government - the lawyer Thomas Gregory, clerk of Coventry Corporation, and Humphrey Reynolds seem to have been acquainted. Both men owned land to the south of the city and Thomas Gregory occupied his time with the keeping of carp and swans in 'pypes pole', the pond adjacent to his moated house the Overhallshute, in Stivichall, in the county of Coventry. In 1553 Gregory placed 'a female' swan there 'to matche w[i]t[h] a Cobb of m[aste]r Reynoldes'.[46] Legal documents relating to Reynolds's landholding and disputes appear in Thomas Gregory's papers, suggesting that they also had a professional legal relationship. Both men also had reforming religious tendencies and were part of networks of reformers. When Reynolds died he left his leases of the grange in Stoneleigh to Ralph Underhill, brother of Edward Underhill, the 'hot gospeller', and his aunt Jane Winter, then living at Bagington near Stoneleigh.[47] The preamble from his will suggests that he died 'trusting in his worde by the merittes of his passion to be in the nombre of them that be saved', implying that Reynolds veered towards Protestantism in matters of faith.[48] This was probably an outlook shared by Gregory. When Thomas Gregory died in 1573 his body was accompanied to St Michael's Church by his tenants in Stivichall and Kingshull and a 'sermon... maid by m[ast]r oxenbridge p[ar]son of southame' a nonconformist, and according to Collinson, 'the most notorious puritan in the diocese'.[49] However, for Reynolds this friendship was more important

[45] Catherine Davies, *A Religion of the Word; The Defence of the Reformation in the Reign of Edward VI* (London, 2002), pp. 141-2; Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), p.146.
[46] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 19v.
[47] *Narratives of The Days of the Reformation,* ed. J. G. Nichols (Camden Soc., old ser., lxxvii,1859), p. 159; TNA PRO C 4/58/132 ; TNA PRO C1/1391/56-59 [Winter v. Reynolds].
[48] LRO B/C/11 (Humfrey Reinolde 1553).
[49] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 59r ; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), p.184.

as one of the ways in which he could access civic power and politics. In the years before his death, in the early 1550s, Reynolds was readmitted to the Drapers' Company and became a feeofee of one of the city's almshouses along with Thomas Gregory.[50] Despite his advancing years, it was not until 1550 that he was made a warden of the Drapers' Company and gained a real foothold in civic politics and industry again.[51] Connections with men like Gregory enabled him to re-legitimise his political place in urban life, after his divisive actions in the 1530s. As well as focusing on common ideas and descriptions of urban life, for men like Reynolds and Gregory, the city could also be represented as a community of elites in which traditional models of family, friendship and personal connections were as important as class based economic interest in the working political life of the city.

As well as concentrating on this inner world, some civic rhetoric sought to conceptualise the city in a broader political and geographical landscape. The new civic rhetoric also put the city of Coventry at the heart of the kingdom. Proponents of the 'New British History' often suggest that English regionalism is ignored by a conventional historical narrative which promotes state formation as the crucial historical development in Europe during this century. Instead, these historians demonstrate the economic and political links present within the British Isles and the difficult politics of power and identity that existed at the various national and regional boundaries.[52] However, the very problem with examining the distinct identity of the English midlands region, particularly with regard to the city of Coventry, is that it wedded its own identity to the broader political community of the kingdom. The emerging civic language of the early modern period celebrated the centrality of the city. Coventry symbolically placed itself far away from the disorder that existed on the peripheries and at the heart of a protective commonwealth. As Gregory's document went on, the citizens of Coventry were

[50] CRO BA/D/D/26/3.
[51] CRO PA 154/2 fo. 28.
[52] Stephen Ellis, 'Defending English Ground: The Tudor Frontiers in History and Historiography' in Stephen Ellis and Raingard Esser (eds.), *Frontiers and The Writing of History, 1500-1850* (Hannover, 2006), pp. 73-93.

bounden as be naturall chyldrur unto ther mother that bryngest them upp in ys frayll liff for as the mother tenderlie norissheth the childe and lovynglie provideth all thynges where by he may p[ro]sper... so o[ur] country or citie deyligentelie kepeth us and carefully defendeth us. [53]

Here the document deliberately blurs the use of the word 'country' so that it comes to represent both the civic commonwealth and the broader political reality of the kingdom. The metaphor is not only a model for this mutual relationship, but also a model for civic and national order.

The recorder of the city, John Throckmorton, used similar language to praise the city and the Queen, upon the visit of Elizabeth in 1565. While Throckmorton was not part of the radical religious tendency that dominated the civic government in Coventry during the 1560s and should not be confused with his reformist namesake, he still espoused the new brand of civic thought.[54] As Lee has shown for the late medieval period, recorders were vital links between royal authority and civic governments, valued for their diplomatic skills and legal abilities.[55] Recorders' interests were often rooted in the locality and the Leet court in Coventry expected them to be resident in the city for most of the year. However, it was equally vital that they were comfortable representing the city's interests in London legal circles, amongst the nobility and at court. Many recorders were made MPs for their city and were expected to take on a wide range of tasks in support of the city's interests. At the visit in 1565, the Queen, accompanied by the recorder, the mayor and the earl of Huntingdon viewed pageants at various stations in the city. The party then proceeded to the Whitefriars' Church where the royal party received an oration from the recorder. Throckmorton dwelt upon the royal associations of the city in a dissection of the meaning of the Coventry motto *camera principis*. Throckmorton's theme of centrality used Coventry's geographical position as an allusion to its political importance and connection to a greater commonwealth. In his oration to Elizabeth he talked of Coventry's 'pleasant situation the firtell soyle invironing the same and natrall force planted in or very neare the midst of this

[53] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 1r.
[54] *The History of Parliament : The House of Commons, 1509-1558*, ed. S. T. Bindoff (3 vols., London, 1982), i, p. 455.
[55] James Lee, 'Urban Recorders and the Crown in Late Medieval England' in Linda Clarke (ed.), *Authority and Subversion* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 163-79.

realme'.[56] Far from making a dichotomy of the rural and the urban, the commonweal of the city was thought to rest upon its immediate surroundings and its farming and trading hinterlands. Unlike the other sources, in which complaints about the decay of the city figure highly, Throckmorton dwells mostly upon the glorious history and splendour of the city situated within a landscape civilised and dominated by the city's presence. This is partly because of the nature and context of this source. However, it also suggests a growing topographical awareness which was used for the promotion of the city and the nation. It acknowledges the economic reality of an early modern city that relied on economic connections with its surroundings. Throckmorton ended his oration by describing the Queen as 'mother to your kingdome and to the subjects of the same by justice motherly care and clemency' and went further to hope that the Queen would 'by gods goodness and justice be a natural mother'.[57] Mirroring earlier language, the citizens of Coventry successfully projected their image of city and commonwealth onto Elizabeth.

Civic rhetoric was also informed by a growing awareness of national histories and the humanist historical tradition. Historians in search of the modern historical tradition, or simply the techniques that let reformist religious writers explain the ceremonies of the ancient church in terms of societal and cultural practice, have often denigrated historical annals. Such plain historical *res gestae* works 'lacked any true appreciation for the organic nature of society'.[58] However, there was no firm divide between medieval traditions and new humanist history. Continuity of form was a feature of historical writing during the sixteenth century. Even apparently methodologically unsophisticated works of history played a part in forming ideas and definitions of the city.

In Throckmorton's oration in 1565 he referred to the old civic myth of Hock Tuesday in terms of explaining present conditions and the growth of the ancient city of Coventry which was

[56] Bodleian MS Top. Warwickshire d.4 fo. 20v.
[57] Ibid.
[58] A. B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound : Perceptions of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (New York, 1978), pp. 100, 161-2.

'remembered of Polydore Virgil to be of noe small account in the time of king aviragus'.[59] The history of the city and the royal grants and actions which led up to Coventry's economic and jurisdictional freedoms were outlined in the sort of detail which belied the simplicity of civic myths. Many of the civic elite must have been exposed to printed chronicles and national histories. In 1560 Thomas Gregory, the town clerk, lent the minister of the Trinity Church a copy of Werner Rolewinck's popular *Fasciculus temporum omnes antiquorum cronicas complectens*. This was a late medieval historical collection which incorporated the universal chronicle of Marianus Scottus and contained many references to early British history. The same year he 'lent to m[ast]er Dudley my scotyshe cronecle'.[60] The civic elite were also interested in their own history. The prominent Coventry alderman, Henry Over, was often referred to as coming from Cester Over in Warwickshire, where his coat of alms emblazoned the parish church.[61] The Reformation enabled many men to get their hands on monastic documents and deeds, often acquired along with the purchases of land. Thomas Gregory, the clerk of the city, was keenly interested in researching his own landed past. Both Thomas Gregory and far more extensively his son, kept cartularies into which they not only copied details of their transactions and lands, but also older material which might be used to support further claims.[62] Although trawling local collections of monastic and personal deeds with the object of financial gain could hardly be considered history or even antiquarianism, researching ancient claims enabled townsmen to adopt personal identities based on their own studies. Even though this process often resulted in partly fictionalised family histories, it enabled men to wed themselves more closely to civic and regional identities. Exposure to national histories helped the townsfolk conceptualise their own personal and civic history within that of the realm.

National histories also helped to promote other local constructions of history in the form of civic annals. Many historians have seen the influence of printed history upon annals and

[59] Bodleian MS Top. Warwickshire d.4 fo. 20v.
[60] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 31v.
[61] William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2nd edn, ed. W. Thomas (2 vols. London, 1730), pp.90-1.
[62] SBTRO DR10/1408; SBTRO DR10/1409.

chronicles largely in negative terms. The idea that chronicle forms gave way to humanist history, relegating chronicle forms to the backwaters of civic histories, was often argued and the evolution of printed history is still often blamed for the decline and demise of chronicles.[63] Woolf argues that the technological advances of printing made new forms of history both cheaper and more readable.[64] However, at least in sixteenth-century Coventry, the circulation of national histories and printed annals amongst the civic elite seems to have encouraged their enthusiasm for local manuscript forms and their willingness to blend the national narrative of history with the civic and the local one.

There were two annals of Coventry written during the mid to late sixteenth century. Civic office-holding in the form of lists of mayors and sheriffs formed the backbone of these annals by providing a chronology for local and national events. The earliest set of annals was written by John Hales, a man with political and family connections in Coventry, clerk of the hanaper and founder of the free school in the city after the dissolutions. Hales's promotion of Coventry's civic history in the form of a set of annals sat easily alongside his humanist social concerns. As with many such documents it was also a deeply personal account, especially during the period from around the mid 1540s when Hales was living at the dissolved house of the Whitefriars in Coventry. This section of the annals was most likely composed from contemporary experiences and attitudes which lend them a confessional colour. Hales attacked the religious conservatives in Coventry and his political affiliations also shine through. [65] He recorded the arrest of the 'good duke of somersett' who was 'comitted to the Tower w[i]th five knightes m[aste]r John Hales and certeyne other'. In another entry for 1549 he describes the actions of the western rebels 'w[i]ch under p[re]tence of Rising for there commons through the p[er]swasio[n] of there popish p[re]lates would have had up there popish masse agayne' and the disorder in Oxfordshire put down by the 'valiant Lord Gray of wilton'. Kett's rebellion is entirely ignored. The annals also present some of Hales's social concerns. In the entry for 1549 Hales notes

[63] F.J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, 1967), p. 33.
[64]Daniel Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 76.
[65] SBTRO DR37/2/123/7 fo. 23r; *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. John Dasent (46 vols., London, 1890-1964), i, p.277.

approvingly that the common land in the county of Coventry which had been 'taken in and enclosed' was 'delivered again to the citye'.[66] Unlike its near contemporary, a roll possessed by the Coventry citizen Samuel Butler in the 1580s, Hales's annals make no mention of the disorder over the common lands at Coventry in 1525.[67] However, despite their obvious personal aspects and competing viewpoints, civic annals were a systematic and complex attempt to understand the city's history and promote civic virtues.

It is highly probable that other annalists worked by copying and revising earlier work. The seventeenth-century Bodleian annals celebrate those persecuted for religious reasons throughout Coventry history and contain remarks about the persecution of Lollards in Coventry that are not found in Foxe and must have been part of an oral or manuscript tradition.[68] The annals dwell not so much upon the Marian martyrs but on Richard Hopkins, Coventry's godly sheriff who was 'glad to flee the Realme before his yeare was expired yet he bare all the charges of the office'.[69] The annalist contextualises his history of the city with remarks copied out of Stow's annals. Edward is described as a 'prince of such towardness in virtue learning and all godly gifts', whilst many of Stow's remarks about the effect of the plague in London are also copied.[70] He also alludes to civic myths about individuals in the tradition of the London civic worthies. It is very likely that some of these ideas were current in the sixteenth century. Thomas Wheatley, mayor of Coventry in 1556 and a donor to the city's charities, is celebrated as a man who 'came to Coventry in a white coate and very poore and grew to great wealth'.[71] This story later received a more elaborate rendering by Dugdale in which Wheatley's wealth was acquired by chance.[72] These stories were not digressions into irrelevant and unusual events, but provided a model for civic behaviour and charity. The growing idea that the city had a history which

[66] SBTRO DR37/2/123/7 fo. 24r.
[67] SBTRO DR37/2/123/7 fo. 3-11r.
[68] *Lollards of Coventry 1456-1522*, eds. Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner (Camden Soc., 5th ser., 23, 2004), p. 315.
[69] Bodleian MS Top. Warwickshire d.4 fo. 20v.
[70] Ibid fo. 20r; John Stow, *The Annales of England* (STC 1611, 1600), p. 1029.
[71] Bodleian MS Top. Warwickshire d.4 fo. 20v.
[72] Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, i, p.194.

could be integrated into that of the nation helped shape the changing perception of the city of Coventry during the sixteenth century.

Historians have placed great weight upon charters of incorporation when trying to prove the existence of an English civic renaissance. Tittler saw incorporation as a governmental response to the demands of the local elites for the consolidation of power which in turn could be put to use in solving social ills and urban problems. In Tittler's formulation, incorporation also met the necessity of providing a definitive statement of the rights of a borough to fend off the attacks on its jurisdiction from men who had acquired new holdings during the Reformation.[73] However, while charters often gave a comprehensive statement of local rights and privileges they failed to deal with the growing need to discover the city's place within the nation. Civic history fulfilled these needs as well as the need to explain the traditions of civic life by providing an explanation of civic history which stressed continuity. In the end civic history and the rhetoric of the active civic life came to reinforce each other. By building up a complex picture of the city's history and the role of the civic elite, Coventry responded to changing economic and social anxieties. As it will be shown, both the geographical and jurisdictional edges of the city proved a source of conflict. However, civic language employed traditional tropes of service and mutual responsibility to counter the divisive nature of government and politics in Coventry.

With the changing rhetorical senses of the city came a need to define the city physically. This was also a response to new economic realities and the problems and insecurities of the Reformation. Defining the boundaries of the city is a question open to a multitude of interpretations and meanings. In terms of simple geography, the city can be defined by walls or natural boundaries and manmade urban structures. However, historians have also defined the city by looking for what in historical jargon has become known as 'space'. 'Space' in the urban historical context is a particular piece of land or geographical area that is defined further by the social or economic interactions that take place there. It must also fall under the jurisdiction of

[73] Robert Tittler, 'The Incorporation of Boroughs, 1540-1588', *History*, 62 (1977), pp. 25-9.

various, and sometimes overlapping, institutions. In Coventry the primary encompassing organisational and jurisdictional institution was the Leet court. The rights and procedures of the governing Leet were confirmed by several charters, the last of which, in 1451, made Coventry a county corporate, with its own assizes and the right to appoint sheriffs and bailiffs. As a corporate institution Coventry also had the vital abilities to hold land in mortmain and plead as a single party in legal suits. The 1451 charter also conferred part of the manor of Cheylesmore upon the mayor and aldermen in fee-farm. This charter retained its importance in the collective mind of the aldermen. In 1541, the charter was copied into the book of the Leet court at a time when changes in landholding produced a degree of anxiety and a desire to restate the liberties and franchises of the city. The wording of the charter served to define the county of Coventry until a more exacting survey, completed by leading aldermen, was undertaken in the 1580s due to anxieties that had developed over the exact boundaries of the corporate county.[74] Coventry was split into ten intramural or partly intramural wards and eight rural districts, or 'foreigns', defined by the charter. However, there was never the clear distinction between the urban and the rural that this division supposes. The city's suburbs extended beyond the city walls, along Gosford Street to the east, in the direction of Leicester, and to the North and West, in the Spon Street and Bishop's Gate wards.

These suburbs had their share of cloth-workers, tanners and other urban trades, who were able to utilise the water of the streams which fed the river Sherborne in this part of the city.[75] Between 1530 and 1570 there were ten men who left wills describing themselves as husbandmen. Their inventories included sheep and cattle as well as evidence of arable farming such as ploughs and wains. Six of these men came from the Spon Street ward of the city and another three were based in the neighbouring Smithford Street and Bishop's Street wards to the northwest of the city. John Hammond, as his will makes clear, farmed land in the Spon Street

[74] *Leet Book,* pp. 746-59, 821.
[75] *Coventry and its People in the 1520s,* ed. Mary Hulton (Dugdale Soc., 38, 1999), pp. 6-7.

ward, but he felt prosperous enough to call himself a yeoman.[76] Much of the land along Spon Street contained gardens and orchards and backed onto rich arable land. Householders in Spon Street clearly earned their living partly or wholly from agriculture, so that in terms of the material culture of urban and rural life there was no clear distinction between the town and the county.

Late medieval urban decay is a well explored phenomenon in the history of Coventry. Historians have usually found evidence for urban decay in the abandoned housing in early sixteenth-century Coventry, or property in such poor repair that it could not be rented. Typical of such evidence is a rental of the Trinity Guild in 1536 which records vacant property particularly in far Gosford Street and the suburbs of the city outside the Gosford gate.[77] However, evidence from rentals is fragmentary and fails to provide an ongoing picture of urban geography and development. Coventry's suburbs largely retained their morphology, and there is little evidence that the city experienced any topographical contraction in the early sixteenth century, despite its economic troubles. Many of the residents of Coventry's outlying districts actually experienced an increase in their prosperity over several generations from the 1530s. When Nicholas Bedull died in 1538 he left £3 6s 8d to his son Thomas, and 20s to his father who was still living in the Spon Street ward. Bedull also maintained a relationship with the alderman, Thomas Gardener, leaving him 3s 4d.[78] Thomas Bedull is described as a 'whelerite' in his will, but he also kept cattle, 30 sheep, beehives and horses and was able to bequeath land to the north of the city, held by copyhold from Robert Throckmorton, lord of the manor of Sheldon. A distinctive material culture is supposed to be one of the defining aspects in the growth of elite civic society during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. However, during this time and at this level of society it is hard to distinguish between urban and rural material

[76] LRO B/C/11 (**Spon Street**: Thomas Alen 1533, Richard Arneway 1558, William Coakes 1557, Nicholas Woodeshaw 1558, Edward Remyngton 1566, John Hamond 1558 **Smithford Street**: John Cartwright 1564, **Bishop's Gate**: John Palmer 1558, John Saunders 1558 **Misc**: Nicholas Browne 1549, Thomas Barfote 1565); TNA PRO E179/192/157 [1544 Subsidy] **Spon Street** d 10, 3 **Smithford Street** d 2 **Bishop's Gate** d 1, 2.
[77] SBTRO DR10/1869 fo. 4v-5r.
[78] LRO B/C/11 (Nicholas Bedull 1538).

culture. This allowed men at the geographical peripheries of the city to participate in civic life. Bedull kept armour; 'a byll', 'gauntlet', 'boucler' and a 'short dagger', which allowed him to keep the watch at mid-summer, and join the sheriffs and craft companies in guarding the walls and gates at moments of crisis.[79]

Urban historians have often concentrated solely upon the intra-mural city; however, the hamlets in the wider corporate county of Coventry also formed part of the city and shaped its identity. The hamlet of Keresely contained several families of moderately wealthy yeoman farmers, who associated together and witnessed each other's wills. John Ruyding's will describes him as a yeoman and he farmed land around Keresely, possessing a barn with sheep, cattle and beehives. In 1544 his lands in Keresely were valued at £3.[80] However, he also had economic connections to the city of Coventry. In 1543 he acknowledged a debt of £20 to the mercer and alderman John Wade.[81] John Asheborne, a husbandman dying in 1557 also farmed land in Keresely and was taxed there. However, he asked to be buried 'in my paryshe cirche yearde of Saynt Mychaell' in the city of Coventry. He requested that, 'the company of Cappers... fatch my body at the byshoppes gate and bruing it to the churche accordinge to the costome of the cytte'.[82] Asheborne was not necessarily affiliated with this craft company. The poorer companies, such as the cappers, commonly provided pall bearers at set fees and many men had bearers from more than one craft, without actually belonging to any of the urban guilds and paying their quarterage fees. Furthermore, the corporation was wary of allowing too wide a membership of these organisations. An ordinance of the Leet court in 1549 prevented anyone that did not 'occupie & use' a certain craft from being associated with its company.[83] Perhaps this was in part because the association of rural gentlemen and yeomen with urban crafts was becoming more common. Membership of the companies went hand in hand with political influence in the city and the civic elite were desirous to protect this privilege. Even membership of a minor

[79] LRO B/C/11 (Thomas Bedull 1550).
[80] TNA PRO E179/192/157 d 8, 1.
[81] CRO BA/E/3/7/36.
[82] LRO B/C/11 (John Asheborne 1557).
[83] *Leet Book,* p. 791.

company conferred certain commercial freedoms and the Leet sought to make sure that the men of Coventry could only exert influence commensurate with their economic status and trade. Nevertheless, links with comparatively minor figures in the rural areas around the city remained and shaped the city's identity.

Another aspect of the city's connection with its rural districts was undoubtedly the anxiety over landholding and the changes which the Reformation had brought about. To take our previous example, many of the farmers in Keresley were tenants of the priory before the dissolution. The guild of the Holy Trinity in Coventry owned land there as did the priory.[84] Ford's Hospital, situated in Coventry, also owned land in the hamlet from the 1530s, purchased by William Wigston, founder of the hospital in Leicester.[85] Ford's will was carried out by his executor Henry Pisford, who added the stipulation that the Trinity Guild should install a priest to say an obit for his soul. In 1528, the executors of Pisford's will, William Wigston and Thomas Whitell, purchased 20 marks of land to fulfil his bequest and to add to the lands enfeoffed to the use of the almshouse.[86] William was the father of Roger Wigston of Wolston, recorder of Coventry from 1532 to his death in 1544, and the hospital's chantry priest was most likely a relative of the family. [87] The city's religious and charitable provision relied on the control of these purchased lands and much of the rent that supported these institutions was collected from farmland in and around Coventry. Capital in the form of the rents from these lands was being transferred to civic provision even before the great land movements which the Reformation occasioned.

Of the hospital's tenants in Keresley, John Proctor was described as a yeoman in his will and held the 'northcroft' in Keresley until his death in 1559 as well as land in neighbouring Corley. Oliver Wright, a gentleman from the neighbouring parish of Exhall, witnessed the will, as did his brother Robert Proctor, a whittawer, who lived on the other side of the city 'without

[84] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls... Edward VI, 1547-1553* (5 vols., London, 1924-29), ii, p. 383.
[85] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 4v; TNA PRO E 301/57 fo. 1v; TNA PRO E 301/53 fo. 2v.
[86] CRO PA54/280/1 fo.1r.
[87] *The History of Parliament : The House of Commons, 1509-1558*, i, pp. 612-3.

newgait'.[88] John Proctor had witnessed the will of his neighbour John Yardley, living in the parish of Exhall, in the year prior to Proctor's own death. Yardley described himself as a yeoman and his inventory indicates that he was involved in farming as he possessed cattle, sheep and a plough with a team of oxen. Like Proctor, Yardley also had contacts with men of higher status; the local gentleman Richard Stansfield also witnessed the will. Yardley left the leases of his property in Exhall to his wife and his son and also left bequests to the parson of Bedworth. Although it was within the county of Coventry, Exhall was separate from the two main civic parishes in Coventry. Yardley requested to be buried in the churchyard of St Giles in Exhall with 'iiij men to beare me to the church' but also left money to the 'masters of [th]e cappers yf they will come to my beryall'.[89] Although Ford's almshouse survived the Reformation, through the city's painstaking efforts to recover their endowed charities, the changes were still troublesome. The outlying parts of the county of Coventry served as a microcosm for a highly political battle to retain influence over the dissolved lands in the city. They also contained individuals who were connected to the life of the city through kinship and informal social and economic networks.

For most early modern Englishmen it was not the town but the parish which was the ultimate expression of shared religious experience and corporate existence. These were never separate identities. In Coventry, the structure of the parishes often had the effect of bringing the inhabitants of the broader county closer to the political centre of the city. Most of the outlying rural districts were originally chapelries of the parish of St Michael in Coventry; the advowsons were held by the prior of St Mary's. Sowe, Wyken, Stivichall and Stoke remained chapelries of St Michael's Church for the rest of the sixteenth century, each appointing a curate.[90] The neighbouring curacies of Sowe and Wyken were held jointly during the latter half of the sixteenth century whereas Ansty and Shilton to the north west of the city had claimed to be

[88] LRO B/C/11 (Robert Proctor 1559); *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry*, ed. Geoffrey Templeman (Dugdale Soc., 19, 1944), pp. 100,127; SBTRO DR10/1869 fo. 4v.
[89] LRO B/C/11 (John Yardley 1558).
[90] LRO BA/A/1/14/iii 8v, 21r, 31r, 39v; CRO BA/F/20/1/1; CRO BA/B/6/28/40.

independent rectories from 1410.[91] However, there seems to have been some confusion about their status and in 1540 the chapels of Sowe and Ansty were listed as part of St Michael's parish in the Crown leases for that year.[92] Willenhall to the south east of the city was a part of the urban parish of Holy Trinity. The hamlet of Keresley, three miles north-west of the city was similarly a detached part of St Michael's parish, although it bordered the urban parish of the Holy Trinity to the north of the city. Stivichall too had an ill defined status, complicated by battles over tithes and manorial jurisdiction. An analysis of the interconnectedness of urban parishes serves as a salutary example for those who draw sharp geographical lines around urban culture and influence.

Obtaining control over the income from tithes from the dependent chapelries in the county of Coventry was also an important consideration for the corporation during this period. Clerical income in the form of tithes had decreased markedly because of the decline in Coventry's population and tithes had also been subject to lay impropriations. [93] In 1550 the tithes of the Holy Trinity Church were farmed out for a stipend by the incumbent William Bennett and in 1561 the tithes of both parishes in the city were let out for three years.[94] To counter the trend of declining clerical incomes, Coventry obtained an act of parliament which allowed tithes to be levied as a tax on householders within the city, and in 1568 it was agreed that payments should be made to the vicars of St Michael's and the Holy Trinity from the incomes of the Crown lands in the city.[95] Despite these measures to improve the financial situation of the clergy, the city still sought greater control over tithes. In 1565 the corporation purchased the rectory of the two churches from the crown, allowing it to pursue the income from tithes that were lost in the dissolutions.[96] The mayor and corporation took this opportunity to secure rights over lands

[91] TNA PRO E 164/21 fo. 55r [Abbey Cartulary].
[92] TNA PRO E 315/212 fo. 2r [*L&P*, v. 15, 539] .
[93] P. Carter, 'Clerical Polemic in Defence of Ministers' Maintenance During the English Reformation' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49 (1998), pp. 236-56.
[94] WRO DR0429/74.
[95] *The Statutes of The Realm* eds. Alexander Luders, Sir T.E. Tomlins, John France, W.E. Taunton and John Raithby (Record Commission, 11 vols., London, 1810-28).iv, p. xxi; Sharpe, *Illustrative Papers*, p.8.
[96] Ibid p. 8.

which had formerly belonged to religious and charitable institutions after the large purchases of monastic lands made by the corporation in the 1550s. In 1572 the death of John Hales allowed the aldermen to renegotiate the payment of tithes to the city from land formerly belonging to the hospital of St John.[97] The city agreed with Robert Beale, the puritan diplomat and antiquary, on behalf of the younger John Hales, that the tithes should go to the city during the period of his minority. The city also pursued a case against a servant of John Hales, Peter Cottys, to establish the payment of tithes from land within the county of Coventry left to him in Hales's will. Land at Stoneleigh, called 'dalby ffieldes', was alleged to be exempt from tithe by the terms of a composition. However, the city argued that the 'Composicion is suspiciou[s] and not executed w[i]thin memorye'.[98] The corporation often had difficulties with individuals such as Hales whose economic interests conflicted with that of the city. The income from tithes that the corporation sought to recover was only a small fraction of the incomes of both parishes. However, as well as defining the tithe income that the city was entitled to, the boundaries of the parishes were crucial in forming the metes and bounds of the city. Therefore, the ambiguity that persisted over some of the parish boundaries was troubling and tithe disputes took on a wider significance.

In 1591 the city was still debating the boundaries of the parish of Stivichall and the boundaries of the city. On one side, Bartholomew Tate claimed that he was entitled to the tithes for the parish granted by letters patent to Sir Christopher Hatton and then sold to him. On the other, the corporation of Coventry claimed that it was entitled to the tithes because Stivichall and the decayed hamlets of Asthull and Horwell were part of the rectory of St Michael's Church.[99] Such cases inevitably involved invoking communal memory, with the aim of proving whether the church had been used for baptisms, burials and christenings. Men were also asked to remember any markers in the fields that acted as metes and bounds and perambulations or beating of the bounds that they had taken part in. Tellingly they were also asked whether they had seen any

[97] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 73v-r.
[98] CRO B/F/20/4 fo. 1r.
[99] Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, ii, p. 202.

'deeds recordes or noates' and whether they were written upon 'paper or parchement' and 'in Latin or English' and whether 'you understand them you[r]self or who interpreted or expounded them unto yow'.[100] The increasing power of written evidence when placed alongside traditional usage is clear. The city responded in kind to Tate's action producing men that could swear to Stivichall being a chapel of St Michael's and had seen the 'register book in the councell house called the black booke' that showed it was taxable along with Asthull for the fifteenths and tenths.[101] Thomas Bannister the clerk to the corporation testified that the relevant tithes were 'inc[e]rted by Thomas Gregoryes owne hand into the lyne where the paymentes appeare'.[102] The matter was eventually settled by a composition agreed between the parties.[103] The city's engagement in disputes over tithes was partly a matter of economic necessity and a product of the difficult relations between the city and landholders in the county of Coventry and on its borders. However, the overall effect of such disputes was to produce a definition of the city's rights that helped to shape the city's self-image. Greater topographical certainties produced through these agreements resulted in a more confident civic elite and a city that was more securely defined.

The Leet court in particular was very concerned with their jurisdiction over the county of Coventry. This concern allowed men like Robert Turnor, a yeoman in the county of Coventry, to play a more directly participatory role in civic politics. Turnor farmed land in Stivichall, several miles outside the city, beyond the Cheylsmore and the Little Park Street gates to the south of the city walls. He was a freeholder in Stivichall, owning land but owing a chief rent to the manor. Turnor seems to have been moderately wealthy, to the extent that he appears in several statute merchant recognisances in the court in Coventry, and seems to have been trading in land around 1560.[104] He also must have travelled to London frequently on business, as he was present there in February of 1574, where he obtained information which was of interest

[100] TNA PRO E 134/34&35ELIZ/MICH36 fo. 2r.
[101] Ibid fo. 3r.
[102] Ibid fo. 5r.
[103] CRO BA/B/6/28/53.
[104] CRO BA/E/3/7/47-48.

both to him and the corporation of Coventry. The incident concerned Edmund and Arthur Gregory, the sons of Thomas Gregory, the local lawyer, who had been clerk of the Leet court for almost forty years by the time of his death in 1574 and had also been, at various times, the coroner for Coventry and clerk of the Statute Merchant in the city. Thomas Gregory married the daughter of the Coventry alderman, Christopher Wade.[105] For most of his life he lived in Smithford Street in Coventry, near to St Mary's Hall, the meeting place of the Leet court in Coventry.[106] Through his positions in Coventry and as lawyer to many of the prominent families in Coventry and the surrounding districts, he had acquired the social knowledge which he was able to use to his economic advantage in the acquisition of land and the lending of money. After his father's death in 1573, Arthur Gregory continued in this role. In 1574 he received fees from Thomas Fisher of Warwick and Bartholomew Hales, both landowners in the county, as well money from Richard Over, son of Henry Over for his 'councell' and legal advice. He was also paid by M[aste]r Kelway (probably the Wiltshire lawyer who served the Court of Wards), M[aste]r Samuel Marrow and Edward Fisher for keeping the manorial courts at Binley, Wolvey and Foleshill respectively.[107] From the 1540s the Gregory family also built up a substantial landowning in Stivichall within the county of Coventry.

Thomas Gregory's landholding in Stivichall began when he was left land, including the moated manor house, the Overhallstude, by Christopher Wade's widow, Isobel, in 1541.[108] This bequest later became the subject of some dispute between Thomas Gregory and his brother-in-law, John Wade, over the provisions in the will. The details of the bequest were later solved by arbitration between the parties and the dispute did not seem to have prevented the two men remaining close in matters of business.[109] Gregory's landed wealth continued to grow during this period and he bought further holdings in Stivichall from Thomas Fisher, a local gentleman, who had acquired

[105] SBTRO DR10/2066.
[106] TNA PRO E 179/192/157 d 9; CRO BA/E/3/7/47-48.
[107] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 61r; J. H. Baker, 'Keilwey, Robert (1496/7–1581)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[108] TNA PRO PROB 11/28 (Isobell Wade 1541).
[109] SBTRO DR10/761; SBTRO DR10/779.

them in 1545.[110] Fisher had built up a substantial landowning in Warwickshire which he added to as a result of the dissolutions.[111] The interests of Gregory and his sons inevitably clashed with the freeholders in Stivichall. By 1571 one of the tenants in Stivichall, Robert Turnor, had already brought a Star Chamber case against Thomas Gregory over manorial rights. In 1571 interrogatories were put to Edward Aglionby, a local landowner and a client of Robert Dudley, over his knowledge of various agreements concerning manorial tenure.[112] Moreover, because the corporation of Coventry claimed that Stivichall belonged to their manor of Chelysmore, there was always the potential for conflict with the city.

By the time of Thomas Gregory's death in 1573 his sons were already running part of their father's estate. In 1563 Arthur Gregory entrusted some of the lands he had been given to his brothers whilst he was in London. He reserved for his own use the lands in Stivichall and four rooms of the house in Smithford Street at Broad Gate in Coventry.[113] In 1568 a statute merchant bond was enrolled, probably at the behest of Thomas Gregory, which put Arthur Gregory in debt to his brothers, Thomas and Jeremy as well as a cousin, John in Manchester.[114] The bond compensated Arthur's younger brothers and cousin for the land that he had received and which Arthur Gregory was managing for his own profit throughout the 1560s. Later, Arthur disputed the terms of the bond, suggesting that it was never the intention of his father's will to put him in debt to his brothers.[115] Arthur Gregory and his brothers were educated to reflect the full extent of his father's improved social position. Arthur was sent to Oxford and then on to the Inner Temple to complete his legal training.[116] Thomas Gregory possessed a considerable library, sending various books to his son in Oxford in 1562 and then a Greek new testament in 1565.[117] It was Arthur Gregory's ambition to increase his own wealth and social standing which probably led to his marriage to Jane Ferrers, daughter of John Ferrers of Tamworth in 1573. By

[110] SBTRO DR10/788.
[111] TNA PRO E310/4/29, 21,22,24; TNA PRO E315/220 fo. 69v-r.
[112] TNA PRO STAC 5/T22/26 fo. 1v-r.
[113] SBTRO DR10/1205.
[114] CRO BA/E/3/7/54.
[115] SBTRO DR10/1612.
[116] *Members Admitted to the Inner Temple 1547-1660*, ed. W. H. Cook (London, 1877), p. 46.
[117] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 46r.

his marriage agreement he was transferred land in Stivichall belonging to Humphrey Ferrers, the brother of Jane, which helped to consolidate his holdings in the district.[118] During his life Arthur Gregory undertook considerable research regarding his own lands and claims. He also made notes on legal procedure that he considered useful and possessed a formulary for the rites and procedures governing a court baron.[119] His increased social status along with his education and interest in legal precedent and his own genealogy led him to attempt to exploit his father's holdings in Stivichall.

To this end, Arthur Gregory petitioned the Leet court of Coventry to establish his right to hold a manorial court in Stivichall based on the manor acquired from Thomas Fisher by deed of gift.[120] In September 1574 he presented the Leet court of Coventry with documents, which in his own words, 'shewe how I clamed the leete in stichall'.[121] Gregory produced court rolls and documents that he had obtained with the grant of land from Thomas Fisher and he may even have held a court in Stivichall with the object of proving his rights by usage. A later Star Chamber case in the 1580s accused him of keeping a 'courte of Leete or vieu of franck pleg[e]' in about 1568.[122] However, in 1574, the Leet court produced 'no writing at all' in reply and left Arthur Gregory with an ultimatum. According to Gregory, Master Anderson 'liked not my title' and stated that 'I must lose mye office in coventre or ells consent ther desyer to yelde ther my right'.[123] Although Arthur Gregory possessed court rolls of the manor and only parts of Stivichall were awarded to the corporation by the 1451 charter, the aldermen were in no mood to compromise on matters of their jurisdiction. In their view, Stivichall was within the corporation's manor of Cheylsemore. As a result of the ultimatum presented to him by the city on the 26 September 1574, Arthur Gregory signed an understanding with the Leet court. This agreement stated that Thomas Gregory had previously held illegal lawdays and prevented his tenants from attending the manorial court in Cheylesmore held by the corporation of the city of

[118] SBTRO DR10/806.
[119] SBTRO DR10/1815.
[120] SBTRO DR10/788 [Fisher's deed of gift]; *Leet Book,* pp. 815-7.
[121] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 64r.
[122] TNA PRO STAC 5/C48/7 fo. 1v.
[123] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 64r.

Coventry. Arthur Gregory promised to quitclaim his right to hold a view of frankpledge in Stivichall in return for retaining his offices in Coventry and the right to pay an essoin to the Cheylesmore court thereby avoiding any compulsion to attend.[124]

However, it seems that Arthur Gregory was far from abandoning his claim, despite the agreement that he had signed. On 7 February 1575, four months after they had petitioned the Leet court, Arthur and his brother Edmund Gregory went into the scrivener's shop of one Lambert Thomas in Fleet Street in London and asked him to engross a deed 'very Secretly in a Close studdie or parlour', concerning land in Stivichall.[125] By pure chance, according to his own account, Robert Turnor, tenant of land in Stivichall, also went into the shop later that day. The scrivener, recognising an old acquaintance and knowing his land and his business, told him that he had a deed in his shop that 'made mencion of your manor of stivichale'. As a result of this incident, Robert Turnor brought a series of Star Chamber actions in which the case against Arthur and Edmund Gregory was outlined. Water Meredith, servant of the scrivener in London, was questioned about the incident itself and the supposed secrecy of the transaction. It was put to him that the deed the scrivener was working from was a draft prepared by Arthur Gregory, not the original made by Thomas Fisher. Meredith was asked if the deed 'supposed to be made by Thomas ffisher' should have been antedated or not.[126] Even after the subsequent dispute with the corporation had been settled, Turnor continued to press his suit. In later Star Chamber cases, from the 1580s, Turnor seems to have accused Thomas Fisher of complicity in the forgery and an attempt to engross the chief rents of the manor with Arthur Gregory.[127] Gregory had clearly demonstrated the perils of upsetting men with money, geographical mobility and a knowledge of both local and national justice.

It is likely that Robert Turnor first alerted the Leet court in Coventry to the accusation of forgery which resulted in Arthur Gregory's removal. The aldermen were also, no doubt, upset at

[124] CRO BA/G/1/3/7.
[125] *Leet Book*, p. 817.
[126] TNA PRO STAC5/T29/34 fo. 1v-3r, see also STAC5/T27/34.
[127] TNA PRO STAC 5/T30/34.

his presence in London for most of the law terms and his holding of numerous other offices and positions. Arthur was notoriously unpopular and venal in his position of feodary in Warwickshire. His brother Christopher remarked in a letter of 1579 that he doubted that the court of wards would ever allow anyone by the name of Gregory to be appointed to that office again.[128] When he was finally removed from the corporation's service and from his position as clerk of the statute in 1580 the aldermen began a Star Chamber case which accused Arthur Gregory of fraud. Gregory was accused of taking documents from the corporation and 'p[ar]chm[e]nt unwritten upon called Blankes sealed w[i]th the seale of the corporacion'. It was also put to him that Thomas Gregory, his father, had never returned certain documents to the treasury and had kept a wooden seal belonging to the city.[129]

The accusations against Arthur Gregory are partly the collected grievances which his father had built up throughout his time in the service of the corporation. The corporation made the allegation, amongst other more general ones, that Thomas Gregory had taken bribes. They alleged that as far back as 1543, William Sm[e]ckling, a tile maker of Atherstone in Warwickshire, had paid money to erase the clerk's side of a recognisance in the Statute Merchant made with Thomas Wood.[130] The accusations also probably stem, in part, from the city's dissatisfaction with the services, which Arthur Gregory was rendering as town clerk. After years of service from Thomas Gregory, they seem to have been disappointed with their new clerk and his use of legal authority to try to undermine their jurisdiction. Because he spent so much time in London and on business outside the city of Coventry, he failed to integrate into the social networks that were so vital to the smooth running of the city. There is no way of assessing the truth of any of the allegations against Arthur Gregory. He flatly denied most of them in his responses, apart from clarifying small matters of detail and outlining his duties as clerk to the corporation. However, the primary reason that the Leet court felt unable to tolerate Arthur Gregory was the attack on their rights and jurisdiction over the county of Coventry. The

[128] TNA PRO DR10/1926.
[129] TNA PRO STAC 5/69/30 fo.1v.
[130] TNA PRO STAC 5/69/30 fo. 1v, 4r; CRO BA/E/3/7/36.

Star Chamber cases were preoccupied with the forgery of Thomas Fisher's deed of gift and the accusation that his son Edward Fisher had 'made a new conveyance of the... lands in Stichall' to Arthur Gregory. They corporation also questioned the authenticity of manorial documents which Arthur Gregory had provided to them in 1574 and alleged that Arthur Gregory had moved the 'meirstones or bou[n]des by the dwision or coustitucion of the cou[n]ties of the city of Cove[n]tre and of Warwick', thereby placing his lands outside the jurisdiction of the Leet court.[131] In 1581 the city undertook a survey of the metes and bounds by the sheriffs, chamberlains and wardens and 'other yong men' who rode out with 'dyuers of euerie Townshipp sommune within the forrens appoynted by speciall precept'.[132] This survey sought to define precisely the boundary of the city of Coventry. This was in all likelihood in response to the uncertainty and anxiety about the boundaries of the county of Coventry that the Gregory case caused the aldermen. Indeed, the dispute with Gregory, over lands and jurisdictions and the boundaries of the corporate county, reflected an attempt to define the boundaries of civic political life when faced with the needs of a more powerful urban oligarchy.

In Coventry during the early modern period changing descriptions of the city remained contentious because statements of civic values were often made to advance personal agendas. In many cases they were also a process of personal self-definition which accounted for and promoted personal religious choices. It was advantageous for those with new religious ideas to wrap themselves in a cloak of loyalty and civic virtue through participation in civic life and charity. These new ideas also advanced subtly changing notions of civic identity. Civic rhetoric sought to promote order by defining the city more firmly and wedding its sense of place to that of the locality and nation. Civic myths were set aside for careful historical expositions of the gradual process that produced Coventry's economic and corporate freedoms. However, civic political culture did not stop at the walls of the city. After Coventry's economic trouble, writers slowly began to acknowledge the broader economic, political and topographical realities of the city. Coventry was the gravitational force around which smaller economic communities

[131] TNA STAC 5/C59/13 fo. 1r.
[132] *Leet Book,* p. 821.

revolved, both in the rural districts of the corporate county of Coventry and further afield. The urban parishes also extended the city's influence. Civic rhetoric was partly an acknowledgement of the economic reality that no English town could stand aside from its regional networks and satellite settlements. Given this context, the conflicts over boundaries, tithes and manorial tenure seemed to work against the civic concordance and harmony with the landscape which was promoted by civic rhetoric. No doubt, such rhetoric was partly a response to the alarming and destabilising nature of these disagreements. Certainly, engaging in such conflicts was an economic necessity for the civic elite. The city's corporate interests were in constant negotiation with individuals trying to forge their own identity and establish their own landholding. It is ironic but entirely understandable that one of the authors of this new brand of civic rhetoric, Thomas Gregory, should have children who would choose to pursue their own landed interests with little regard to the niceties of civic politics. Yet, conflict was also a source of definition. Ultimately, the civic elites emerged with more certain ideas of how Coventry fitted into the physical and jurisdictional landscape. The willingness of the civic elite to engage in conflict over the geographical boundaries of the city proves that they were actively looking for these definitions. Conflict also changed how the city thought about itself within the kingdom and nation. Ideas of 'state formation' should not simply be about the use of the courts, a common legal culture and fiscal and military centralisation. The formation of the modern state was a process which allowed cities, such as Coventry, the power to engage in defining their own place in the locality and nation.

2. Economic and Social Networks

The economy of Coventry has been thought to have been in terminal decline during the early modern period, as the city's position slipped in the regional hierarchy of urban centres. Berger has described a process by which mercantile trade was dominated by London and shop-keeping became the primary occupation of Coventry's mercers and drapers. He describes a city that gradually became more provincial after the Reformation.[1] It is certainly true that international crises in trade as well as the increased mortality of the 1570s had an effect on industry in the city. However, during the 1550s, the population of the city began to increase again and industry began to recover. Coventry retained access to national trading networks and opened up other economic possibilities by adapting and developing medieval institutions. Such processes were encouraged by a newly confident civic elite emboldened by the land purchases and rights acquired during the Reformation. The city exploited new networks of patronage with the local aristocracy and gentry to increase their hold over trade in the county of Coventry. These men, largely made up of their co-religionists, were crucial in accessing networks of local and national patronage which were vital to the city. The civic elite supplemented their control of trade and industry, through the Leet court and craft guilds, with attempts to understand and control the networks of fuel that supplied the city. As well as providing a guide to casual social interactions, an examination of economic interventions by the civic elite can prove a valuable guide to their aims and ideas throughout the sixteenth century. For the civic elite, the exploitation of economic networks was part of a continuing effort to redefine the city and strengthen their power.

Social, economic and political networks often overlapped in Coventry. The lending of money and commercial relations can help us to elucidate the subtle political power relationships and the bonds of association and kinship which governed urban life in the city. As Muldrew has noted through a careful examination of the economic and social aspects of debt, the extension of credit tended to

[1] R.M. Berger, *The Most Necessary Luxuries : The Mercers' Company of Coventry, 1550-1680* (New York, 1993).

create social obligations between individuals or made an existing relationship apparent.[2] Muldrew argues that the standing of the individual in the community was directly related to his or her ability to borrow money and extend credit in return. Actual wealth and social standing were keenly related. However, historians have questioned the degree to which credit relations were simply based on this social standing rather than the ability to advance real monetary wealth and provide security for debts.[3] Of the 386 Coventry wills sent for probate to the consistory court of the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield between 1520 and 1570, 330 are accompanied by inventories. Out of these, only 44 of the 330 or 13% listed any 'ready money' in the form of coin. 65 inventories, or 20% of the total, also contained precious metals in the form of silver plate or gold.[4] Although the wills extant for Coventry during this period are generally from the better off, they prove that Coventry's citizens often had access to moderate amounts of coinage. Those who did not have coin in their inventories generally bequeathed sums of money in their will which suggests that there was a market for the goods, land and animals of the deceased that might be sold to produce ready money. This material wealth was an important component of the economic power of townsmen. During the 1540s the dissolutions flooded urban markets with metal of all kinds. John Foxall, an important Coventry draper, acquired the commission to melt the lead from the roofs of the dissolved monastic churches in the city.[5] This seems to have entrenched the family's position as traders in lead, and in 1565 a 'M[ast]er Foxall' paid the corporation 13s 4d for 'a gutter of lead taken down of a house... in bishopstreet'.[6] In the mid-sixteenth century wealthy drapers, like Foxall, often held large amounts of stock in warehouses and shops in the city. Inventories from Coventry drapers' wills around this time included everything from luxury items such as gold lace, camlet, satin and buckram along with trimmings such as feathers and buttons, to rolls of the ubiquitous linen material known as 'holland cloth' and hardwearing 'Holmes [Ulm] ffustyan',

[2] Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation : The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London, 1998).
[3] Pamela Nightingale, 'Monetary Contraction and Mercantile Credit in Later Medieval England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 43 (1990), pp. 560-75.
[4] LRO B/C/11 [Coventry wills, 1520-1570 (Aawood- Yardly)].
[5] LRO B/C/11 (John Foxall 1542).
[6] LRO B/C/11 [Coventry wills, 1520-1570 (Aawood- Yardly)].

imported from Germany.[7] Even given the low calculations for the amount of coinage in circulation it is easy to overestimate the need for networks of credit based on social obligation and trust. Many craftsmen held moveable wealth and large inventories of stock that was easily saleable or could be turned into security on a loan.

Economic interactions and lending in the city of Coventry were often based on mutuality, social obligation and kinship. Thomas Gregory, a lawyer, the city's coroner and clerk of the Leet court kept a private memoranda book which detailed, amongst other things, an account of his petty lending. Gregory supported the business ventures of his immediate family, lending to his in-laws, William Phynnes, John Penyfather his sister's husband and John Waid . In 1550 he lent William £20 'so longe as my daughter alice did countinue in his s[er]vice', but otherwise he seems to have lent freely to these men providing them with credit which supported their business activities. Kinship networks also facilitated Gregory's lending to others. In 1554 Gregory 'receved of john grene m[er]cer by the handes of William phynes a perre of Silver hockes as a gage for 3s 4d' and in 1555 he lent 20s 'to addyngton the capp[er] by the handes of his wiff in my brother waides shopp to be p[ai]dd ageyn w[i]tin iij wekes'.[8] However, Gregory often lent without the niceties of a prior obligation, presumably with a profit motive. In 1553 he lent 20s to Thomas Nevet 'm[ast]er mayers servant' upon a gage of 'an angell noble and a souvereign of gold'[9]. In the same year he received 'a little cupp wt a cov[er] of silv[er] and gilt' from William Moseley for the loan of 40s and lent 5s to 'good wiff norres of stichall upon a gage of a christenyng sheit'.[10] Providing security to a lender was a good way of ensuring access to credit without the necessity of an existing obligation or a commercial relationship.

For some trading relationships in Coventry the only records are from debts recorded in the will or inventory of a testator. Using debts and bequests to construct this context can help to place the individual within a local social and political network. However, caution is still needed. Although

[7] LRO B/C/11 (Drapers: Henry Bralesfort 1534, Thomas Burden 1542, John Bowlat 1558, John Foxall 1539, Gylbert Morres 1546, Richard Goldryng 1557, Thomas Heryng 1537, Richard Heryng 1544, William Hutton 1557, John Hill 1564, Thomas Morres 1551, William Norwood 1537, Humphrey Walker 1557).
[8] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 19r, 21r.
[9] Ibid fo. 18r.
[10] Ibid fo. 18v.

the inventory might have been appraised by one or more of the overseers of the will on the day that the individual was 'quick and dead', much of the business of the deceased was concluded beforehand. *Ars Moriendi* literature often advised that a sick man or woman in danger of dying should remain untroubled by economic considerations. In his *dyetary of helth* the monk Andrew Boorde advised not to let 'many men, and specially women, be togyther at on tyme in the chamber' of the sick man and that 'no man oughte to moue to hym any worldly matters or busyness; but speke of ghostly and godly matters'.[11] This advice was geared to avoiding the stream of visitors settling their debts at the deathbed. Later Protestant soteriology believed that the deathbed could be the scene for a final desperate struggle for salvation. Given this theological context and Calvinist theologians' love of balancing salvation upon a knife-edge it is no surprise that clergy were consistently exasperated by the failure of their parishioners to put their affairs in order before they were forced to by the imminence of death. As a consequence of this failure, many debts must have been settled with the sick individual, rather than being recorded in the will. Nevertheless some testators were careful enough to record their debts, leaving a record of their trading relationships and obligations.

These casual credit relationships were vital to the maintenance of trade. Payments of wages in 'truck', that is in goods, were outlawed by the Leet court to prevent any one person from obtaining a monopoly over suppliers of labour.[12] Those who employed men and women, in tasks such as spinning, finishing or dyeing cloth and brewing, relied on informal credit relationships with individuals. Brewing was one of the archetypal industries in which small networks of credit can be seen. Brewing ale, unlike beer, required relatively little investment in equipment or technical skill. Ale spoiled more rapidly than beer and it had to be produced in smaller batches and was harder to store, trade and transport.[13] Therefore work was often performed by women as a domestic sideline. Many were the wives or widows of members of the civic elite. Agnes Atkyns, wife of Hugh Atkyns, a capper of the Spon Street Ward in the city, left all her brewing equipment to her daughter

[11] Andrew Boorde, *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge...A Dyetary of Helth...* ,ed. F.J Furnivall (E.E.T.S. original ser., x, 1570), p. 301.
[12] *Leet Book*, pp. 689, 707, 784-5.
[13] Judith Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England : Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 86-7.

Alice, upon her death in 1558.[14] Others left their equipment to their friends or female relatives.[15] Many wills left brewing equipment or mentioned a 'brew-house', demonstrating the fact that many of the victualling industries in the early modern town were a component part of the household.[16] Alehouse keepers often relied on domestic brewing. In 1545, the alehouse keeper Robert Smith died owing 15 shillings to Nicholas Brakley for 10 sesters of ale, 7s 10d to Anne Boucher and 7s 6d to Margery Tomson for five sesters of ale each.[17] The growing taste for beer gradually undermined these small networks of credit and the ale-brewing industry. However, important members of the civic elite also made their money from victualling. Alice Fan, the wife of Laurence Fan, an alderman and member of the mayor's council from 1532, maintained her husband's shop until her death.[18] Her inventory shows that she kept just as much stock as any of her male counterparts; having £22 14s of stock fish and herring as well as barrels for soaking salt fish to produce 'water-fish'. After the Reformation the trade came under the auspices of the Mercers' Company and in 1563 they licensed a number of men to sell all manner of fresh and salt fish.[19] Poor single women were often prevented from working in the cloth industry by Leet regulation, in an effort to control the amount of surplus labour and ensure a ready supply of domestic servants.[20] However, it was entirely possible for rich widows to maintain their social position in civic life during the sixteenth century through their involvement in trade.

Disputes are often a good way of highlighting the extent of networks of trade, credit and obligation. Katherine Bydell, of Coventry died in 1535 leaving a house in Much Park Street enfeoffed to pay for a yearly obit for her and William Bydell, her husband. Bydell's nephew, Thomas Crosse, a draper living in London, then took up a case against a priest of the parish of the Holy Trinity in Coventry, one of the two urban parishes in Coventry and the masters of the

[14] LRO B/C/11 (Agnes Atkyns 1558).
[15] Ibid. (Katherine Blakmer 1558).
[16] Ibid. (Henry Braylesford 1534, Katherine Bydell 1535, John Broke 1536, Joan Dudley 1544, Joan Hopkens 1554, Philip Sherrade 1550, Robert More 1558, Richard Sewell 1558, Thomas Saunders 1558, John Sevans 1560).
[17] Ibid. (Robert Smith 1545).
[18] LRO B/C/11 (Alice Fan 1552); *Leet Book*, pp. 711, 713.
[19] CRO PA251/3 p. 7 [Mercers' Order Book].
[20] CRO BA/E/6/37/2 p. 8.

fraternity of Our Lady in that church.[21] It is often forgotten that it was not just the crown who were interested in getting their hands on property given to intercessory purposes. The relatives of the deceased often felt that they were rightly entitled to this money. When the provisions made in wills were contested in this way they often revealed complex networks of economic interest. Bequests made in Coventry wills were expansive in their geographical scope. Testators often relied on trusted friends or relatives acting in the capacity of overseers to fulfil these important obligations. John Astley, a Coventry bottle maker dying in 1564 wished for money to be delivered to his brother's son in Worcester, as his father had been killed fighting at St Quentin. The boy was to be paid 40 shillings after he had completed a period of apprenticeship.[22] Because of the obvious trouble testators were put to in the pursuit of these bequests they were customarily left amounts of money or goods in the will as a gesture of continuing friendship and to pay for their expenses and any travel which might be necessary. Many bequests in wills confirmed social bonds that were already well understood by those around the dying individual and it was common to partly or wholly forgive small debts. Henry Tattenhall, a Coventry capper, dying in 1557 left a mark to his apprentice and money to his family, but also forgave the debts of the senior men of his company, John Howes, the elder and George Wingfield.[23] Others forgave their friends and relatives small amounts of money from longstanding arrangements or existing debts.[24] Thomas Raynscrafte, a capper, ordered that any of his remaining debts that his executors could collect should go to Henry Hybbart, the curate of St Michael's Church in Coventry, to distribute to the poor.[25] Charity and the forgiveness of these debts represented the renewal of a social bond even after the death of the individual.

Despite the social obligation to pay money for work or goods given on credit, these transactions were not without risk. On dying in 1562 the Coventry fuller, Thomas Leake, recorded £10 of good

[21] TNA PRO C 1/755/24; LRO B/C/11 (Katherine Bydell 1535).
[22] LRO B/C/11 (John Astley 1563).
[23] Ibid. (Henry Tattenhall 1557).
[24] Ibid. (Henry Lyngham 1553, Alice Saunders 1568, William Bailie 1542, John Byrd 1556, Thomas Bustard 1546).
[25] Ibid. (Thomas Raynscrafte 1547).

debts, but twice that amount in 'desperate detts'.[26] John Foxall, the draper, recorded desperate debts owed to him by cappers and dyers in Coventry, but also merchants in Boston, Chester and Liverpool. Other men seemed to do more business within the surrounding county and in Warwickshire. The Coventry tailor, Christopher Lankton, supplied wares to local gentlemen. He recorded debts to many men in the locality including Hugh Throckmorton of Kingswood in the county of Worcester, a seemingly profligate member of the family who was also in debt to his cousins at Coughton Court in Warwickshire.[27] Social knowledge and the personal relationships necessary for trade clearly did not stop men contracting a considerable number of bad debts during their trading careers. Despite the various usury acts during the sixteenth century, a higher price could be charged for goods if long periods of credit were given over large distances. These contracts clearly tempted some Coventry men into contracting debts with men who could not hope to repay them. On the whole these networks were entirely casual and based on interactions between individuals. However, increasingly during the sixteenth century, the corporation sought to manipulate trade and credit for the good of the city and commonweal.

The new commonwealth ideas of the civic elite and their growing confidence were given expression through their desire to control trade and lending. One of the largest lenders was the corporation of Coventry which often provided credit directly from the corporation treasury. In January 1562 alone the corporation received the repayment of £100 worth of loans from disparate individuals.[28] Loans to townsmen were more easily provided to those who could provide security. In 1564 £50 was lent to 'M[aste]r Over upon a gage of plait' and on 1 May 1567 £20 was advanced to John Saunders, a butcher and grazier upon a 'gage of a salt wt a cov[er] p[ar]cell of sylver gilt a gilt goblet of silv[er] xij silver spones wt appostlles on the endes and oon gilt spone of silver and iiij li vjs viijd in old gold [coins]'.[29] Money was also lent to two aldermen, Richard Over and Christopher Warren, in January 1568 on security.[30] In a more complex arrangement in 1567 the corporation lent £5 to 'm[ast]er brownell up[o]n a gage of cetayn plait the some of w[hi]ch plait is

[26] Ibid. (Thomas Leake 1562).
[27] WRO CR 1998/Box 66/Folder 6/40.
[28] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 [A.16], p. 5.
[29] Ibid. p. 7.
[30] Ibid p. 13.

George holms and John Rogersones'. Holms and Rogersones then repaid the corporation the following year to redeem their plate.[31] The lending of such monies upon security no doubt fulfilled the corporation's goals of improving trade and aiding the employment of ancillary craftsmen with a view to setting the idle population to work. Despite this, it is hard to avoid the impression that such lending was sometimes the result of a high point in Coventry's urban oligarchy, during the thirty years after 1560, when the corporation's finances were relatively secure but before the common council of the city had been re-instituted.[32] A wealthy corporation could afford to lend money with the hope of expanding its grip on local trading networks and encouraging trade. Access to the corporation's wealth was a reward to select individuals for their political involvement.

The city also had considerable amounts of charitable loans to disburse. In the sixteenth century lending money was still a controversial act, yet arguments over usury never aligned neatly with any of the traditional dividing lines of the Reformation. John Jewel followed Aquinas in his condemnation of usury in a sermon of 1560, equating it with the more heinous crimes of theft and murder. Using commonwealth ideas he also condemned the social evils of poverty and the wrongs done to small tradesmen.[33] There had always been debates over what exactly usury was and therefore it was often easy to avoid committing a crime when lending money. Nevertheless, the continuing suspicion of lending money with a profit motive in the early modern period rendered free loan money a worthy charitable act. However, bequests of loan money were attractive for a number of other reasons. As the money was repaid, it could be lent out again and therefore the gift was self-perpetuating. Gifts of loan money to the corporation provided at least the possibility of continuing post-mortem fame and also a comparatively simply way to bequeath money to charity. It avoided the legal pitfalls of providing a steady stream of income which might involve property and enfeoffments. The successful way the corporation and craft guilds administered the money also encouraged others to give. This money could be used by the corporation to fulfil some of their goals of encouraging trade. Craftsmen, such as weavers, needed to make a considerable initial

[31] Ibid pp. 12, 13.
[32] *Leet Book,* pp. 835-7.
[33] Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders : Usury and the Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 27; Eric Kerridge, *Usury, Interest, and The Reformation* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 54-5.

outlay on a loom and other crafts required tools and equipment. For mercers and tradesmen to start a business, stock needed to be purchased. Free loan money allowed the corporation to encourage trade and business by lending to young men who had completed their apprenticeships.

Money was often lent for a period of up to three years. In 1518 John Haddon, the draper, gave £100 to lend to young men in the Drapers' Company and £100 to ordinary citizens.[34] Loan money was often bequeathed by those with family or trading connections to Coventry to reaffirm their family's links to the city. In 1542, Thomas White, the Bristol merchant, gave loan money to 14 citizens of Coventry at the rate of 20 marks each, provided that the borrowers paid for bonds to be enrolled detailing the loan.[35] In 1559 William Willington, merchant of the staple, from Bareston in Warwickshire, gave £120 to be distributed in loans of £10.[36] Other bequests of loan money came from aldermen who had been members of the mayor's council and prominent merchants or tradesmen. John Tallants, the Coventry Goldsmith who had been influential in securing tithes for the city, gave 20 nobles each to six poor householders for 3 years.[37] Simon Parker, an alderman dying in 1551, as well as giving money to 'xx yong maryed coples that be towdyle and thryvyng' also gave £40 in loan money to 'vj yong men Inhabaytants of the sayd cyttye' at the rate of 20 nobles each. He gave £10 to the mayor and his brethren for their trouble in administering the loan and setting the conditions of the loans.[38] The corporation required, as with much of its other charitable lending, that two men stand surety for the borrower.[39] In 1566 Thomas Wheatley made a large bequest of £400 in loan money, half of which was lent as lump sums to the craft fellowships in Coventry to disburse as they wished. Wheatley expressed his gratitude to other towns and acknowledged his other trading links by leaving loan money to other towns to be administered by the corporation of Coventry. £200 of his bequest was distributed to the towns of Northampton, Warwick and Atherstone.[40] In the latter half of the sixteenth century numerous other bequests of

[34] CRO BA/D/BL/1/2 fo. 2v.
[35] Ibid fo. 2v.
[36] Edward Jackson, *An Account of the Many and Great Loans, Benefactions, and Charities, Belonging to the City of Coventry* (London, 1733), p. 16.
[37] Ibid. p. 6.
[38] LRO B/C/11 (Simon Parker 1551).
[39] CRO BA/D/BL/1/1 fo. 2v.
[40] Ibid fo. 2r.

loan money were made, to be administered by the corporation, the records of which, along with the existing bequests, filled the corporation's new loan book.[41] As well as supporting the projection of the trading interests of the city, some men bequeathing loan money also sought to remedy the problems of office-holding and ensure the smooth running of the city and its political community. The process of Tudor accounting meant that office-holders were often faced with unexpected costs and charges. Therefore, as well as his other bequests, Thomas White detailed £20 to be lent to the mayor, £20 to be lent to the sheriffs and £40 to be lent to the wardens of the city during their year in office.[42] Loan money was directed at these officials to ensure the smooth running of civic politics.

During the sixteenth century the corporation found that lending and the granting of other rights to individuals was a useful way of solving a number of other civic problems. One of these problems involved the development of mineral and mining resources within the boundaries of the county of Coventry. This effort was in part a response to the city's increasing need for fuel. Coal was first burned widely in London but by the end of the sixteenth century mineral coal or 'sea-coal' was being used in provincial cities. The overarching narrative applied to explain the expansion in the coal-mining industry in the early modern period by J. U. Nef, argued that demand for coal was driven by a shortage of wood and the overexploitation of common resources.[43] Coventry's acquisition of the park of Cheylesmore and dissolved lands provided the city with new supplies of wood. However, as with most urban areas during the sixteenth century, the demand for fuel grew alongside a recovering and expanding urban population. The corporation purchased coal to heat the mayor's parlour in St Mary's Hall from the mid 1570s and much of Coventry's population must have come to rely on it as a source of fuel.[44] The presence of speculators controlling mining interests just outside the boundaries of the county of Coventry, on the north Warwickshire coalfield, must also have been a factor in encouraging the adoption of new fuels. For much of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century the Beaumont family owned controlling interests in coal

[41] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo.78r.
[42] CRO BA/D/BL/1/1 fo. 9r.
[43] J. U. Nef, *The Rise of the British Coal Industry* (2 vols., London, 1966), i, pp. 150-64.
[44] CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 10.

mining in and around the city of Coventry. Substantial mining activity existed outside the boundaries of the county of Coventry at Parkfield in Bedworth and Chilvers Coton owned by Nicholas Beaumont, followed by his sons Huntington and Thomas Beaumont.[45] They were aggressive marketers of their product to urban areas, and in the early seventeenth century even conceived of a scheme to ship coal from their Nottingham mines along the river Trent to London. Despite the failure of these grander schemes, coal was successfully sold locally and the citizens of Coventry acquired their coal from the mines in Exhall and Keresley, parishes to the north of the city.

To counter the influence of the speculators the corporation encouraged the exploitation of coal within the county of Coventry. In 1570, £10 was lent to the alderman Humfrey Smalewood by the mayor's council 'towards the getting of seacole' and the 'the cole pyttes' dug by him.[46] Smalewood seemingly recouped his investment as he repaid the money in 1573.[47] In 1579 the council granted Christopher Winold the right to 'synke a pitt in a lane leding from the three mile tree in exull towarde hawkesberie Grove w[i]ch lane is p[ar]cell of the waste of the mannor of chellesmore', and to see if there, 'be any cole the[r] to be found or not', provided that Winold did not obstruct the lane and the transport of cattle.[48] The corporation was flexible enough to recognise that allowing individual citizens of Coventry to speculate, supported by loans and the granting of rights to those who came before the common council, was the best way to break the monopoly that the gentry had over the supply of fuel.

This development put the corporation into direct competition with the Beaumont family. Thomas Beaumont's commercial strategy involved buying the rights to the competing mining interests in and around his existing mines. Coal was difficult to transport and these practices served to protect a captive local market. Beaumont even went so far as to pay £100 a year to the Nottinghamshire mine owner, Sir Percival Willoughby, to close his mine at Foleshill, several miles north east of the

[45] TNA PRO E 178/2326 [Parkfield; 1570]; NUL MM Mi Ac 123 [Coal Mining Accounts; Bedworth, 1574]; NUL MM Mi Ac 124 [1580-81]; NUL MM Mi Ac 126-7 [1577-8], NUL MM Mi X6/27 [Lease].
[46] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 [A16] p. 20.
[47] CRO BA/H/3/20/1 [A17] p. 24.
[48] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 82v.

city of Coventry.[49] Willoughby had acquired mines in Foleshill, Bedworth and Astley from his father by deed of gift in 1594.[50] The corporation's own mine workings proved a sufficient irritant to persuade Beaumont that they were worth acquiring too and in 1595, various mineral rights in Exhall, in the county of Coventry were rented to Thomas Beaumont.[51] This in turn provided the city with secure supplies of fuel as the rent exacted was paid in coal, at the rate of 100 loads a year, 20 of which were then to be distributed, as charity, to the poor of the city.[52] By using loans to encourage investment, and dangling the possibility of wealth in front of speculators, the corporation had gained a measure of control over its supply of fuel and the economic networks surrounding the city. Some of the mines in Exhall were less than profitable; nevertheless, the corporation turned its investment into rents which provided the city with fuel for several decades at the end of the sixteenth century. Having power over these economic networks surrounding the city allowed the civic elite to take control over their landscape and redefine urban authority by controlling flows of raw materials in and out of the city.

The civic elite continued to use the structures of the craft guilds, the Leet and the mayor's council to control trade and industry in the city, as well as less formal economic power. For poorer men economic interactions and debt could come to define their social status and position in the civic hierarchy. Dyers, walkers and fullers rarely owned the cloth or material on which they were working. Dyers' inventories often only recorded their household goods and the equipment of their trade. On average, from 1520 to 1580, the surviving inventories of Coventry drapers were worth substantially more than those of the dyers who made wills. More drapers than dyers seem to have made wills and while few dyers had goods worth over £10, four drapers of the sample left goods worth over £100 and several more left between £20 and £50 in goods.[53] Therefore, dyers' ability to

[49] Richard Smith, *Early Coal Mining Around Nottingham 1500-1650* (Nottingham, 1989), pp. 66-7; NUL MM Mi X 3/4.
[50] NUL MM Mi X 6/23.
[51] CRO BA/D/1/31/1.
[52] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] pp. 234-5; CRO BA/D/BL/1/2 fo. 1r.
[53] LRO B/C/11 (**Drapers**: Henry Bralesfort 1534, Thomas Burden 1542, Robert Dudley 1563, John Foxall 1539, Gylbert Morres 1546, Thomas Greffyn 1551, Richard Goldryng 1557, Richard Herring 1554, William Hutton 1551, John Hyll 1563, Thomas Morres 1551, William Norwood 1537, John Phillips 1553, Philip Sherrade 1550, John Threchare 1549, Humphrey Walker 1553, **Dyers**: William Cley 1542, John Hunt 1554, Robert Moore 1551, Henry Putter 1554, Robert Moore 1551, Humphrey Renolde 1553).

borrow money advanced upon their goods was proportionally lessened. Minor craftsmen in the cloth industry were more dependent on interactions with the merchants and drapers who provided the white cloth or wool on which they worked. The ambiguity of the law and the uncertainty surrounding the legal rights of merchants and craftsmen contributed to the social context for interactions between these individuals.[54] Of course, here, caution should be exercised. Historians have always pointed out that a study of economic relationships cannot describe society in its entirety without displaying an unwanted 'predictive rigidity'.[55] As Withington has shown, such relationships were contingent upon friendships and hatreds, and the language which was used to describe them.[56] Although economic issues were important it would be wrong to reduce social and political relationships between individuals in the city to economic or legal functionalism. Commercial relations in Coventry were more than the combination of social deference, economic need and the peculiarities of the law. Nevertheless, economic interactions combined with the politics of individual incidents can go some way to describing the nature of relations between the civic elites and the more minor tradesmen who served them.

Even in a personal capacity, as individual tradesmen, the civic elite acted to control and manipulate trade and the social circumstances of their surroundings. A particularly striking incident occurred in 1538. It involved the alderman Thomas Banwell who had been mayor in 1523 and had held many of the important civic offices in Coventry, including being the master of the Trinity Guild in 1538 and in 1539 one of two justices of the peace for the city.[57] Banwell was not only important within the Drapers' Company and in the city, but independently wealthy, holding a considerable amount of property.[58] On 18 September of that year he and some of his fellow drapers, Harry Magett, Thomas Bateman, John Heth and John Slee, entered a house which was rented from Banwell by Tristram Mounteford, a journeyman dyer living in Deed Lane. Mounteford alleged that Banwell 'toke and karyed away w[i]th them as much Rayment of the said orrators and his wifes as

[54] John Baker, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England Vol. 6. 1483-1558* (Oxford, 2003), p. 732.
[55] Keith Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England' in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996) p. 30.
[56] Phil Withington, 'Company and Sociability in Early Modern England', *Social History* 32:3 (2007), pp. 291-307.
[57] *Leet Book*, pp.668-768 ; CRO BA/B/16/216/1; CRO BA/B/16/244/1; CRO BA/H/8/309/21.
[58] CRO BA/H/8/310/2.

was wourth xiijs iiijd' and had him imprisoned for 24 hours, calling Mounteford a 'fals knave'.[59] Mounteford's plea argues that the dispute was over wages and that Banwell was angry because he 'wold not syve the said Banwell in dyers Craft for lasse money th[a]n other dyers' and that 'the said banwell wyll nether geve y[ou]r said orator suche wages as his neybers wyll doo nether wyll suffer y[ou]r said orrato[r] to werke w[i]th no other man'.[60] In one sense, this dispute is indicative of the prevailing economic conditions, in terms of labour supply, the ordinary commercial hierarchy of the city and the danger of competing cloth manufacture outside the boundaries of the city. The civic elite even seem to have prevented the dyers organising as a company in an attempt to control their wages after 1529. [61] It was only in 1550 that a company of dyers was set up again.[62] In this climate Banwell saw the need to make an example of Mounteford and seems to have taken a leading role as one of the more powerful personalities in the Drapers' Company. Mounteford, in his response to the court, claimed that he was 'therby compelled to goo and seke his worke xx myles from his owne hows to his utt[er] undoing'.[63] The fact that he was able to obtain work outside the city suggests, despite his pleas to the court, that the drapers' strategy was only partly successful. Despite Mounteford's claims about his need to look for work he clearly remained resident in the city and in 1540 he was fined 12d for 'soefferyng menes servuantes to pley at unlawfull games in his house', perhaps to supplement the income he had lost from being excluded from trading networks.[64] It is unlikely, in this context, that the guild system ever exercised anything like complete control over the cloth industry. In any case, Thomas Banwell denied the charge levied against him and his company, saying that Mounteford was behind in his rent and that he had entered the house in a 'peasable' manner and taken only 12s of cloth – the value of the unpaid rent – and that Mounteford took himself 'oute of the said citie' to avoid justice.[65] The incident illustrates the possible tensions which could occur over wages and at times

[59] TNA PRO C1/1013/45.
[60] Ibid.
[61] *Leet Book,* pp. 697-8, 704, 714-5.
[62] Ibid. p. 795.
[63] TNA PRO C1/1013/45.
[64] Levi Fox (ed.), 'Some New Evidence of Leet Activity in Coventry, 1540-41', *The English Historical Review*, 61(240), p. 237.
[65] TNA PRO C1/1013/48.

when craftsmen were handling other men's goods. However, the corporation could not prevent Coventry's citizens interacting with the larger labour market and local commercial networks. The comparative wealth of the dyers did not entirely negate their political power and the corporation was not always successful in trying to shape their economic interactions.

Regulation by the craft guilds and the city government was an important way in which the civic elites shaped economic interactions and controlled economic networks. The Company of Fullers made ordinances in 1563 that required that no man of the company employ any other clothier in milling cloth. Regulations also sought to protect the craft from the intervention of unskilled labour drawn from the city's other cloth-workers. Another order, made in the 1560s, stated that fullers were not to allow their servants, apprentices and journeymen to full cloth for profit.[66] During the latter part of the sixteenth century the Mercers' Company made a number of measures which controlled the right to sell goods in the city. The mercers often only granted the right to buy and sell specific goods on the payment on the payment of small fines.[67] Guild regulations reflected a set of shared values which brought together a community of craftsmen. It is also possible that these measures were, in fact, indicative of increased difficulty in controlling access to labour because of the recovery in the city's population during the 1560s. However, the picture is further complicated by the intervention of other parties. The cloth industry in Coventry was highly integrated and complex. Therefore, many of the guilds had an interest in the regulations of other crafts. These regulations had a direct bearing on the prices that other men paid for labour or raw materials and the corporation also took a hand in monitoring production and trade. As others have shown, the urban renaissance of the late sixteenth century meant that aldermen became increasingly concerned with their own prestige. The cloth industry was important to the reputation of the city from the perspective of the aldermen, as well as outsiders. This led the civic elite to attempt to control the quality of output through the regulation of the dyers' craft. In 1578 an order was made by the mayor's council outlawing the use of false dyes in the city, on pain of standing 'thre sev[er]all market dayes on the pyllorie w[i]th their wares nealled theon' and the same year 6d was paid to

[66] CRO PA/30/1 fo 7-11 [Fullers' order book].
[67] CRO PA251/3 pp. 1-10 [Thomas Daffern, transcr. , The Mercers' order book].

'the payntor for papers for them that made false coulors'.[68] The regulations of the craft guilds were well integrated with the interests and contemporary concerns of the civic elite. Leet regulation had always supplemented guild regulation and for most of the guilds the mayor and aldermen were the final court of appeal during disputes. In 1579 it was agreed that all of the dyers' fines should go to the mayor so that he would be more willing to hear all cases brought before him by the company.[69] Other companies, such as the barber-surgeons, also referred troublesome cases to the jurisdiction of the mayor and aldermen as a way of confirming the authority of the companies.[70] In many ways these attempts to control the trade seem to differ very little from the punishments and controls that were placed upon trade and industry in medieval English towns and in many ways they display the importance of the medieval legacy of corporate governance and punishment. However, they also provide a window on the city's new priorities. During the sixteenth century the civic elite attempted to maintain the city's prestige whilst engaging with broader networks of trade and industry.

The corporation of Coventry also sought to promote expansion and innovation in industry as a way of coping with poverty and other social problems which afflicted English towns towards the end of the sixteenth century. As with many other urban centres, Coventry came up with innovative schemes for promoting employment and industry in the city. These measures should instead be seen as a concerted effort to interact with broader social and economic networks for the benefit of the city. Guild regulation was rarely as intrusive as it first appeared and regulations were often designed to ensure quality and were sensitive to the supply of skilled labour. Although the city would later demand larger sureties from strangers, throughout the 1560s and 1570s the aldermen admitted strangers as freemen of the city on the payment of certain entry fines, usually amounting to 40s.[71] On 18 December 1576 the corporation admitted a Dutch dyer, Peter Desmaistres, a denizen of Tournai, to the freedom of the city and on 11 December 1578 they admitted another

[68] CRO BA/A/26/3 p. 27.
[69] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire C7 fo. 117v [William Reader, transcr., Dyers' Ordinances, 1579], see also fo. 102v-103v [Corvisers' Ordinances]. , fo. 217v-218r [Tilers' Ordinances].
[70] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 80r.
[71] CRO BA/H/3/20/1 [A17] pp. 33 ,34,35, 39.

Dutchman, Anthony Blocke.[72] The city had also acquired the old priory site and its dyehouse in November 1574 through a payment of £400, which purchased the holdings from the executors of Stephen Hales.[73] They then installed the men in the priory dyehouse and in 1577 money was paid by the mayor to the 'duchemen of the priory'.[74] The civic elite, increasingly dominated by members of the Drapers' Company, attempted to improve their access to skilled labour and manipulate the cloth trade by bringing different techniques and skills into the city. Desmaistres's later career is illustrative of the talents that he brought to Coventry and the skills that the corporation sought in him. In 1582, after time spent at Coventry, he moved to London and was admitted into the Company of Dyers there.[75] From this vantage point, along with a London mercer, John Williams, he undertook a woad growing project in Ireland with the backing of Sir Francis Walsingham.[76] What his career tells us is that he had knowledge of foreign cloth and the dyers' craft which complemented the other innovations being developed in Coventry at this time. In all probability Desmaistres was an expert on madder, a red dye, and woad, the blue dye which was famous through its association to the city. It is even possible that the corporation considered its own woad growing project in the 1570s which might have allowed it more control over the quality and price of raw materials, through the use of woad planted in the county of Coventry. Woad was a favourite crop of speculators in the latter half of the century, much to the alarm of the government. In 1577 there was a woad growing project proposed by Sir Francis Willoughby at Wollaton in Nottinghamshire and there were many other schemes promoted by less wealthy and important speculators.[77] Anthony King's survey of 1585 suggested there was very little woad planted in Warwickshire, but there is some evidence of experimentation with the crop near Coventry in the

[72] CRO BA/H/3/20/3 [A16] pp. 32, 35.
[73] Ibid p. 27; CRO PA96/12/1.
[74] CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 18.
[75] *Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London,* eds. R. E. G. Kirk and E. F. Kirk (Hugenot Society of London, 3 pts., 1900-1908), xii, p. 308.
[76] Richard Hoyle, 'Woad in the 1580s; Alternative Agriculture in England and Ireland', in R.W. Hoyle (ed), *People Landscape and Alternative Agriculture* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 68-9; *Calendar of the Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland, of the Reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, and Elizabeth*, ed. James Morrin (2 vols., London, 1861-2), ii, p. 80-1.
[77] R.S. Smith, 'A woad-growing project at Wollaton in the 1580s,' *Transactions of the Thoroton Society* , 65 (1961), pp. 27–46.

early modern period.[78] Woad had been planted to the south of the city at Stoneleigh. A grant of land made in Coventry in 1595 contained the condition that no woad was to be planted on the land, which suggests that the crop was considered a nuisance by townsmen.[79] From a national perspective the planting of dyes was thought to be damaging to the commonwealth because of the loss of tillage, and the decline in customs duties paid to the crown from imported woad. However, this did not stop the corporation trying to bolster its knowledge of dyes and the process of dyeing by exploiting a disparate range of individuals and connections.

Such projects, although minor in their immediate scope, were almost always controversial because they were perceived as a threat to existing interests. While Desmaistres seems to have moved to London from the early 1580s, Anthony Blocke remained in Coventry at the priory. Until 1583, Blocke seems to have been working on the condition that he was only to dye specified 'clothe woll threed yarne and... forren workes and ware'; however in 1583 the mayor and common council made a further agreement to let him 'inioye the libtie and benefyte of couloring and dyeing of clothe woll yarne and threede as fully and freely as any other dyer of this citie'.[80] The Dyers' Company, despite the agreement made with the mayor's council, maintained objections to the intervention of strangers in their craft. Later in 1583 a further order was made clarifying previous agreements. This order stated that Blocke should pay the Dyers' Company two fines of 20s and agree not to 'enter medle w[i]th the dyeing of any the clothe woll or yarne of any p[er]sone or p[er]sones dwelling out of this cittie and countie... but onley w[i]t[h] such as shalbe brought unto hym' nor was he to take any alien or stranger into his 'service or apprentishipp neyther teache his said arte to any such allyen or stranger'.[81] The civic elite viewed access to quality craftsmanship as imperative for the commonwealth of the city, not to mention their own personal fortunes. In 1593 the Leet made new regulations for making and sealing of blue thread with the seal of the city.[82] The council wanted to regulate the quality of items, such as blue thread, which were especially

[78] Hoyle, 'Alternative Agriculture', pp. 59-60.
[79] Christopher Dyer, 'Warwickshire Farming 1349-c. 1520: Preparations for Agricultural Revolution,' *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, 27 (1981).; CRO PA194/2/11.
[80] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 92r.
[81] Ibid. fo. 94r.
[82] CRO BA/E/6/37/2 pp. 7-8.

associated with Coventry. The civic elite, many of whom were involved in the cloth industry, relied upon the reputation of the city. Many of the wares produced in the city traded on Coventry's name and reputation. The corporation sometimes had difficulty in imposing its will upon the city and craft companies, resulting in carefully negotiated agreements. Nevertheless, utilising networks of national and European trade brought new techniques which helped to revitalise trade and industry in the city. The city's intervention helped to shape broad networks of trade within the jurisdiction of the Leet court and the county of Coventry.

Networks of credit in the county of Coventry were still, to some extent, shaped by the legacy of what Phythian-Adams referred to as the 'ritual year' and medieval networks of trade continued to be important to the corporation. These networks were particularly in evidence at Coventry's Corpus Christi fair. Before the Reformation the fair was strongly associated with religious drama, beginning on the Thursday after Corpus Christi, in late May or early June. The plays continued for a period after the Reformation but were eventually put down in the 1580s.[83] Yet, the trade done at the fair was so important that in 1570 it was exempted from new regulations on alehouse keeping made in 1553 and by large measure repeated in 1570. No tippler was to have any citizen 'resorte into ther howses to eate and drynke unless unless it be on the market daye & feyre tyme in the Company of an honeste stranger'.[84] The fair also retained its political significance for the civic elite. Despite its medieval origins, the fair was part of the projection of Coventry's economic and political interest into the surrounding countryside during the sixteenth century and it was customary for the mayor and aldermen to attend. In 1577 the chamberlains paid money for drinking at the newly repaired mayor's parlour in St Mary's Hall 'before they went into the faire on the latter faire day' and freemen of the city continued to escort the mayor's procession.[85] After this date there appears a regular payment for a breakfast made for the mayor and alderman at St Mary's Hall.[86] The companies also participated. In 1562, the butchers provided 8 men in harness

[83] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 27r.
[84] *Leet Book,* p.808; CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 68r.
[85] CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 26.
[86] Ibid. pp. 29,34.

on the Friday of the fair and paid water carriers.[87] Chartered fairs, such as the one in Coventry, were often defended against the encroachment of other fairs and markets by their founding corporate bodies, in order to protect the commercial landscape within which they operated.[88] In 1552 Coventry obtained a charter for another fair running for three days from 21 October.[89] However, this event does not seem to have been successful over the long term and the Corpus Christi fair retained its primacy in civic life. It also kept its regional dominance in trade and the ability to bring together national networks of commerce.

The main business of the Corpus Christi fair was cattle. Local tenant farmers came to transact small business deals or to purchase plough animals on credit, and the Coventry lawyers Thomas Gregory and Richard Denton acted as petty lenders at the fair during the 1550s and 1560s. A small toll was levied on each animal sold at the fair, and Gregory and Denton seem to have stationed their lending activities near the fair's toll booth. Anyone attending the fair must have known where to go to obtain small amounts of credit, and the presence of other officials from the corporation supplied a ready source of reliable witnesses to these transactions. In 1554 Gregory lent 3s 6d 'to Reed of wotton in the tole boithe ou[er] the faire Friday in p[re]sence of m[aste]r fitsherbert and m[ast]er Wightman shireffes'.[90] He also advanced money to his family, noting that his wife had lent £20 to his cousin William Phynnes at the fair, possibly so that Phynnes would have the ready money to buy cattle.[91] Gregory also purchased cattle on his own account at the fair, as many of the surrounding yeoman farmers must have done, paying £3 6s 8d for 'a yocke of Bullocks' in 1551 and £4 13s 4d in 1569 for a 'yock of younge blacke bullocks'.[92] Many minor gentlemen farmers traded at the fair, or sent their men to trade there. Peter Temple of Burton Dassett, near Southam in Warwickshire, bought and sold cattle at the fair on several occasions during the middle part of the

[87] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire c 6 fo. 25r.
[88] Richard Hoyle, 'New Markets and Fairs in the Yorkshire Dales, 1550-1750' in P.S. Barnwell and M. Palmer, (eds.), *Post-Medieval Landscapes* (Macclesfield, 2007), pp. 93-106.
[89] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Edward VI 1550-1553* (H.M.S.O., 6 vols., London, 1924-9), iv, p. 380.
[90] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 19v.
[91] Ibid fo. 16v.
[92] Ibid fo. 16v, 52v.

century.[93] However, as well as being the theatre for local trade, the fair was still at the centre of national trading networks.

In April 1546 the evangelical London merchant John Johnson sent £3 to his factor Christopher Bretaine and apologised for not being able to send more money by the time of the Coventry fair.[94] Credit agreements such as this had been a common way to facilitate regional purchases by London merchants, as these men gradually dominated national trade during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The fair was also important as a meeting place and a time for completing transactions and the business done there was not restricted to cattle. In 1551 Robert Saunders wrote to John Johnson confirming the delivery of cattle and offering Johnson wool on credit; the debt to be paid at the Coventry fair.[95] As well as merchants, the fair also attracted gentleman livestock farmers, such as Sir Thomas Newnham, who pastured 500 sheep in Everdon in Northamptonshire and 1200 in Newnham in the same county, during the 1560s.[96] Because of the fair's ability to bring disparate sets of men together, relations could sometimes be fractious. In 1553 Newnham was accused of affray by another man, Thomas Wilks, a London merchant. Wilks accused Newnham, who had been present with his son and five other men, of ordering his servants to attack him at the fair, with the result that Wilks had been injured. It was common for rich farmers such as Newnham to travel with large retinues of drovers who could then transport the purchases of cattle and arrange for their pasture. However, these men could clearly be used to intimidate others. Newnham countered that Wilks had begun the affray and that Wilks had expected the confrontation because he had tried to borrow 'a p[ri]vy Coote' in Coventry.[97] According to Wilks, the confrontation had sprung from an incident in London where Thomas Newnham 'gave to this d[e]pon[an]t [Wilks] a blowe on the eare in the Soliciters Chamber at Lincolnes Inne bycause this d[e]pon[an]t gave his counsell to kepe his lande and not to sell yt for that yt was the state of his lyving'.[98] These men probably

[93] *Warwickshire Grazier and London Skinner 1532-1555: The Account Book of Peter Temple and Thomas Heritage*, ed. N. W Alcock (Records of Social and Economic History, new ser., 4), pp. 70,73,78.
[94] PRO SP 46/5/Part 1, fo. 83r-v.
[95] TNA PRO SP 46/7 fo. 51r.
[96] John Martin, 'Sheep and Enclosure in Sixteenth-Century Northamptonshire,' *Agricultural History Review*, 36 (1988), p. 50.
[97] TNA PRO STAC 3/7/73.
[98] TNA PRO STAC 2/26/331.

bought cattle at the fair, but their presence suggests that they often came to Coventry on the pursuit of business. Coventry's Corpus Christi fair represented the coming together of regional and national networks of trade. It was a time for the payment of debts, argument and confrontation as well as civic pride and ceremony.

Coventry was also a centre for the trade in sheep. During the early modern period sheep were driven down from Wales onto the midlands plain and sold to graziers in Warwickshire. Wool from these animals was then sold in cloth making towns such as Coventry or bought by merchants and middlemen for the London market, in which case it could then reach Calais or Antwerp. Peter Temple bought large numbers of Welsh sheep in Coventry during the late 1540s which he drove south to grazing land near Southam in Warwickshire. He sold wool to his brother for the manufacture of cloth, but the vast majority of what he produced went to men who shipped it abroad, such as Anthony Cave of London.[99] The price of wool rose throughout the 1550s only to enter a decline for a long period in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Prices remained stagnant when compared to the increase in the cost of grain. Such changes must have damaged Coventry's wealth when compared to the boom period of the mid century. However, sheep farming added greatly to the prosperity of Coventry. The proliferation of small farmers and an increase in access to land during the Reformation meant that farming was often undertaken on a small scale by citizens of Coventry. Thomas Gregory, the city's clerk, is a case in point. Gregory maintained a flock of around 120 to 150 sheep during the 1550s on land partly acquired from Stoneleigh Priory. He traded in both sheep and wool.[100] Many citizens also pastured flocks in and around the city, or used their privilege as citizens of Coventry to keep a few animals on the common land. Henry Lyngham, a grazier left 200 sheep in his will, William Lawton, a shearman employed a shepherd to keep his flock, while the Coventry miller, Hugh Aston, left 20 sheep.[101] Sheep and lambs were common bequests in wills amongst many others who undertook unrelated trades.[102] In many ways

[99] *Warwickshire Grazier and London Skinner 1532-1555,* ed. N. W. Alcock, pp. 86-7.
[100] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 17r, 20v, 20r, 21r, 23v, 27r.
[101] LRO B/C/11 (Henry Lyngham 1553, William Lawton 1543, Hugh Astonn 1566).
[102] LRO B/C/11 (Thomas Barfote, 1565, John Cartwright 1564, Richard Shaw 1569, John Yardley 1558, Thomas Bedull, 1550, William Foster 1547, Edward Stone 1563, William Clerke 1558, William Bailie

Gregory was typical of many townsmen. He owned land and had agricultural interests in the county of Coventry boosted by the acquisition of land and rights from dissolved institutions.
A better way of quantifying the range of Coventry citizen's commercial interactions with others is through official records of debt. Townsmen could record the debts made through such trading in a number of ways. One of the more obvious ones was through a Statute Merchant recognisance recorded by the clerk of the court in front of the mayor of the city of Coventry. Statute Merchant courts were set up in major cities as a way of recording debts owed to merchants upon the purchase of goods. They were popular because they allowed a merchant an easy method of recovering money upon a debtor's goods or the income gained from lands.[103] Furthermore the loan could be checked alongside the rolls kept in the corporation's treasury in St Mary's Hall which contained the 'clerks side' of the recognisances. However, some difficulty arises in trying to assess the extent of trade or lending in Coventry using the records of these courts. Firstly, Statute Merchant recognisances could be used in a way that was analogous to the use of penal bonds. A Statute Merchant recognisance could be enrolled for the payment of a greater sum of money than was actually lent or to ensure the fulfilment of a condition not given upon the recognisance. The recognisance could be defeated by the production of a separate defeasance, on the fulfilment of some condition, leaving no record of the conditions of the loan on the Statute Merchant roll. Therefore, it is not only 'impossible to infer that a mute recognizance was the result of a loan', it is also impossible to say that, for an actual loan, the enrolled amount did not register a penal sum far larger than the original debt.[104] Secondly, it is a common complaint of historians that it is difficult to accurately discern the difference between an increase in the activity of a court because of genuine demand and an increase in popularity of one legal mechanism over another. In Coventry the clerk of the statute, Thomas Gregory, was active in encouraging the court and drew up recognisances for his own legal clients.[105] An act of 1532 tried to limit the mechanism to

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1542, Thomas Bustard 1546, William Hyndman 1542, Grace Kyllngworth 1542, William Kyllyngworth 1538, William Coakes 1557, Edward Remyngton 1566, Thomas Castell 1553, Thomas Clerke 1563).

[103] Baker, *Laws of England, 1483-1553, Vol. 6*, p. 707.

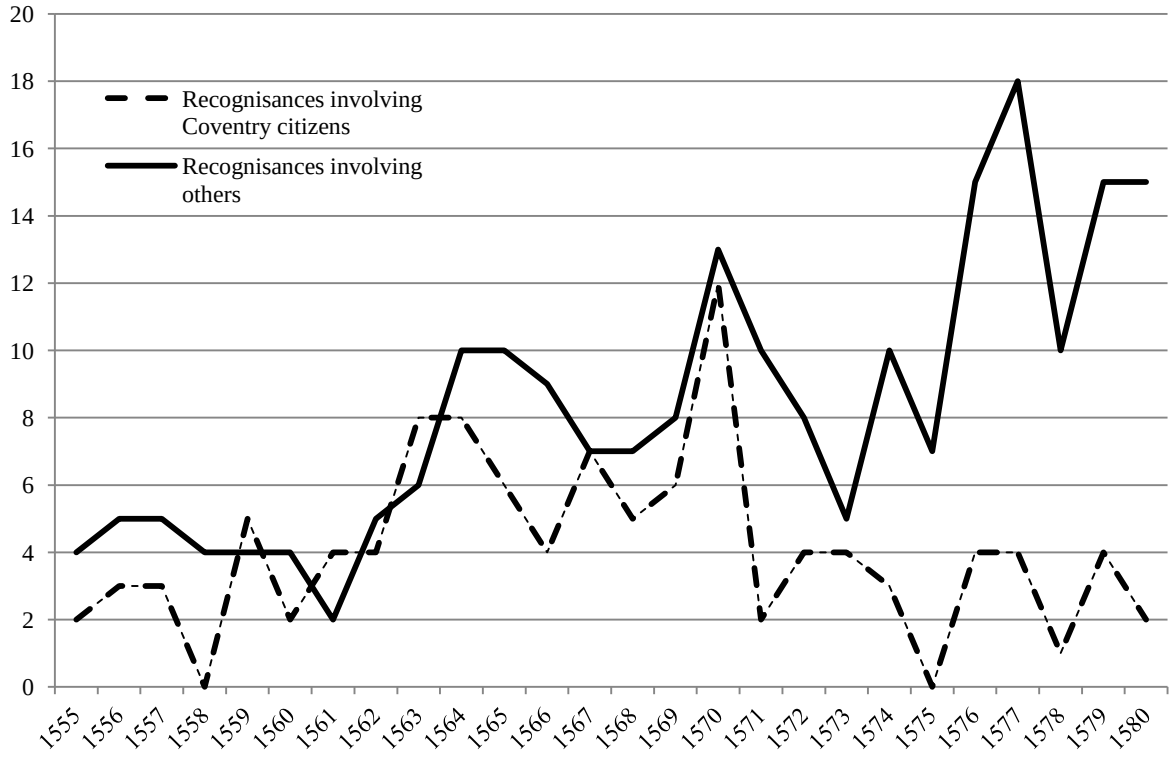
[104] Joseph Biancalana, 'The Development of the Penal Bond with Conditional Defeasance' *Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 26, 2 (2005), p. 68.

[105] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 26v.

merchants; however, despite fines being levied upon information provided by informants, the act seems to have been ignored in the latter half of the sixteenth century.[106]

Despite these difficulties, something of the extent of Coventry's trading relations in the sixteenth century can be gleaned from examining those men who made recognisances.

Figure 1 - The Number of Recognisances in the Statute Merchant Court in Coventry, 1555-1580



The graph shows the number of recognisances made each year between 1555 and 1580 at the Statute Merchant court in Coventry. It further breaks these figures down into recognisances in which one or more parties described themselves as living within the county of Coventry and the recognisances in which all the parties mentioned lived outside these boundaries. The period shown by the graph is bookended by the two high points in late sixteenth century mortality; the 1558 influenza epidemic and the outbreak of plague in the mid to late 1570s. Many of the recognisances were made by non-merchants. Therefore, many were probably for penal sums that supported the fulfilment of conditional agreements and land transfers rather than ordinary borrowing. Bonds were made by local gentry such as Henry Goodere, Thomas Dudley of Stoneleigh, Sir Fulke

[106] *The Statutes of The Realm*, eds. Alexander Luders, Sir T.E. Tomlins, John France, W.E. Taunton and John Raithby (Record Commission, 11 vols., London, 1810-28), iii, pp. 372-3.

Greville and Sir Henry Berkeley, retainers of the earl of Leicester, as well as the earl's steward Anthony Docwra.[107] Men with business interests in and around the city, such as Sir Nicholas Beaumont, also made bonds.[108] The sheep farmer Peter Temple made a bond in Coventry in 1556 with Leonard Dannet of Leicestershire, a man from whom he purchased land during this period.[109] The Statute Merchant court in Coventry was probably important to the local market in land during the mid-Tudor period. Men who had connections in legal circles and were patronised by the corporation also enrolled recognisances in the court. The city's recorder, Edward Saunders, enrolled a bond as did the solicitor general, Thomas Bromley.[110] Yet there were many others present who were of considerably lower rank. Of the parties making recognisances in the court between 1555 and 1580, over 100 described themselves as yeomen; these men largely came from Warwickshire or the surrounding counties. Recognisances made with London merchants and lawyers form a significant minority of the bonds made between these dates. They accounted for six of the agreements between Coventry merchants and seventeen of the other recognisances. Of the Coventry men, many of those making Statute Merchant recognisances were members of the common council and the civic elite.[111] The overall trend of the data is difficult to interpret as there is the possibility that the actions of the mayor and commonality, the promotion of the court by successive clerks of the statute, the supply of money and even fluctuations in the market for land all affected the activity of the court. However, the increase in the number of bonds made with Coventry merchants probably represents a modest recovery in the city's fortunes in the 1560s bracketed by two mortality crises. After the high point of 1570, the number of bonds made by Coventry men declined, in comparison to the activity of the court. What can be said with greater certainty is that the medieval institution of the Statute Merchant retained its importance, and the geographical expanse of trading relations is clearly shown by the data. The Statute Merchant was vital to many land transactions as well as mercantile trade and its existence enabled the city to

[107] CRO BA/E/3/7/38,52,57,63.
[108] CRO BA/E/3/7/60.
[109] CRO BA/E/3/7/43; *Warwickshire Grazier and London Skinner 1532-1555*, ed. N. W. Alcock, pp. 235-6.
[110] CRO BA/E/3/7/44,66.
[111] CRO BA/E/3/7/42-69.

retain its regional primacy in the sixteenth century. It was a legal institution which drew men into Coventry and helped it to retain its dominance in local markets.

As in other cities the gentry were well integrated into the economic life of the city, taking part in trade and government in Coventry. Between 1533 and 1580, 386 recognisances were made in which 147 of the parties described themselves as gentlemen. These men usually came from the surrounding counties and were almost twice as likely to be on the debtor's side of the roll as opposed to the creditor's.[112] Even in the early part of the sixteenth century the gentry were using the city as a commercial centre. Orchards in the city grew fruit for the market and other imported produce was also retailed. In 1521 the Willoughby household, at Wollaton Hall near Nottingham, purchased oranges and pomegranates at Coventry.[113] The growth of luxury retailers in Coventry probably only increased the propensity for the city to become a centre for retail and socialising for the local gentry in the following period. Mercers like Richard Hurt, who owned two shops in the city, carried staples like vinegar, hops, pitch, and coarse canvas. Yet, he also carried luxury goods such as silk hats, taffeta, glassware, books and 'sugar candie'.[114] Men, such as the town clerk, Thomas Gregory, who travelled widely and had to be in London for the law terms tended to purchase items there; however, luxury goods, purchased from Coventry, were vital retail commodities for the local gentry.[115] Coventry mercers began to adopt many of the specialist items that were only previously retailed in London. In 1569, the son of a Coventry mercer, Thomas More, who had been apprenticed in London, petitioned the Mercers' Company to be allowed to sell hawks' hoods, lures, dog collars and other hunting gear in Coventry. The company granted him this privilege provided he undertook to manufacture the items in the city after carrying his initial stock from London.[116] By encouraging this trade and adopting the latest fashions and practices the mercers provided a source of gifts and fine goods which were necessary for gentlemen to maintain their status and provide hospitality to their guests.

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[112] Ibid 34-69.
[113] *Historical Manuscripts Commission: Report on the Manuscripts of Lord Middleton*, ed. W. H. Stevenson, (H.M.C 69, H.M S O., 1911), p. 376.
[114] LRO B/C/11 (Richard Hurt 1561).
[115] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 20v.
[116] CRO PA251/3 pp. 20 [Thomas Daffern, transcr. , The Mercers' Order Book].

Some of the local gentry also kept houses in Coventry, rather than staying in the city's inns. However, the social scene and recreations of sixteenth century Coventry could never rival London or even one of the large provincial cities like York.[117] Gentlemen used to newly built and fashionable country houses could be disappointed with cramped urban architecture. Nor were relations with the mayor and aldermen without their difficulties. In 1578 Sir Francis Willoughby departed for London from his townhouse in Coventry leaving his wife and children under the charge of his steward. However, when Lady Willoughby left the city to visit her brother, the servants refused to let her back into the house and the mayor and aldermen were obliged to intercede with Sir Francis on her behalf. After a letter from Sir John Littleton, Sir Francis's father in law, he agreed to let the aldermen find her private lodgings. [118] Despite these difficulties, Coventry was obviously a social centre for the gentry. The comparative scarcity of personal accounts and letters from this period makes it difficult to establish the connections of other gentry in any great detail. Nevertheless, it is apparent that that the city was valued for socialising, retail and business by local gentlemen. It was these interactions which came to define urban life and one of the city's new roles in the sixteenth century.

Networks of patronage were crucial to Coventry's integration into these national networks of trade. Some historians have suggested that the relationship between towns and patrons was often tense and difficult. The city of Liverpool often opposed the rights of the earls of Derby to appoint freemen to the city and contested the privileges granted to them as high admiral.[119] The relationship of the city of Coventry with Robert Dudley had all the potential to be similarly difficult, as the city was surrounded by a complex web of influence which included clients and servants of the earl. After the accession of Elizabeth in 1558, Dudley had considerable influence over the appointment of MPs in Coventry as well as maintaining networks of gentry as clients in the city.[120] Men such as Henry Goodere, Clement Throckmorton, Edward Aglionby, Fulke Greville, and Thomas Dudley of

[117] Palliser, *Tudor York*, pp. 15-21; J.F. Merritt, *The Social World of Early Modern Westminster: Abbey, Court and Community, 1525–1640* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 146-54.
[118] *Manuscripts of Lord Middleton*, pp. 547-49.
[119] Barry Coward, *Lords Stanley and the Earls of Derby 1385-1672* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 132-3.
[120] Simon Adams, 'The Dudley Clientele and the House of Commons, 1559-1586', *Parliamentary History*, 8 (1989), pp. 216-39.

Stoneleigh all had connections with the earl of Leicester and the city of Coventry.[121] Minor servants of Dudley were a presence in Coventry because of its proximity to Leicester's seat at Kenilworth. Anthony Docwra and Sir John Hubaud, Leicester's stewards, and Thomas Underhill, master of the wardrobe at Kenilworth, all had connections with the city.[122] There was trouble in 1565 when Thomas Riley, the mayor, wrote to Leicester, asking his advice about a servant of his, who had been caught clipping coins within the jurisdiction of the city.[123] However, Leicester and the social networks which surrounded him were often of great benefit to the city in establishing rights and privileges thrown into confusion by the tumults of the Reformation. Clement Throckmorton was rewarded in 1568 along with Stephen Hales by a dinner in St Mary's Hall for helping to obtain the tithes of the Holy Trinity Church in the city.[124] Henry Goodere, a captain of the earl of Leicester in the Netherlands expedition of the 1580s, was intervening in the city's affairs long after Leicester's death. In the 1590s he acted on behalf of the city in the long running dispute between the corporation and their former clerk of the Leet court, Arthur Gregory.[125] The corporation even sent their lawyer Thomas Gregory to intercede in a matter between Fulke Greville and Leicester in 1570.[126] The earl also directly interested himself in the city's affairs. His efforts to help the city in their acquisition of rights over the park of Cheylesmore were recorded on a brass plaque placed in St Mary's Hall and in 1572 he also assisted the city in re-founding St John's almshouse.[127] The relationship with the earl of Leicester brought tangible benefits which the corporation sought to exploit.

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[121] Simon Adams, '"Because I am of that countrye & mynde to plant myself there" Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and the West Midlands', *Midland History* 20 (1995) p. 40; Henry Summerson, *'An Ancient Squires Family' : The History of the Aglionbys, c. 1130-2002* (Carlisle, 2007); CRO BA/H/17/A79/82 [Henry Goodere, letter]; CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 12 [Fulke Greville].

[122] CRO BA/F/9/3/3, CRO BA/F/9/3/4, CRO BA/F/9/3/5 [Sir John Harington, letters]; CRO BA/H/3/20/2 p. 20, 21, 24 [Anthony Docwra,]; CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 1 [Sir John Hubaud] ; *Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1558–61, 1584–86*, ed. Simon Adams (Camden Soc., 5th ser., v. 6) pp. 178, 214-5 [Anthony Docwra,], 224, 255 [Sir John Harington], 300 [Sir John Hubaud] 99, 178, 205 [Thomas Underhill].

[123] DP, DU/VOL. I fo. 102 [Dudley Papers, microfilm].

[124] CRO BA/H/3/20/1 [A17] p. 17.

[125] CRO BA/H/17/A79/82 [Letter].

[126] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 [A16] p. 20.

[127] William Poole, *Coventry: Its History and Antiquities* (London, 1870), p.17-9.

Patronage was promoted by the constant flow of gifts and hospitality between the aldermen and the earl, a relationship which existed between Leicester and a number of towns.[128] In 1575 alone the corporation spent £21 6s 8d on a yoke of oxen and 20 sheep in what became the corporation's customary gift to the earl.[129] In return he sent them 2 bucks on which they dined in St Mary's Hall.[130] Such reciprocity was vital to the maintenance of civic patronage. The corporation also sent gifts to others. It was only good sense for anyone with pending legal disputes to make themselves known amongst legal and court circles in London. In the 1560s and 1570s the city sent gifts to Thomas Bromley, the solicitor general, and Sir Edward Saunders, the Lord Chief Baron and the recorder of Coventry in the 1550s.[131] However, many of the aristocrats patronised by the city also had connections to Leicester's circle. Gifts of wine and sweetmeats were sent to Lord Arthur Grey, Sir Henry Sidney and Lord Francis Russell and in 1580 a particularly extravagant gift which included sugar, spice, almonds and wine was sent to the countess of Huntingdon.[132]

As well as receiving gifts, the city's patrons often accepted the city's hospitality, bringing them into contact with the mayor and his brethren. The centre for these meetings was St Mary's Hall in the city, the site of the council chamber. The post-reformation renaissance in English civic architecture is often talked about in terms of the way it provided newly resurgent civic oligarchies with the appropriate degree of dignity. This analysis implies that the civic elite of post-reformation England were constructing an insular oligarchy through civic ceremonial. Yet sometimes the rejuvenation of urban architecture was more plainly functional and outward looking. In 1580 in preparation for the visit of the earl of Leicester, the corporation painted and reconstructed St Mary's Hall and added new stone columns. However, the real engine room of civic hospitality was the medieval kitchens in the hall which were the target of a considerable outlay of civic funds in 1580. In the following year when the earl visited the townsmen, the kitchen played host to the mayor's cook, as well as Leicester's cook and his two servants, Henry, Lord Berkeley's cook, Sir

[128] Catherine F. Patterson, *Urban Patronage in Early Modern England,* pp. 197-8.
[129] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 [A16] p. 29.
[130] CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p.6.
[131] Ibid. p. 6.
[132] Ibid. p. 43.

Fulke Greville's cook, as well as labourers and turnspits.[133] The banquet was obviously a grand occasion which brought together the earl of Leicester's friends, as well as the corporation and the county gentry.

The reward for these careful gestures of friendship was reaped in terms of the city's ability to shape trade and industry within the county of Coventry. Patronage was vital to protecting the city's interests within the corporate county and the city's domination over the surrounding landscape. In 1577, when one Bowyer came to the city with a commission to dig for saltpetre, the townsmen wrote to Robert Dudley. The prospecting and digging of pits obviously caused a considerable nuisance and Dudley replied that the mayor and aldermen need not obey the commission.[134] Leicester was also a considerable help to Coventry's cloth industry. The Lancashire clothier Henry Breers arrived in the city with a letter of recommendation from the earl in 1573.[135] The corporation had no difficulty in accepting him to the freedom of the city and he was even repaid part of his entry fine in later years.[136] He was mayor in 1583 and must have added considerably to the city's wealth, government and industry. The townsmen of Coventry were able to use their association with the earl of Leicester to their advantage in accessing the national networks of influence which were vital to the wealth of the city.

Urban problems were also a good excuse for important men to strengthen their associations with towns. In 1581 townsmen were appointed from Coventry to consult about the reform of the statute of capping.[137] A decline in the wearing of caps made in Coventry was thought to have caused much of Coventry's poverty. The earl of Leicester probably also had a hand in setting up of the manufacture of 'Armentières cloth' in the city in 1568, which was similar to the coarse narrow style of cloth made in the French town. Leicester was given gifts of cloth from the townsmen after the foundation of the project in the city.[138] The new franchise for the making of 'oultrefines' and 'crombelistes', was granted after much deliberation amongst central government and after several

[133] Ibid. pp. 59-62.
[134] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 121.
[135] CRO BA/H/3/20/1 [A17] pp. 25, 27.
[136] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 [A16] pp. 26-7.
[137] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] 89r.
[138] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 [A16] p. 17.

petitions from vested interests it was decided that the new industry would be of much benefit for one of the 'decayed towns'.[139] The new cloth was of shorter breadth than the ordinary cloth and used lower quality wool in its manufacture. Therefore, the mayor and aldermen were granted rights of manufacture only on the condition that all such cloth was made by men with sufficient skills and specially marked and sealed to differentiate it from other goods.[140] In 1568, 11 Coventry men were granted the right to its manufacture and in the early 1600s the Leet court was still making regulations which affected its manufacture which suggests that the franchise met with some success.[141] By 1571 the cloth was being exported through the port of London to Antwerp.[142] For such enterprises to succeed, Coventry required powerful friends. These men promoted the city's interests in disputes which involved the government and royal authority. Political friendship allowed the aldermen to negotiate their place in an increasingly centralised state where power and patronage could be dispensed directly from London.

Many subtle networks shaped the economic and social life of the city and townsfolk had many intricate economic connections in the regions and the nation. If the economic situation of Coventry's citizens did not entirely provide a format for civic life, it certainly conditioned their social interactions and political involvement. There remained a great deal of continuity in the economic life of the city in terms of civic institutions. The craft guilds, the city's Leet court and council, the Statute Merchant as well as the Corpus Christi fair retained their importance and found new and enthusiastic users and promoters. The control of trade in the city was conducted in much the same way, with its careful negotiation over trading privilege taking place throughout the sixteenth century, as it had done in the medieval period. The common assumption that the Reformation destroyed part of the corporate commensality of the early modern city comes with the implication that guild regulation may have been weakened. The theory states that this, in turn, may have created new opportunities for the city's craftsmen. In reality, guild regulation was probably never so strong as to seriously interfere with the flow of goods and labour in and out of the city.

[139] TNA PRO SP 12/46 fo. 3,7, 15, 17, 117,118 [*CSPD Eliz.* 46/4-8, 41,52, 53].
[140] TNA PRO SP 12/46 fo 117 [*CSPD Eliz.* 46/52].
[141] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 69v.
[142] Eric Kerridge, *Textile Manufacturers in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 35-6.

However, after the Reformation the corporation acquired a great deal of land and wealth and made renewed attempts to shape the economic landscape within the county of Coventry. The disturbance in the ownership of land after the Reformation meant that the city could be part of the exploitation of new resources. Far from rejecting the integration into regional and national networks for a growing provincialism, the council sought to promote new enterprises and techniques which relied on a broad view of the geographical and economic possibilities of trade. As well as providing the continued wealth for a rejuvenated civic elite these endeavours helped the council to find a way of dealing with the city's poverty and the decline in some of the city's principal and most prestigious industries. A new set of political and religious alignments, centred on active Protestant gentry in the region and the following of the earl of Leicester, helped the city to dominate its immediate geographical surroundings. As the city sought to understand and control economic networks, new forms of urban identity were created based on these interactions.

3. Civic Politics and Government

The historiography of early modern urban politics is shaped by vastly differing narrative structures. Local studies of urban government have suggested that the successful early modern town experienced a narrowing of its horizons during the sixteenth century. In this model, the civic elite protected their legal autonomy and prevented broad political participation in urban government while cementing their rights with legal charters. Political success was achieved by those towns which sought stability through social interventions and prevented the deleterious effects of the Reformation through the adaptation of religious and civic institutions.[1] By contrast, economic success is often measured in entirely different terms. The loosening of corporate and community structures has been thought to promote the individualism necessary to interact with the networks of trade. In this dynamic situation new groups and structures grew up to exploit and dominate new markets.[2] The first narrative is often used to explain the political stability of English towns. The second can be woven into chronologically broader narratives which seek to show England's growth into a commercial nation, focused on trade. However, there have also been other approaches which look at the development of urban political identities. The changing nature of civic politics during the sixteenth century requires a degree of sensitivity to the development of urban political identity amongst the civic elite. Political language and dispute should be examined as well as the progression and lifecycle of aldermanic careers. If participation in civic life and politics was a key humanist and civic virtue then the extremities of that involvement need to be examined. Those at the edges of civic life and participation in urban politics can help us to understand the limits of civic politics and government. Civic disputes are also a good way of showing the limits of civil language and behaviour. These issues can help to point towards notions of civic service and virtue and their use in the maintenance of the civic community based on common behaviour and ideas. It was precisely these developing civic ideals which gave the city the

[1] Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth*, p. 48.
[2] David Harris Sacks, *The Widening Gate; Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450*-1700 (London, 1991), pp. 9-10, 277.

ability to cope with the growing breadth of its own economic interactions and the religious changes which accompanied the Reformation.

Conflict over urban privileges in Coventry helped to define a common civic and political ethos. As in most towns, urban privileges, such as freemen's status, were doled out selectively to those who could provide large entry fines or to men who could claim familial associations with the civic government and the craft companies.[3] For instance, in 1566 the Mercers' Company in Coventry implemented an act of Leet which prevented anyone from practising a trade to which they had not been apprenticed to stop the 'utter decaye and overthrowe of the comen welthe of the said Cittie'. Apprenticeship was an important part of creating a commonwealth to which all citizens contributed though their industry, service to the city and association with the craft fellowships. Yet, only two men from the company were fined for not having fulfilled the conditions of the 1566 act: Henry Whytyng, for 'not fullie and duely serving his apprentysship' and John Potter for 'c[e]rten trespasses to the said felowsshyp' which was then repaid to him 'for certen good consideracons'.[4] Rather than removing their corporate and civic identity for a breach of the Leet ordinances, the payment of a fine signalled their acceptance by the company and the city. Moreover, the Mercers' Company also accorded membership to those who paid an entry fine and even bestowed certain trading privileges on Londoners, on their petition to the company, and the payment of fines.[5] For most men the location of their birth did not matter. A developing civic culture provided a rationale for members of the company to adhere to the rules or be reconciled to the company after a breach of the ordinances whatever their previous experience or background.

Civic identity rested strongly on shared political and civic values. Commercial rights and freeman's status were often granted to those who had not been born in the city. Even neighbouring gentlemen sought political association with the city by becoming a freeman.[6] It was common for men from the rural county of Coventry and further afield to petition the mayor's council directly

[3] Jonathan Barry, 'Civility and Civic Culture in Early Modern England: The Meanings of Urban Freedom' in Peter Burke, Brian Harrison, Paul Slack (eds.), *Civil Histories* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 185-6.
[4] CRO PA251/3 fo. 20-24r.
[5] Ibid fo. 24r.
[6] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A 14] fo. 64 v.

during the latter half of the century, usually paying a fine for their freedom because they had not served an apprenticeship.[7] Local gentlemen wished to acquire the economic power of freemen's rights but also to associate themselves with the urban values of the civic elite. There was also a small stranger community in the town, which by 1551 already amounted to several households. Membership of the urban political body in Coventry was not closed to those born outside the city. Political association was open to purchase and negotiation with those who shared the values and interests of the city including those displaced from other nations. In the subsidy of 1551 several men were specifically listed, according to their nationality, as either French or Dutchmen and 'aliens' were listed on the subsidy of 1590. These men had often received invitations from Coventry's urban elite with the intention that they would contribute to and improve Coventry's cloth making projects.[8] It is hard to gauge the size of Coventry's immigrant community because of the paucity of census data and the declining quality of information available through taxation records for the period when immigration was highest. However, while it is true that most of the large communities of French and Dutch Protestants were located in southern and eastern towns, by 1570, the stranger community in Coventry was sufficiently large and self-confident to request its own preacher.[9] They were duly sent one Jacobus de Kuenick of Geneva who came with references from the Dutch church in London.[10] Later, in 1576, when the elders of the Dutch community in London called members of all of the stranger churches to an assembly they mentioned the community in Coventry.[11] Allocating freemen's status and craft guild membership, or the simple right to work for others and reside in the city, was not simply a matter of economic priorities or

[7] CRO BA/H/3/20/1 [A17] (Freedom obtained: Humphrey Billingly, Yeoman, 1571; Robert Beilie, Weaver, 1572; Henry Breers, Draper, 1573; John Napton, 1575; John Gregory, Tailor, 1576; Thomas Owyhton, Miller, 1576; Richard Yate, Tailor, 1576; John Parr, Smith, 1576; Thomas Phillipes, Carpenter, 1577; Thomas Meade, Baker, 1578; John Vyncent, Labourer, 1578; Raffe Millington, Innholder, 1578; Hugh Mawpass, Wheelwright, 1578; Nicholas Hateley, Cooper, 1578; John Bowell, 1578; John Rowley, 1578; Anthony Bloke, 1578; James Ruddie, Gardener, 1579; William Cotterell, Cutler, 1579; Henry Rowley, Yeoman, 1580; John Shottel, Smith, 1580), pp. 23-39.

[8] TNA PRO E179/193/188 (1551, **Bishop Street**: Thomas Thomas, **Muchpark Street**: Mathew Boistinges, Joachyme Johi[an]son, **Earl Street**: Peter Goddesall, Thomas Goddesall); TNA PRO E179/193/190 (1551 d. 14, **Muchpark Street**: Philip Verydyt, d. 13 **Bayley Lane**: Gilbert Walles); TNA PRO 179/193/245 (1590); LRO B/C/11 (Stephen Cordre 1568, John Cockson 1568).

[9] Nigel Goose, 'Introduction', in Nigel Goose (ed.), *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (London, 2005), p. 18-29.

[10] *Archives of the London-Dutch Church; Register of Attestations*, ed. J.H. Hessles (London, 1892), p. 1.

[11] *Epistulae et Tractatus Cum Reformationis Tum Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Historiam Illustrantes*, ed. J. H. Hessels (3 vols., London, 1889), iii, pp. 366-7.

protectionism. Although there were economic tensions between foreigners and the guilds, these disagreements were resolved by the corporation. As has been shown, the ability of foreign immigrant communities to integrate themselves into local urban culture prevented widespread unrest.[12] The immigration of diverse sets of individuals coupled with high mortality in urban areas during the early modern period brought with it a state of change and disturbance which could be countered through political and civic association. The stranger community might have had similar religious priorities to many of the civic elite in Coventry but they were also townsmen themselves who subscribed to a common civic ethos. Perhaps their urban experience on the continent also influenced civic thought in Coventry. In any case civic values seem just as important as religious motives in establishing a cohesive civic community. The constant demographic change of the English urban regions created the need for a stable and easily defined culture of political virtue to which everybody could adhere.

Given these potential destabilising demographic factors it is not surprising that unity was a prized commodity amongst the ruling elite of Coventry. It was part of the ethos of civic government that agreement was reached on issues with the entirety of the mayor's council. The council were the body of aldermen, usually numbering from 10 to 12, drawn from those who had previously served as mayor. They met regularly outside the ordained Leet days to govern the city and control its finances. In 1569 the council book, which was the record of this body, recorded a dispute between John Hartford, then mayor, and the aldermen on the council. Hartford had 'taken upon hyme to correke and punyshe by imp[ri]sonement and otherwise some of his ^ said bretherne thaldermen and contrie to the annciente rules order and custome of this citie'. The council emphasised the singularity of the mayor's actions and that they were carried out upon his 'owne mynde and will'.[13] In a system of politics and government in which collective action and the appearance of universal agreement was paramount the mayor's behaviour could not be tolerated. Up to this point Hartford's civic career had been more or less a model of humanist civic service. He had been

[12] Raingard Esser, '"They Obey All Magistrates and All Good Lawes … And We Thinke Our Cittie Happie To Enjoye Them": Migrants and Urban Stability in Early Modern English Towns', *Urban History* (2007), 34, pp. 64-75.
[13] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 68r.

mayor in 1544 and was first sworn as an officer of the Leet court in 1539 when he was made sheriff.[14] He was certainly of a reformed religious leaning or at the very least he was enthusiastic about the destruction of the wealth of the church. In 1538, John Hartford, yeoman of the crown of Coventry, wrote to Cromwell to inform him that the vicar of Higley in the county of Shropshire had set up a newly gilded image of the Virgin Mary with the intent of bringing the 'pore and Ignorant people of the countray' to the 'vsage of Idolatre'. He also reported the rumour that the image had restored the sight of an old woman.[15] In 1539, the monastic visitor to Coventry, Dr John London, wrote that a certain 'Harford', sheriff of Coventry, had informed him that the abbot of Combe had £500 hidden in his brother's house; however, when searching the house in question, London only managed to recover £25. Hartford was clearly more than willing to believe tall tales of monastic and priestly excess.[16] Whether he had directed any unwelcome religious or civic moralising at his brethren on the council in 1569 is unclear. However, simply holding opinions that were more or less in tune with the prevailing winds of religious change, both in the city and the nation, had obviously failed to make recompense for Hartford's deafness to important civic and political values.

In dealing with Hartford, the aldermen chose to emphasise the indivisible nature of the civic body. Quoting Matthew's gospel the council declared that 'no house or country that is dyvded in itself can longe continewe'.[17] Even with the general principle defined, deciding on a course of action was a trickier matter. Corporate behaviour and a common humanist civic ethos engendered a quasi-republican sentiment amongst many of England's self governing urban centres. Despite this, there were political limits to the power of the self-governing elite in Coventry and the mayor's council at the head of the city's government found that it was difficult to remove their mayor outside official election times. Before 1555 the mayor's term of office ran from January; however, after that point mayors were elected in October and took office the following month.[18] Hartford's actions, earlier

[14] *Leet Book,* pp 737-811.
[15] TNA PRO SP 1/141 fo.146 .
[16] TNA PRO SP 1/142 fo.124 .
[17]CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 68r.
[18] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d4 fo. 24v.

in the year, left the council with a mayor that they were ill at ease with and who still had most of his term to serve. The city's charter was an expression of royal authority and despite all of the civic elite's independence in legal and administrative matters the charter made no provision for a mayor who threatened civic unity through tyranny. However, in August 1569 mayor Hartford's own actions provided an opportunity to resolve the matter. According to later testimony, on 15 August, William Heley, an embroiderer from Coventry was walking outside the city with his spaniel 'in a close called the stripp' within the county of Coventry. Heley met the mayor, walking with two of his greyhounds. Upon seeing Heley's spaniel, the greyhounds 'rane to it and did bite it' which casused Heley to separate the dogs. This angered Hartford who believed Heley was harming his dogs and 'in a great rage and furie w[i]t[h] force made an assult upon hym And w[i]t[h] a crabtre staff strooke and beit hyme dyvers strypes upon his shoulders and syde'. Heley continued to complain of his injuries and died two weeks later on 26 August.[19] Because both the incident and the death occurred within the city it was investigated by the Coventry coroner, Thomas Gregory, who was also clerk to the corporation. It was probably not hard for most of the city to take sides against the mayor given Hartford's record of intemperate behaviour. For the civic elite it must have also seemed like an opportunity to excise potentially troubling political division and disunity by the swift execution of justice. Following Gregory's inquest the coroner's jury indicted the mayor for manslaughter.[20] The civic elite believed that their charter did not allow them the power to remove the mayor and so consulted the recorder, Sir John Throckmorton, who advised them to send letters to the Privy Council.[21] The corporation acted swiftly dispatching alderman Edmund Brownell with letters to the Queen who responded on 8 September.[22] Having stated that she did not wish to 'preiudicate' the mayor's case she ordered the council to elect a new mayor, and interpret the city's charter accordingly, as though the mayor were dead or incapacitated. Even though the Queen wished to be kept informed of the matter the judgement of the aldermen was held to be paramount. The townsmen were ordered to do what was 'most necessary for the Common-weale of the said

[19] TNA PRO KB 9/625/90.
[20] TNA PRO KB 9/625/91-2.
[21] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d4 fo. 25r.
[22] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 p. 16.

Cittie'.[23] A new mayor, John Saunders, was appointed and, although Hartford was later pardoned after making a settlement with Heley's widow, he was permanently removed from the mayor's council.[24] The dispute highlights the efforts that the civic elite made in trying to pursue some of the political aims of civic government. Hartford's service to the corporation and religious leanings did not outweigh his divisive personality. It was his inability to act as part of the corporate entity and to share the city's political ideas which eventually led to his downfall. The city prized its political unity too highly to allow him to remain on the mayor's council.

Therefore, dispute resolution was a large part of the practical application of civic political ideals. Disputes between or even within the companies were often resolved by the intervention of the mayor's council, such as the disagreement within the Shearmen and Tailors' Company in 1568.[25] These methods brought about swift and less costly reconciliation than the common law and were a common recourse for disputes over trade in the city. The reconciliation of disputes in this way effected a restoration of order and harmony and was therefore a powerful expression of local civic and political culture. In disputes where civic land and property was at stake arbitrated settlements were common and were presided over by both local gentry and the aldermen. This allowed local elites an opportunity to increase their prestige and demonstrate their commitment to civic values. In 1558 Sir Edward Saunders, then chief justice of the King's Bench and recorder of Coventry, was in a prime position to negotiate an agreement over disputed land which belonged to Bond's almshouse in Coventry.[26] Saunders was able to fulfil his public role in the city through this settlement while strengthening his valuable political association with the city of Coventry. It also had the effect of making a representation of his honour and virtue by providing an equitable settlement to the city. Agreements were often backed by bonds and recognisances, enforced by local courts such as the Statute Merchant court in Coventry. These measures can often seem narrowly local and protectionist, designed to avoid interacting with the central law courts and enforcing local politics and civic ideals rather than national ones. However, civic ideals as well as

[23] CRO BA/H/17/A79/32; *Leet Book,* pp. 812-9.
[24] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d4 fo. 25r.
[25] CRO BA/F/18/1/1 fo. 61v.
[26] CRO BA/D/4/50/23; CRO BA/H/8/310/1; CRO BA/H/8/310/2; CRO PA194/9/4.

economic interests could often produce instances of cooperation, especially when townsmen were forced to deal with broader political issues. The Company of Cappers met with their brethren from Lichfield in 1569, when the Queen was at Kenilworth, and cooperated in obtaining the support of noblemen for the parliamentary statute of capping.[27] In this case civic ideals were broad enough to induce this cooperation and the maintenance of good relations between craftsmen of different towns.

Another example of dispute helping to challenge and define civic political values was another disagreement, this time involving Peter Cottys, a barber-surgeon and former servant of John Hales in Coventry.[28] In many ways this was a continuation of Hales's disputes with the corporation, which occurred despite his commitment to humanist education in Coventry and his transformation of St John's almshouse into the free school. Cottys's own problems with the corporation began in 1578 when he was brought before the mayor's council by the company of the barber-surgeons in Coventry who wished to deny his right to practise the trade on the grounds that he had not been born in the city.[29] In reality Cottys's place of birth mattered little and merely served as a pretext to attack him. By denying his freeman's rights the mayor and council, as well as the barber-surgeons, were making a political statement which pushed Cottys away from the political centre of the city and attacked his identity as a townsman and citizen of Coventry. However, the dispute seems largely to stem from issues other than the purely economic. It seems that Cottys's association with the unpopular local gentleman, John Hales, had resulted in an attempt to put distance between him and the civic community. A dispute over the tithes of the Holy Trinity Church, after the corporation had purchased the rectory in 1565, was also an aggravating factor. Cottys claimed that he did 'paye or other wyse lawfully compounde' with Humfrey Fenn, vicar of Holy Trinity in Coventry from 1578, over the tithes in 'prestes field', the land which he had been left by John Hales.[30] The corporation disputed this agreement in the ecclesiastical court in Lichfield, and

[27] CRO PA 1494/20 fo. 841v; CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 89r.
[28] TNA PRO PROB 11/55 (John Hales, 1573).
[29] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A 14] fo. 80r.
[30] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 4.

having lost this case, took their appeal to the Court of Arches in London.[31] This lingering dispute produced much of the animosity between the parties. However, Cottys also involved himself in a disagreement in which communal memory and concepts of civic virtue were tested.[32]

In this case there were also other civic values to be protected, not least of which were the dictates of civil language and behaviour. After Humfrey Fenn's removal as vicar there had been arguments about the appointment of his successor.[33] Yet, it was a dispute involving a sermon preached by a visiting preacher, William Wager, which proved most objectionable. Wager was a puritan preacher and playwright, holding two lectureships in London. Thomas Wilcox, author of the presbyterian admonition to parliament in 1572, described him as a man who 'hath many times been hot in words against the popish regiment and ceremonies'.[34] His plays were imbued with anti-Catholic invective but they also reflected the moral beliefs of his Protestant humanist contemporaries who sought to create a divinely ordered commonwealth. To this end, Wager criticised idleness and exhorted the rich not to misuse their wealth. [35] The tendency has been to see anti-Catholic sentiment as a 'unifying other' which helped to solidify communities into common political action, especially in the context of the early seventeenth century.[36] In the reality of the sixteenth-century urban setting it often produced troubling incongruities. The conflict was between Wager's distrust of traditional religion and his positive moral stance which praised the civic elite for their role in enforcing order and dispensing charity. In 1585 he preached a sermon in St Michael's Church in which 'he did commend and praise one m[aste]r warrin... alderman... for [tha]t the said warrin did at the time of his death leave to the said aldermen of the city 4 nobles a year... for 4 sermons to be made so long as the world endureth'.[37] The man whose memory he invoked was Christopher Warren, a draper

[31] CRO BA/B/F/20/4; CRO BA/B/F/23/1 fo. 1-4.
[32] Robert Tittler, Reformation, Civic Culture and Collective Memory in English Provincial Towns, *Urban History*, (1997), 24, pp. 283-300.
[33] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 25r.
[34] Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford, 1970), pp. 80, 333; Mark Eccles, 'William Wager and His Plays', *English Language Notes*, 18 (1981), pp. 258-62.
[35] William Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast,* ed. R. M. Benbow (London, 1968), p. xi.
[36] Peter Lake, 'Anti-Popery; The Structure of a Prejudice' in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England* (London, 1989), p. 82.
[37] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 27r; CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14(a)] fo. 59v.

and alderman and the mayor of the city in 1542.[38] In this case communal memory was always strongly connected to a sense of place, as in rogation-tide ceremonies, where parishioners 'beat the bounds' of the parish.[39] This particular facet of civic memory was marked by quarterly sermons which encouraged visiting preachers to reflect on the values of their benefactors in front of the parishioners of St Michael's and the civic elite of the city. In a city largely denuded of spiritual and pastoral provision, first by economic difficulties and then by the Reformation, civic religious provision took on increased importance. As seems to have been the will of its benefactors, this preaching provoked the recollection of an idealised history of civic charity informed by humanist ideas and embodied by an individual benefactor. Sermons encouraged the townsfolk to think of the city as a political entity and commonwealth by noting the qualities of a good alderman and the civic ethos which was necessary for the good of the nation. Where there were economic and political disagreements and difficulties, these forms of civic remembrance gave the political elite of Coventry a sense of place and permanence.

Invoking a charitable past to criticise the lack of public mindedness in the contemporary civic elite was a common rhetorical trick of Protestant preaching. It was used by Hugh Latimer in 1548, when he preached in the shrouds of St Paul's in London, to criticise the burgesses whose covetousness and lack of charity he lamented. [40] Such invocations were popular in Coventry with a civic elite whose identity rested upon a carefully constructed narrative of the historical past. For many in the city of Coventry, Warren, the man praised by Wager, must have seemed to be the embodiment of this tradition and the renaissance civic virtues which put service to the city and charity to the fore. Warren was instrumental in the construction of the city's new cross in 1541, situated in the crosscheaping, near to the marketplace.[41] He also served as one of the city's MPs in both parliamentary sessions in 1545, during the passing of the first chantries acts, when he extracted an exemption which resulted in the lands being granted to the city.[42] His commitment to this charity

[38] *Leet Book,* p. 714-811.
[39] Nichola Whyte, *Inhabiting the Landscape* (Oxford, 2009), p. 88-9.
[40] *Remains of Hugh Latimer*, ed. G. E Corrie, pp. 82-103.
[41] British Library, Add. MS 28666 fo. 432.
[42] *Acts of the Privy Council*, ii, pp. 193-5; CRO BA/G/1/25/1 pp. 30, 35,43,49.

was confirmed through later attempts to secure the funding of Bond's almshouse from the grandson of the founder, Thomas Bond, who had argued that endowed land should pass to him by his grandfather's will and not to the city.[43] Warren also demonstrated a commitment to education indicative of humanist ideals through his administration of Thomas White's money intended to found St John's College Oxford and on his death left a £6 annuity to the vicar of St Michael's Church in Coventry.

Despite Warren seeming to embody some of the civic ideals and concern for the commonweal that was part of Coventry's programme of civic improvement during the mid-sixteenth century, presenting any individual as the paragon of charity and virtue was not without its dangers. The effects of the Reformation had been extremely polarising at a personal level and Christopher Warren had a history of religiously conservative familial piety. His father, Thomas Warren, gave money to the dependent chapels of St Michael's Church in Corley and Fillongley as well as a cup of silver and gilt to be used on Easter day. He also endowed a perpetual obit as well as several sermons to be preached in perpetuity.[44] Christopher Warren himself supported conservative preaching in Coventry during the 1540s and led prosecutions under the act of six articles.[45] After the Reformation Warren's bequests to the corporation were a means of finding an outlet for this traditional familial piety through the provision of endowed annual sermons. Some of the civic provisions he had made or been a part of became increasingly controversial as the Reformation progressed. The cross, constructed in 1542, was attacked in the 1560s in an instance of Protestant iconoclasm and had to be defended by the men of the butchers' guild who, according to the colourful story, brandished their cleavers in its defence.[46] Moreover, Warren had been present in Coventry at the interrogation of the evangelical Robert Glover as it was relayed in Glover's own letter to his wife printed in the 'book of martyrs'. Glover charged Warren with the 'cruell seeking

[43] TNA PRO C1/1209/52; TNA PRO C1/1471/10-14.
[44] TNA PRO PROB 11/23 (Thomas Waryn 1530).
[45] TNA PRO C 47/7/9; TNA PRO KB9/129, fo. 1r.
[46] Frederick Bliss Burbidge, *Old Coventry and Lady Godiva; Being Some Flowers of Coventry History* (Birmingham, 1952), p.42.

of my death'.[47] During his life Warren had placed himself in opposition to the evangelical circle in Coventry and opposed John Hales and his plans for the free school. By 1580 many of these individuals were now dead; however, this did not stop Wager's sermon causing contention. The contradiction inherent in the fact that a puritan preacher had received support from the bequests of one of Coventry's most notorious conservative families was too much to bear for some.

The man who found 'great fault' with Wager for his praise of Warren was none other than Peter Cottys, who was committed to the gaol for his great 'contention and quareling'.[48] Cottys no doubt remembered the damage that men like Warren had done to his master, John Hales, and his reputation in Coventry. He probably also possessed the same strength of religious conviction as his master. Cottys, already distanced from the civic elite, had further transgressed the boundaries of language and behaviour with his complaints. Yet, harsh words spoken against a visiting preacher might have been unacceptable at any point in time and in any context. It does not necessarily suggest the development of any new civic moral codes and in this case Wager might not have been fully aware of the feelings and memory that he awakened. Nor was the condemnation of Cottys's actions universal. Although one of the civic annalists obviously disapproved of his behaviour, another set of annals implied that Wager was rightly criticised by Peter Cottys, for preaching 'false doctrine'.[49] This, again, suggests that Cottys had a strong idea of his own religious identity and was prepared to attack others. Nevertheless, this incident and incidents like it should warn us not to ascribe a universal and partisan puritan religious ethos to townsmen. Unalloyed evangelical Protestant belief was not the sole source of moral authority or the only force driving politics, charity and schemes for the material improvement of the city.[50] Traditions of civic service and participation in politics, built up throughout the medieval period, were too important to the political makeup of Coventry in the sixteenth century for townsmen to summarily dismiss their past and precious political unity because of religious disagreement. Cottys's imprisonment suggests that at

[47] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1576 Edition; Sheffield, 2004) [http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/], p. 1888.
[48] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire c 4 fo. 26r.
[49] British Library, Harleian MS 6388 fo. 39r.
[50] Peter Clark, *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 151-2.

least some men in the corporation felt the need to balance their religious beliefs and emerging codes of civic morality with continuity and tradition. As in the case of John Hartford, civic and political unity was more important to the city's elite than religious and factional questions. Traditions of civic service and charity needed to be protected, and if that meant having a selective memory when it came to the character and virtues of important figures in the city's past, then that was preferable to the disunity and dispute which was the alternative.

The Protestant religious message was most successful as a civic ideology when it could be blended with the traditional concerns of civic culture and morality. This is particularly true of Christian humanist texts which rejected the passive and private monastic life and promoted the civic and public one. While Protestantism probably did not provide a historically aware critique of civic institutions, it did promote the traditional facets of the urban life, such as office-holding and charity, through its emphasis on service to a greater commonweal.[51] It was common, given this context, to mingle civic and religious ideas. In a letter of 1554, later published by Foxe, the martyr John Bradford wrote to Richard Hopkins the sheriff of the city of Coventry imprisoned in the Fleet for his religious views.[52] Bradford cast Hopkins in the role of a dutiful public figure for whom the dictates of his service to God and the city had specially marked him out for persecution. In his letter he exalted Hopkins as an example for all magistrates in the realm. However, despite this relationship there were still implicit tensions. The authority necessary for the functioning of the civic elite and civic hierarchies was challenged by Bradford's lauding of the conscience of the individual rather than the collective authority of the aldermen. Despite the praise of Hopkins as a magistrate he occupied the most junior position in the civic hierarchy, that of sheriff, and was probably a young man at the time of his arrest.[53] The point that Protestantism relied more on an individual reading of scripture rather than participatory acts of worship has often been made when arguing about the ability of the Reformation to attract support from the parish community. The

[51] Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 34-7.
[52] Christine Garrett, *The Marian Exiles* (Cambridge, 1938), p.187-8; *The Writings of John Bradford*, ed. Aubrey Townsend (Parker Soc. vi, London), pp. 244-7.
[53] *Leet Book*, pp. 796, 811.

idealism and individualism of some parts of the Protestant message conflicted with the negotiation inherent in the politics of urban civic life which was corporate and collective.

If the Protestant Reformation ultimately lacked the ability to destabilise the workings of urban government it was probably because Protestant thought could be successfully blended with civic traditions. The association of youth with insurrection, rebellion and evangelical religion made by recent historiography might have been justified. Many of the supporters of the 'new religion' were young men predominately from urban areas, but often the young were also encouraged in their civic and religious attitudes by a number of associations made early on in their lives. This included their links with the household economic unit through apprenticeship. Because it had the ability to foster the political and religious ideas of young men, the family was considered an important political institution in its own right. In Coventry, men were usually apprenticed for seven years from the age of 16.[54] In 1568 the Drapers' Company raised the age of beginning an apprenticeship to 18 and the length of the apprenticeship to nine years, beyond the statutory minimum set in 1554.[55] It might be argued that such measures were primarily economic. Apprentices provided their employers with much needed labour and longer periods of apprenticeship and higher starting ages helped control the access of this labour to the market. However, apprenticeship also had a moral function. Apprenticeship indentures commonly contained injunctions against drunkenness and gambling and it was expected that apprentices would, through the household of their employer, receive some instruction in civic, religious and moral life.[56] To this end, the drapers' ordinances ordered that 'no yong man unmarryed take any prentys tyll he have occupyed iij yeres' so that an employer would have time in which to set up his household.[57] It had often been standard practice in the Drapers' Company to begin taking on apprentices immediately after individuals had paid the fine for 'setting up' in their occupation.[58] However, the company clearly feared that this might lead to households made up solely of young unmarried men who failed to receive the required civic

[54] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p. 83.
[55] CRO PA154 fo. 64r [Daffern's transcript].
[56] CRO PA468/2/3/4-20 [Drapers' indentures].
[57] CRO PA154 fo. 64r.
[58] Ibid fo. 64r.

instruction. Before the Drapers' Company made its regulations the number of apprentices allowable to the cappers was being regulated by the Leet court. Members of the company were only allowed three apprentices, the last one to be taken on only when one of the others was in his last year of service.[59] As well as moral injunctions, indentures also included an outline of the duties of the apprentice. In the case of Cuthbert Joyner, grandson and namesake of a former mayor of Coventry, making his indentures in 1580, they included the duty to serve God and obey the Queen's laws but also to respect the customs of the city.[60] The priority for the Drapers' Company during the sixteenth century was to ensure the economic prosperity of their members but also to create safe forms of political association through the apprenticeship of young men into an established household.

The household was a centre for moral and civic education which taught values of self-regulation and public service vital for the maintenance of the city and commonwealth. From an early period during the English Reformation citizens of Coventry who were evangelically inclined saw the family as a body which formed a constituent part of the greater political reality of the city and the nation. This chimed with some of the classical humanist understanding of civic duty present in English political culture. Cicero's 'Offices', first translated in 1534, was one of the most commonly printed classical works in early modern England, during which time its advice on citizenship and duty became a commonplace of Tudor political thought.[61] Cicero saw the mutual duties of parents and children flowing naturally upwards into duty to the nation and he likened the family to the 'seedplotte of a comonweal', as the mid-sixteenth-century translation stated.[62] It was also a rhetoric embraced by the citizens of Coventry. This rhetoric, employed extensively by the civic elite in Coventry, used the mutual duty that members of the family owed to one another, as a metaphor for the political duties that the aldermen and citizens of Coventry owed to the city and the kingdom.

[59] Leet Book, pp. 774, 788, 792.
[60] CRO PA468/2/3/20; *Leet Book* , p.759.
[61] Howard Jones, *Master Tully: Cicero in Tudor England* (Nieuwkoop, 1998), pp. 132-3; Patrick Collinson, 'Servants and Citizens: Robert Beale and Other Elizabethans', *Historical Research*, 79:206 (1996), p. 493.
[62] Nicholas Grimalde (trans), *Marcus Tullius Ciceroes Thre Bokes of Duties to Marcus his Sonne* (STC 5281, 1556) fo. 22r.; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis* (trans.), Walter Miller (London, 1968), pp. 56-7.

Nor was this concentration on the family simply a rhetorical flourish of the governing class. In 1547 when the council ordered aldermen to enforce the licensing of alehouses in their ward, several years before a parliamentary statute dealt with the matter on a national level, the Leet urged that labourers should be kept from such establishments on a workday. Their drinking was not only to the 'high displeasure of god and theyre own ympouer-shynge' but the act argued that men should not spend their money in alehouses because 'theyre wiffes and children shulde haue parte therof'.[63] However, if a man was poor and not able to 'susteyne his famyle' through the 'multitude of childerne' in his household, the aldermen were to 'se hym releved by the Comon almes of the citye'.[64] The Leet government saw the duties of the heads of households to be both practical and real. Therefore, it sought to promote the integrity of the household through legislative action. This headship, as part of the hierarchical structure of the city, was carefully guarded by parents as the prerogative of the family. In 1542 a prosecution indicted several Coventry craftsmen under the act of six articles. The prosecution included the wife of one of the more prominent members of the Drapers' Company, Alice Banwell, who had spoken out against the priesthood, remarking that, 'I cane say a gospel in my house for me and my s[er]vantes aswell as eny p[r]ist cane'.[65] Servants not only included female domestic labour but also apprentices. Such statements, as well as including an implicit anticlericalism which attracted the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities, embodied the idea of a household which brought its members up in close attention to the religious and civic ideals. In her statement Alice Banwell was also embracing a very traditional idea of civic and moral education. During the early period of the Reformation in England the shockingly new could be made more palatable by an appeal to these traditional values. Moreover, many of the moral injunctions made by the Leet court were directed at providing for the integrity of the family as a political unit.

As well as providing a centre for civic and moral instruction for family members the urban household also sought to educate its apprentices. The commencement of service to a master who

[63] *Leet Book*, pp. 784-5.
[64] Ibid p. 785.
[65] TNA PRO KB9/129 fo.8r.

could teach the mysteries of his craft marked the entry of the individual into the larger political community and the signing of apprenticeship indentures was a serious occasion accompanied by customary drinking.[66] After the signing, one half of the documents were deposited in the council chamber, St Mary's Hall.[67] When the old guild hall and church of St Nicholas fell into disrepair, partly because it was maintained with the money from guild and chantry lands, St Mary's Hall became the new heart of political involvement in Coventry.[68] For the city of Coventry the changes in the urban environment due to the Reformation meant a concentration of power in the centre of the city. As it became clear in the latter part of the century that St Mary's Hall and the council house were acquiring this political status, increasingly lavish amounts of money were spent on the improvement of the hall by the civic elite.[69] Indentures were deposited in this centre of political and civic life, thereby symbolically representing the beginning of the new apprentices' involvement in public life, and for some men the start of a political career during which they would rise to the heights of urban government. [70] The ceremony which surrounded apprenticeship and the signing of indentures was their induction into this political community, particularly for those who had joined one of the more lucrative professions and prominent guilds.

Despite the gradual evolution of the traditional paths of civic political involvement, various historians, beginning in the nineteenth century, have declared the period after the Reformation to be one of political oligarchy and narrowing political participation in civic government. This also accords with more recent economic and demographic ideas. The description of the period after the black death as the 'golden age of women' stems from the supposed increase in power that women obtained because the easing of demographic pressure made their labour more valuable.[71] These *longue durée* arguments saw the growth of the urban population during the latter part of the sixteenth century as a contributing factor to the political and economic marginalisation of women.

[66] CRO PA/100/17/1 fo. 60r, 63v, 68r, 70r, 71r.
[67] CRO PA154 fo. 64r.
[68] CRO PA/100/17/1 fo. 20r-40v.
[69] CRO BA/A/1/26/2 pp 1-63.
[70] CRO PA154 fo. 64r.
[71] Caroline Barron, 'The Golden Age of Women in Medieval London', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 35-58.

However, traditional forms of political association in the city valued women as a part of the household where they retained a crucial role in education and discipline. The involvement of women in civic politics had more to do with already existing political associations than economic necessity. In the mid-fifteenth century the weavers' guild banned men from teaching the mysteries of the trade to their wives and daughters.[72] Yet, it is apparent that women continued to learn their husband's trade throughout the sixteenth century. Political stability in the city concentrated on ensuring the coherence of the household unit. This was particularly true during periods of high urban mortality. In 1558 when the weaver Henry Bowether died, probably in the influenza epidemic of that year, he left £10 to his young son with the instruction that he was 'to be educat[e]d and brought up as suche a mannes child ought to be'.[73] The following year, using the political capital her husband had built up as a previous master of the craft, his widow began paying quarterage to the craft and took on two apprentices.[74] In 1567 when her son Christopher died, he was buried with the attendance of the craft, as 'boweters sonne'.[75] Historiography has often concentrated on the political status of widows or those who traded as *femme sole*. There has also been a focus on the ability of early modern women to enter political and civic discourse through subversive forms of speech, such as gossip. However, it is clear that most women acquired what political status they did have through marriage and acquired a public role through their authority in the household. In this case the political links formed between the guild and the household were maintained even after the death of the individual. This both made the civic community more inclusive and created an element of continuity and stability which guarded against the demographic and political shocks of civic life. The weavers' guild had a responsibility not only to the members of the craft but also to their household and apprentices. The flexibility of the craft companies could prevent the break-up of households and the dispersal of their members and the political instability which might potentially arise.[76] Inclusion and association with the craft guilds also fulfilled the

[72] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 87, 273.
[73] LRO B/C/11 (Henry Bowether 1558).
[74] CRO PA/100/17/1 fo. 43v.
[75] Ibid fo. 58v.
[76] Alan Dyer, 'The Bishops' Census of 1563: Its Significance and Accuracy', *Local Population Studies* , No. 49 (1992), pp. 19-37.

mutuality present in the commonwealth rhetoric of the civic elite as it protected and maintained those who subscribed to civic values. The admittance of women to the guild was not simply a failure to meet the idealised moral standards but evidence that other values were more important. In the sixteenth century these values overrode the economic and moral concerns of guild ordinances which prevented women from participating in civic life and work. Men like Bowether had fulfilled their public duty and in return they had certain expectations of the political community in Coventry. This political community, through the craft guilds, worked to ensure the continued financial viability of the family and household even after the death of one of its members. This in turn ensured the preservation of the civic hierarchy and the maintenance of order.

By these methods, the civic elite in Coventry were able to pursue new definitions of civic virtue while maintaining the traditional aspects of civic political involvement. Although many items of civic and religious ritual succumbed to the Reformation, equally important aspects remained. This helped to connect the citizens of Coventry and the surrounding villages and settlements to the political heart of the city and its elite. Rather than simply maintaining a connection with members of their craft, some companies in Coventry, particularly the poorer ones, had different classes of membership. The Weavers' Company maintained lists of so-called 'love bretheren'. These members had paid a fee primarily with an intercessory purpose, gaining the prayers of the members of the company, although the political and economic association with the craft was also valuable. The love brethren included the sons, daughters and wives of existing members of the guild, members of the other civic companies and men from the county of Coventry and the county of Warwick. Local clergy also sought membership and in 1536 the prior of Coventry became a brother of the guild.[77] When, in 1549, the Leet court banned men from being a member of any craft to which they had not been apprenticed, it was probably to thwart this method of purchasing post-mortem prayer.[78] However, multiple affiliations remained. Love brethren were appointed to the weavers' guild as late as 1573 and testators continued to request the presence of more than one

[77] CRO PA100/17/1 fo. 2v,4r,9v-r,11r,13v,16r,17v,19r,25v.
[78] *Leet Book,* pp. 790-1.

company at their burial.[79] Although the records for love brethren in the Cappers' Company are not nearly as extensive as those contained in the accounts of the weavers', the cappers were still appointing love brethren in 1581.[80] Despite their original intercessory purpose the political association gained from membership of the company was valuable enough for these civic traditions to survive. Funerals are also an example of a practice which involved the crafts, in which the social and political purpose of involvement had outlived some of the religious meaning. Out of the 386 wills of Coventry men and women sent for probate at the consistory court in Lichfield between 1520 and 1580, 58 or 15% specifically requested the presence of one or more of the craft companies at their burial.[81] Still more men and women were buried in this manner, with the attendance of the companies, or attended the burials themselves as members of a craft.

For many men the promotion of the memory of the individual was an ideal way to make reference to the continuity and immutability of the civic elite. Philip Palmer, a Coventry clothier who died in 1544, had entered civic government in 1522 and had been mayor in 1534.[82] Palmer requested many 'felowshipis and estates' to be at his burial and carry the coffin and pall, including members of fourteen of the craft companies. While it was relatively uncommon, even for townsmen, to enter a discussion of greater political issues, there was still a desire to represent the political hierarchy of the nation in this way. This helped to position the individual, as well as the city, into the broader political community. By including priests and the poor in his funeral, Palmer alluded to an obvious intercessory purpose, which included the hope that the money that he bestowed would elicit prayers for his soul. However, he also wished to place himself inside the traditions of the city of Coventry. Palmer required that his executors perform his obsequies according to the 'laudable custome as hathe been used for aldermen'.[83] Indeed, while eight wills refer to the 'olde custome' of the city or the 'accustomed duty' of the civic companies to attend the burial, only one will out of

[79] CRO PA100/17/1 fo. 64v
[80] CRO PA1494/20 fo. 119r, [Cappers' Accounts].
[81] LRO B/C/11 [Coventry wills, 1520-1570 (Aawood- Yardly)].
[82] *Leet Book*, p. 717.
[83] LRO B/C/11 (Roger Palmer 1544).

the sample referred to the 'custom of the church' and the parish.[84] This was not simply the ordinary tendency of early modern individuals to see the past in terms of the laws and values of their own time but a genuine belief in the virtue of unmoving civic values and morality. Civic identity seemed to figure more prominently in the minds of elite will-makers than those of their social inferiors, possibly because the large city parishes of St Michael's and the Holy Trinity were themselves so strongly connected with civic identity. The city's churches contained its guild chapels, and even after the Reformation the seating in the churches was defined and allocated by the allegiance to the craft fellowships. Tradition, such as this, gave the civic elite a sense of its own permanence and longevity, as it referred, in a demonstrative way, to the history and traditions of civic life. These practices allowed for broad definitions of civic involvement and a porous idea of the boundaries of political involvement whilst retaining the sense of identity present among the civic elite.

Coventry had no diarists, like Henry Machyn in London, to record the passing pageantry of civic funerals. However, when the clerk to the corporation, Thomas Gregory, died in 1573 his son left a detailed bill of the expenses for his funeral. Gregory's funeral processed from his moated manor house in Stivichall south of the city, accompanied by his tenants, to St Michael's Church in Coventry, which was decked with armorial pendants specially ordered for the occasion.[85] The funeral was able to express his personal honour and status as well as displaying the coat of arms obtained during his lifetime. Gregory died on 16 March and was buried four days later on a Saturday, by which time his son, Arthur, was able to obtain the services of one of the more notable preachers in Warwickshire, John Oxenbridge, the parson of Southam. Together with this expression of self-conscious Protestant godliness, the funeral also attempted to situate his life and service to the city within the recognised political hierarchy of the civic elite. The funeral procession was accompanied by the mercers, drapers and cappers as well as the children of the Bablake hospital and the aldermen and all of the 'worshipfull of the cytte'. Gregory was then

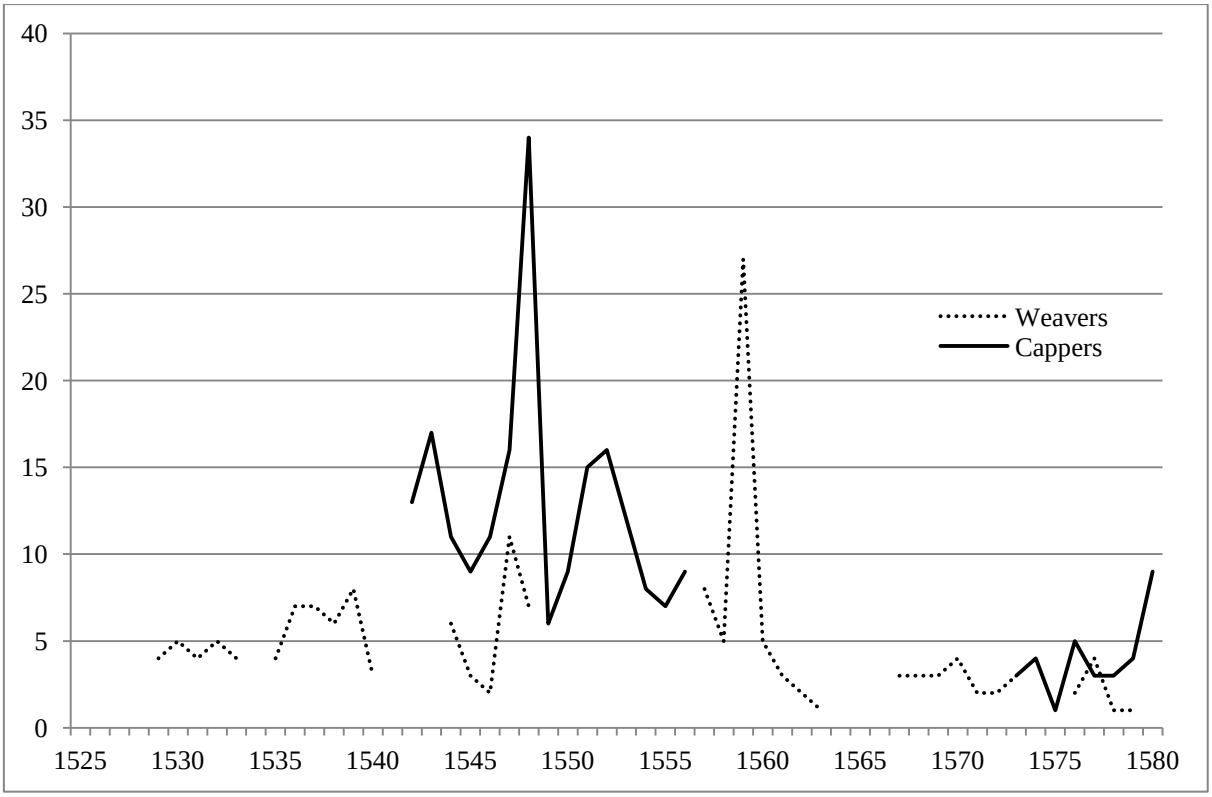
[84] LRO B/C/11 (John Ashebourne 1557, Thomas Bowker 1546, Thomas Bustard 1546, Roger Bowkley 1557, Thomas Letherbarrow 1556, Elanor Mereman 1540, Roger Palmer 1544, John Wherrett 1545, Richard Warren 1558).
[85] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo.59r.

buried alongside his father-in-law, Christopher Wade, in the chancel of St Michael's Church in Coventry.[86] It was usual for many wealthy testators in Coventry to request their place of burial in this manner, often specifying that their body was to be placed next to a family member or even 'amongst my frends'.[87] This seemed to be a way of reconstituting the political and social connections which the individual had enjoyed in life and reminding mourners of these links. After the burial the political community of the city was again reconstructed and ordered by degree, as the poor were given their dole and the mourners repaired to the funeral feast.

A wide range of people were commemorated by the attendance of one or the other of the craft companies and the same range of people also attended funerals in their turn. The craft companies continued to be required as bearers for the coffins and accompanied the mourners, often laying out money for drinking. *Figure 2* shows the available data for funerals attended by the craft companies in Coventry whose accounts survive for this period. Although the data is fragmentary, it does prove that the craft fellowships continued to attend funerals of their own members and important civic officers throughout this period. Very little can be drawn from the fluctuations in the number of burials per year as the trends in the data are primarily controlled by changes in urban mortality.

Figure 2 - The Number of Burials Attended by the Craft Fellowships in Coventry, 1530-1580.[88]

[86] Ibid fo. 59v-60v.
[87] LRO B/C/11 (James Atkyns 1559).
[88] CRO PA100/17/1 fo. 2r-71r [Weavers' Accounts]; CRO PA1494/20 fo. 55r-105v [Cappers' Accounts].



As an urban centre Coventry was susceptible to the dangers accompanying migration and demographic change, as well as the transient communities of traders and travellers who stayed in the city. Balancing these open tendencies were the traditions and the practices of the craft companies. Their continued attendance at the funerals of the aldermen and civic elite highlighted the centre of political involvement in the city and also allowed for a wide degree of participation in civic life.

If the humanist political thought to which many of the civic elite subscribed during the sixteenth century stressed the value of civic service, then the height of civic involvement was holding the office of alderman; a position that might eventually lead to the mayoralty and a position on the governing council of the city. As the historiography of late medieval Coventry makes clear, the citizens and aldermen of Coventry made various complaints over the costs of civic office during the 1530s.[89] However, there is good reason not to take these complaints at face value. Holding aldermanic office could bring benefits in terms of reputation and status which might enhance the ability to trade and ultimately increase individual wealth. The petitions made to the crown in the

[89] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 258-78; TNA PRO SP1/141 fo. 55; TNA PRO SP1/142 fo. 66.

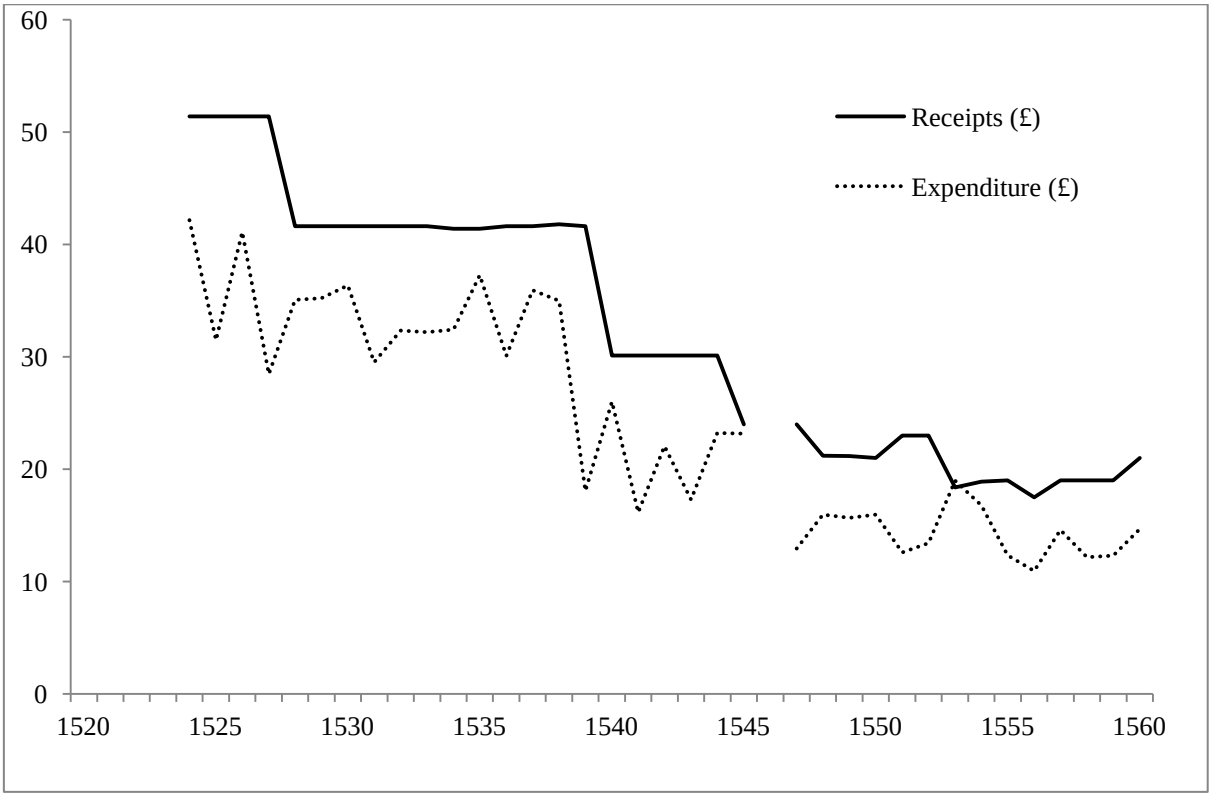
1530s suggested, not that civic service was becoming utterly untenable in and of itself, but that men who were fitted to serve in such offices were trying to subvert their duty by fleeing the city to take on the rank and status of the rural gentry, thereby impoverishing both the towns and the countryside. The answer to this problem, according to one of the Coventry petitioners, was to raise the status of the urban elite through schemes for urban improvement. Therefore, improving the condition of the civic elite would enhance the political body of the realm. Local concerns were not antithetical to the concerns of the state; rather the citizens of Coventry sought, through rhetoric, to align both interests. These concerns also supported the history and traditions of office-holding in the city, which coordinated well with the new idea of humanist virtue. Wealthy individuals were expected to hold office in the urban context because wealth itself conferred certain responsibilities to maintain order and to be involved in public life in Coventry. To have or wish to acquire wealth did not suggest a moral failing but an opportunity to acquire personal honour and virtue through public service and the mutual enriching of the commonweal of the city.

Those who had held public office or rose further up the political hierarchy inside the craft fellowships were expected to be richer and contribute more. In 1534 the Drapers' Company enacted an ordinance which required that the masters of the craft were to pay more towards the upkeep of the fellowship and introduced different grades of contribution for those who had been mayor as well as those who had served as wardens and chamberlains or were merely commoners.[90] Minor offices, such as that of the wardens and chamberlains, who dealt with the upkeep of civic property and the city walls, could be costly for their holders who were just starting out in civic and public life. However, they were not ruinous. The costs of many of the minor offices were defrayed by the corporation. In 1534 the Leet enacted that the sheriffs were no longer obliged to give out livery to their sergeants in the city and in 1546 they were to be given £10 out of the rents of the newly enclosed common lands to pay the costs of office as well as the rent of the gaol.[91] As the chamberlains had to collect the tax in the form of murage payments and make the necessary repairs to the infrastructure of the city, it was possible to conceive of a situation in which the office-

[90] CRO PA154 fo. 1r.
[91] *Leet Book*, pp. 778-9.

holders were left significantly out of pocket. As figure 3 shows, although the income from murage payments fell throughout the period, expenditure only once exceeded the money collected, in 1553, and this resulted in a payment made from the corporation to the chamberlains so that they might re-coup their loss. As the Reformation took its effect on urban institutions the amount that the chamberlains were expected to collect in payments recorded in their murage book was carefully managed downwards. The costs of civic office were very real, both in time and money, as aldermen made a considerable outlay on hospitality and took time out of their ordinary business to fulfil their ceremonial duties. However, some of these costs were balanced by the advantages of office holding, in terms of increased status amongst the civic elite.

Figure 3 - Receipts and Expenditure of the Chamberlains of Coventry 1520-1560.[92]



From these minor offices, members of the aldermanic council might then progress to higher standing in the city with the chance of being elected mayor. Within this framework of idealised behaviour, civic life was not immune to the ordinary politicking and negotiation inherent in all

[92] CRO BA/A/1/26/1 fo. 51r-279r.

forms of power broking. One of the advantages of holding office was the patronage that officeholders could bestow. Aldermen, holding authority through the wards of the city, had the right to elect ale-tasters and men to clean and sweep the streets as well as the five men in each of the ten wards who oversaw the renting of the common-land for the 'universall profite' of the commonality.[93] Aldermen were required to punish the idle, license alehouses and distribute the city's alms to the poor. They also appointed the constables for each ward and in 1547, were instructed, along with their officers, to 'goo every weke... and look upon the people and what they doo'. They were then to report 'what may be bettur doon' to the select group of aldermen which met every month and formed the mayor's council.[94] The sheriffs also had the right of appointment of the common sergeant, who controlled the opening and closing of the city's gates and the constables of the ward, while the mayor had his own servants.[95] Indeed, there were often instances which hint at disagreements and factionalism in civic life over the choice of candidate. In 1539 Edward Smyth, the sheriff's sergeant, was 'discharged of his office' and 'John Cragges, late put owt of the same office' was readmitted.[96] The considerations and difficulties of this patronage are illustrated by a chancery case from 1537. The case involved one Richard Coke who was by his own testimony sergeant to the mayor of Coventry by the 'hole consent and assent of the hole Councell'. Coke's contention against the mayor of that year, Christopher Wade, was that Wade had unlawfully removed him from his post as the mayor's sergeant. Coke seems to have stressed the idea that Wade had gone against the will of his brethren and by doing so had failed to ensure the collective good of the city through his 'hedy and obstinate mynd'. He also alleged that Wade had made a bargain with one Thomas Riley, a fellow member of the Drapers' Company, to dismiss Coke, and that Robert Crowe, a capper, had offered Wade £4 for the office of sergeant. In response to these accusations Wade claimed that 'he made no bargyne' but that he was 'drinking in a Taverne w[i]th the sayd Ryley' when Richard Coke entered. When he had passed the two men Riley then said to Wade that Coke was the 'very louest man' and had 'done yo[u] much

[93] *Leet Book*, pp. 723, 726, 730.
[94] Ibid p. 784.
[95] Ibid pp. 738-9.
[96] Ibid p. 739.

displeasure'. Speculating further about his own civic career Riley remarked that if 'yt chaunce me to be mayre of Coventre he shall nev[er] do me s[er]vice' and holding up a groat asked Wade what he would give him for it if Coke served him honestly as his sergeant. At this point Wade took the money proffered by Riley in jest and 'paid yt for thyr shote' at the tavern.[97]

Although Richard Coke's case was dismissed by the court he knew that an argument which played up the disunity of the civic elite would be liable to go down well with the court. Despite having been accused of disorderly and opprobrious words by the defendants, Coke certainly knew the importance of these values and how to use them to his own advantage. However, the case also reveals other aspects of civic politics, including shedding light on the friendship between a man just beginning his political career, Thomas Riley, and another, Christopher Wade, at the height of his. It is notable that even though the conversation in the alehouse was held at least twelve months before Wade was elected, he fully expected to be mayor. Although few citizens were able to acquire the university education which provided the knowledge of thought, expression and rhetoric which was the humanist ideal, the basic tenets of civic virtue and understanding could be attained through less formal sorts of instruction. The friendship between Riley and Wade allowed both men to contemplate and access the networks of urban politics in Coventry, as well as exploring the qualities and moral values of men they were likely to encounter. These connections were important in inculcating civic ideas through discussion, example and dispute.

At the time this incident occurred Thomas Riley was still a relatively young man, although he had already been master of the Drapers' Company and acted on the company's behalf, along with others, over the drapers' land in Coventry.[98] He was master of the company again in 1544, 1556 and 1560.[99] By the time he was appointed sheriff in 1546 he was already a wealthy member of the civic elite, living in Earl Street alongside most of the more prominent members of the mayor's council.[100] From this point in time he was a permanent member of the Leet jury and was mayor of

[97] TNA PRO STAC 2/22/59.
[98] SBTRO DR10/772; SBTRO DR10/405; SBTRO DR10/779; CRO PA154 fo. 12r. [Daffern's transcript].
[99] CRO PA154 fo. 12r, 24r, 33r.
[100] TNA PRO E179/192/157.

the city in 1555 and again in 1563.[101] Civic office seems to have followed as a natural extension of his power and wealth. In the 1540s he began lending small amounts of money and later enrolled increasingly large recognisances of debt in the statute merchant with fellow drapers and local gentry.[102] Through his lending activities he displayed an important aspect of the duty and responsibility of civic officeholders, namely the extension of the city's influence beyond the boundaries of the city. He continued to practise his trade, and took on two apprentices in 1542 and another in 1555, while in 1560 he paid a fine of 10s to the Drapers' Company on behalf of an apprentice who had coloured the cloth of a foreigner.[103] Riley was inclined towards Protestantism and was able to use his influence as mayor, in 1555, to warn the religious radical Robert Glover of his impending arrest by the Coventry sheriffs.[104] As an ardent evangelical, Riley was also able to assist the returning exiles and in 1560 lent money to Thomas Bentham, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, whose administration was characterised by financial and administrative difficulties. Bentham thanked Riley for 'frendshshippe shewed unto me at my necessitye', but repeatedly failed to repay Riley's money.[105] The personal honour and credit built up through holding civic office as well as engaging in these financial transactions brought Riley many important connections which were a necessity for the city's political advantage, with ecclesiastical and secular authority. During his time as mayor he was also able to use his influence through the recorder, John Throckmorton, to press for the resolution of the city's law suits in the central courts.[106] It may sometimes seem that the civic and aldermanic career was a mechanical progression through the different offices of the city. However, this is far from the real truth. Through a lengthy period of political involvement, negotiation and friendship in the politics of the craft and then in the offices of the city, it was possible for men to attain the degree of experience and authority which was necessary for the

[101] *Leet Book*, pp. 711-819; CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A 14] fo. 54v.
[102] TNA PRO C 1/1154/57; CRO BA/E/3/7/49,50,55,57,63.
[103] CRO PA154, 19r, 33r, 44r.
[104] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1570 Edition; Sheffield, 2004) [http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/], p. 2275.
[105] *Camden Miscellany xxvii*, 'The Letter-Book of Thomas Bentham, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1560-1561 eds. Rosemary O'Day and Joel Berlatsky (Camden Soc., 4th ser., xxii, 1979), pp. 146, 181, 188, 229.
[106] CRO BA/H/17/A79/68A.

desired good governance of the city. Although Riley promoted a reformed religious ethos and administration, his life was a public one according with the humanist model of civic service.

As a consequence he became the embodiment of some of these civic values. When in 1568, 'M[ast]er Thomas Riley oon of the Auncient Aldermen of the citie' was arrested following a suit against him in the King's Bench, it was one of the chamberlains, Robert Bond, who was punished for ordering the sheriffs to arrest Riley against the 'old order and custome of the citie'. When Bond refused to pay the £5 forfeit due for his offence, the mayor's council ordered that the windows in his shop were to be boarded up until the payment had been received. [107] In civic life in Coventry the preservation of political stability and good order meant adhering to the traditions of the city. The aldermen sought to shield the city from the divisive effects of the law; the Leet court ruled that no one should bring a suit under the value of 40s against another citizen without a licence from the mayor.[108] Besides this, the council protected individuals who had a reputation for virtue and civic service and who came to embody some of the new humanist virtues of civic politics. The description of Riley as one of the 'Auncient Aldermen' seemed to connect him to the political traditions of the city. His age and links to the previous generation of civic government suggested the strength and constancy of the political elite in Coventry; a communal ethos that the members of the corporation desired to protect and promote.

A common civic and political culture helped to ensure continuity and stability amongst the shocks and social change to which the city was exposed. It meant that the city could accommodate many different groups, as well as immigrants, providing they understood and adhered to common values. As the dispute involving the memory of Christopher Warren shows, there were many who were willing to reshape the city's past because they wished to praise the political and civic virtue of an individual and diminish the importance of religious disputes, despite the obvious anger from some townsmen who were marginalised as a result. The effect of religious change was more significant when the Protestant message could be used to support the traditional political structures of the city.

[107] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14] fo. 64r.
[108] *Leet Book*, p. 790.

Similarly, humanist ideas were successful because they were blended with traditional ideas of civic service. This gave the civic elite in Coventry a native English definition of political virtue. The continuity and traditional adherences of the craft guilds, such as maintaining funeral observances of members and the city's elite, successfully neutralised the foreign origins of these new ideas. Moreover, political and civic ideas became practical creeds which affected how townsmen thought about all stages in their lifecycle, including family and apprenticeship. Both were supported as the foundation of future political strength and the stability and security of the city. When economic imperatives or religious moralism clashed with political ideas it was often the civic ethos which won out. At the very highest level amongst the civic elite the political culture of the city was corporate and collective, prioritising political unity and collective decision making. This apparent political autonomy gained through the collective decision making of the aldermen increasingly came to define the city of Coventry during this period. When the ordinary methods of civic government were threatened by singular decision making and erratic behaviour, as in the case of John Hartford, the aldermen worked to restore the collective will of the mayor's council. Ultimately, the civic elite were bound by a common ethos of civic government which shaped their public behaviour and their duty towards the city.

4. Projects and Problems

As we have seen, by the early part of the sixteenth century, the aldermen and the civic elite of Coventry based their system of politics and government on humanist ideas of public service as well as tradition. This was a creatively re-imagined tradition, in the humanist mould, which made the political structures of the city seem ancient and immutable; nevertheless, it was effective in reinforcing the collective and cooperative principles of civic politics and government. The influence of traditional attitudes was still notable. The political body of the city was in harmony when every citizen contributed to the public weal through their industry, by generating wealth, or through service to the government of the city, as aldermen and magistrates, depending on the status of the individual. Historians have often argued about whether changing social and religious culture, or short term urban crises, were responsible for periodic bouts of morality and moves to regulate early modern towns and their population.[1] However, the political principles that grew out of the traditional philosophy of government, present in Coventry during the sixteenth century, made the active management of civic problems a political and moral necessity for the urban elite. The requirement to control and understand the city was a tenet that was increasingly built into the political ethos of the corporation. This political culture was the guiding light for the governing class during a period of reform and improvement of the urban environment, which included the development of new civic institutions and new attitudes to poverty and the poor.

It is easy to argue that civic humanism and elite Protestant culture played a relatively small part in charitable endeavours. As McIntosh has argued, although most aldermen were comparatively wealthy they might have relatively little access to education, except in the form of basic schooling.[2] Even those who had been educated at a grammar school might not have come into contact with the canon of works that we now think of as being indicative of humanist philosophy. However, it is apparent that in Coventry there was a circle of educated men who were conversant with these writings and happy to move in social networks which actively promoted evangelical and humanist

[1] Marjorie McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 1-19.
[2] Marjorie McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England', *Continuity and Change*, 3(2), 1988, p. 212.

ideas. Thomas Gregory, the town clerk of Coventry, is a notable example. Gregory had a legal training at the Inner Temple and was involved in civic government for over forty years as coroner and clerk of the statute, and also had had familial connections to other aldermen.[3] He came to Coventry, as the younger son of a gentleman trying to make his way in the world, during the 1530s. Gregory initially worked for one prominent Coventry family, managing their landed interests in Warwickshire, and later married into another family of wealthy merchants and aldermen. During this stage of his career he worked his way into the service of the city. His remarkable personal account book allows us to construct something of his social world as well as his intellectual interests. From this source it is apparent that he possessed a considerable library and lent out his books to aldermen as well as the city's clergy, during the 1550s.[4] His collection included historical works, in English and Latin, as well as the 22 unnamed works which he sent up to Oxford with his son, Christopher.[5] The account book records that, a year later, a Greek new testament, Cicero's orations and volumes of Livy and Plutarch were also sent to Christopher Gregory from his father's library.[6] Classical concepts of honour, citizenship and duty seem to have been crucial to the makeup of civic thought in Coventry. These concepts spill into the acts of Leet made during the 1550s. As well as being influential in Coventry, and drawing ideas from his reading, Thomas Gregory also moved in broader intellectual networks. He was acquainted with prominent lawyers such as Robert Keilway, surveyor of liveries in the Court of Wards and Liveries and later part of a commission to investigate endowed schools and hospitals and preserve charitable uses.[7] However, his legal contacts were far from the limit of his friendships and business arrangements. In 1556 he lent 40s to the schoolmaster of Magdalen College School, Thomas Cooper, and in the same year he was paid by civic leaders in Banbury for advice on their move to attain corporate status.[8] In the 1550s Gregory was at the height of his power and influence and was gaining a reputation as a man who understood the language and legal mechanics of the corporate

[3] SBTRO DR10/416-7; CRO BA/D/9/2/6 fo. 7r.
[4] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 31v.
[5] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 37v.
[6] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo 46r.
[7] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 61r, W. C. Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations* (Baton Rouge, 1961), pp.174-6.
[8] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 25r; ORO BOR 2/XVII/i/1 fo. 171r.

town. In the context of the city of Coventry this gives us a unique insight into the intellectual concerns of the civic elite during a period which was crucial for the development of attitudes towards the poor. Gregory was a friend of Humphrey Reynolds, whose supplication to the king in 1538, discussed later in this chapter, prefigured much of the commonwealth rhetoric in Coventry during the 1550s. He was also probably part of the faction in civic government which the recorder, Roger Wigston, accused of 'pretending the commonweal' for their own advantage.[9] Moreover, it was Gregory, as town clerk, who was responsible for composing acts of Leet which dealt with social problems of dearth and poverty. The survival of acts of Leet from 1557 amongst the private accounts of the Gregory family suggest that they were drafted by the town clerk before being presented to the mayor's council for discussion. Moreover, these insights into the intellectual interests of Thomas Gregory give us some idea of the concerns of the reforming mayoralty of John Nethermill in 1557, which passed one of the more important acts dealing with urban poverty. Made up of notable evangelical figures, including Nethermill himself, the mayor's council was populated by like-minded men who shared their town clerk's intellectual interests. It was this education which allowed the educated lawyers, who were often the town clerks in English towns, to present urban problems through the skilful use of language and rhetoric. A polished rhetorical technique allowed the corporation to argue that dealing with urban problems was an almost patriotic duty owed by the citizens in return for the economic privilege that the city afforded them.

Of course the process of social improvement could not occur without the impetus of real urban problems. Short term crises, notably disease and food shortage, did produce flurries of activity and interest in social problems. These events contributed to the desire to tackle dearth and poverty, which threatened both the welfare of the poor inhabitants of the city and the stability and continuity of urban government. Throughout the sixteenth century, Coventry suffered from the same peaks and troughs of urban mortality as many other cities, as well as the famous demographic crisis of the 1520s, which resulted in a notable depopulation.[10] As well as increased mortality in the late 1540s, commonly put down to epidemic typhus, Coventry experienced outbreaks of the plague in

[9] TNA PRO SP 1/74 fo.14 [*L&P*, v.6, 18].
[10] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 31-69.

1564 and 1578.[11] As centres of population and trade early modern towns were notorious for these periodic demographic shocks which were particularly frequent and intense during the 1550s. In 1551 the city suffered from the 'sweating sickness' as it travelled down from Preston, Chester and Ludlow, accompanying the cattle drovers on the roads from Wales, through Shropshire and Warwickshire on its way to London.[12] Contemporaries found it shocking that the disease and death of the mid-century fell on those 'of the best age' with astonishing suddenness.[13] Although there are no surviving parish registers for Coventry until 1560, wills and probate records exist, often with their surviving inventories, as well as burial records for the craft companies, which give an idea of relative mortality patterns and epidemic disease. Of the Coventry wills proved during 1551 the vast majority fell in the short period from May to July.[14] However, despite the acute nature of the epidemic, the 'sweat' was predominantly a disease of rural parishes. [15] The influenza in England in 1558, accompanied by other diseases, was probably more deadly and worrying. High mortality accompanied most of the latter half of the decade and, unlike plague, influenza struck the rich as well as the poor. While Wrigley and Schofield's work on parish registers estimated that 5.5% of the population died during this period, there have recently been attempts at recalculation, using chantry certificates and probate inventories, which produce a significantly higher figure.[16] The overall proportion of deaths in the population remains a matter of controversy; however, the disease was certainly an attack on the political body of the city of Coventry, during which at least 9 of the 24 aldermen died from 1558 to 1560. The rate of attrition of the Leet jurors, through

[11] *Registers of the Church of Holy Trinity, Coventry, Warwickshire* (3 vols., Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, Birmingham, 1987), i ; CRO BA/H/3/20/1 pp. 27-39.
[12] John Caius, *A Boke, or Counseill Against The Disease Commonly Called the Sweate* (London, 1552), STC (2nd ed.) / 4343, pp. 10-11.
[13] Raphael Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles* (London, 1586), STC (2nd ed.) / 13569 p. 1066; Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire, d.4 fo. 19v.
[14] LRO B/C/11 (Richard Askew 1551, John Cassone 1551, John Chambers 1551, Thomas Corbyn 1551, Richard Edmundes 1551, Anthony Gemmes 1551, Philip Gardiner 1551,William Godfrey 1551, Thomas Greffyn 1551, John Halyday 1551, William Hutton 1551, Harry Hynd 1551, John Leech 1551, John Lunt 1551, Roger Martyn 1551, Robert More 1551, Thomas Morres 1551, Rose Neese 1551, Elizabeth Raynesford 1551, Thomas Spencer 1551, Ralph Walton 1551).
[15] Alan Dyer, 'The English Sweating sickness of 1551:An Epidemic Anatomized', *Medical History* (July 1997), 41:3, p. 365.
[16] John Moore, '"Jack Fisher's flu": A Visitation Revisited', *The Economic History Review*, N.S., 46:2 (July, 1993), pp. 280–307; Michael Zell, 'Fisher's 'Flu and Moore's Probates: Quantifying the Mortality Crisis of 1556-1560' *The Economic History Review*, N. S., 47:2 (May, 1994), pp. 354-358; John More, 'The Mid-Tudor Population Crisis in Midland England, 1548-1563', *Midland History*, 34:1 (2009), pp. 44-57.

mortality, during these three years was more than four times the crude death rate for the population of England, averaged over the latter half of the sixteenth century.[17] The 1550s saw not only these mortality peaks but also the scarcity produced by poor harvests in 1550-1 and 1555-6 and significant political disturbances.[18] Aside from the few Marian exiles forced to leave the city, the political and religious changes of this decade had relatively little effect on the aldermen. However, mortality threatened the continuity of the governing class of the city, and resulted in an unusually high turnover of urban office-holders. If it does not provide a complete explanation for the actions of the civic elite, and the schemes in which they invested to improve the urban environment, this acute crisis provided an incentive to form complex political responses to poverty and civic problems.

The city was also forced to deal with high incidences of the plague in 1564 and endemic illness during the late 1570s. One of the notable characteristics of plague outbreaks in early modern urban settings was that the disease was often localised to certain wards or suburbs.[19] The parish registers of Holy Trinity, the only surviving register for sixteenth-century Coventry, clearly show the increased mortality which denotes the 1564 outbreak. The plague certainly troubled the civic elite. In 1579 alderman Francis Tallants petitioned the city to see that his daughter-in-law, a ward of the mayor and the corporation, was moved to a 'bette[r] aer'.[20] However, despite expressions of personal disquiet from the aldermen, the disease struck the poorest hard and was often confined to the densely packed streets of poorer suburbs. Compounding the severity of the attack was the effect on trade, which added to the financial troubles of the poor.[21] In consequence, in 1575, from April to July, the city responded by making a number of extraordinary payments to the churchwardens of St Michael's parish. The aldermen also distributed money directly to the affected areas. Between April and June 1575 the corporation spent a total of £33 10d on those that were 'vysted w[i]t[h] plage' in Muchpark Street and Gosford Street, delivering it directly through the city's officers in

[17] E. A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (Cambridge , 1989), p. 528.
[18] Ibid pp. 644-81.
[19] Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1986), pp. 112-3.
[20] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14 a] fo. 83r.
[21] Merritt, *The Social World of Early Modern Westminster*, pp. 257-310.

the wards.[22] In the summer of 1579 the city's charitable resources were again directed at plague victims. This time the outbreak was at its worst in Spon Street at the western end of St Michael's parish.[23] In 1578 the chamberlains ordered pits to be dug, to bury the clothes of the deceased, and the following year the corporation appointed four men to live in Sneade's barn, on Hill Street, isolated from the community but adjacent to the afflicted suburbs, from where they were to collect and bury the bodies of plague victims.[24] In contrast, as *Figure 4* shows, the small affluent parish of the Holy Trinity was barely affected by the plague of the late 1570s. Despite the attempts to control infection, the efforts made by the civic elite were mainly a reaction to the poverty and shortages that accompanied the disease in certain wards. Because of their localised nature the epidemics of the 1560s and 1570s had a far less serious effect on the city and its inhabitants.

Figure 4 – Births and Deaths Recorded in the Parish Register of the Church of the Holy Trinity.[25]

[22] CRO BA/H/3/20/2, pp. 26-30.
[23] Ibid p. 30.
[24] CRO BA/A/1/26/2, p.26.
[25] *Registers of the Church of Holy Trinity, Coventry, Warwickshire* (3 vols., Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, Birmingham, 1987), i .

By contrast other problems, during the 1550s, conspired to make the disease and endemic urban poverty in the city much more serious. The relative geographical situation of Coventry, in comparison to other urban areas, might have been an advantage at the height of the inland cloth trade in the medieval period, but it also had the potential to accentuate the scarcity of foodstuffs during years of dearth. The river Sherbourne provided fast flowing waters for the city's mills, as did the river Sowe, a tributary which left the Avon at Stratford and ran to the south of the city, through Stoneleigh. Yet, neither was passable by barges. Studies of the grain trade have indicated that prices in areas without access to navigable water were more volatile. Very small changes in the supply of grain due to poor harvests combined with the inflexibility of the market to cause large price increases.[26] During bad harvests, urban areas with easier access to water transport were better able to compete for grain than landlocked urban areas. Therefore, the city's immediate hinterland was of paramount importance to the ruling elite. The north of the county of Warwick and the Forest of Arden was not known as a cereal producing area and the roads leading to the north of Warwickshire from the city of Coventry were poor. A civic survey of grain stored by the farmers in the villages of the Knightlow hundred, primarily to the south and east of the city, made around 1555, showed the supplies of grain available to the city. The survey took in a variety of grains including malt, barley, peas, winter corn and wheat. Overall the survey found 1619 quarters of grain stored by individually recorded farmers in villages and hamlets, including 435 quarters of rye, 405 of wheat, 14 of peas, 211 of winter corn, 37 of barley, 24 of malt and 493 quarters of miscellaneous grains.[27] *Figure 5* shows each village in the survey as an area proportional to the quantity of grain recorded in each place. It appears that, in the Knightlow hundred, the southern villages bordering Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire provided the most grain to the city. Good access to major roads helped to transport foodstuffs and the road to London from Coventry passed close to Thurlaston, Dunchurch, Toft and Willoughby before proceeding through Daventry and St Albans. Another road passed directly south from the city into Oxfordshire travelling through Long

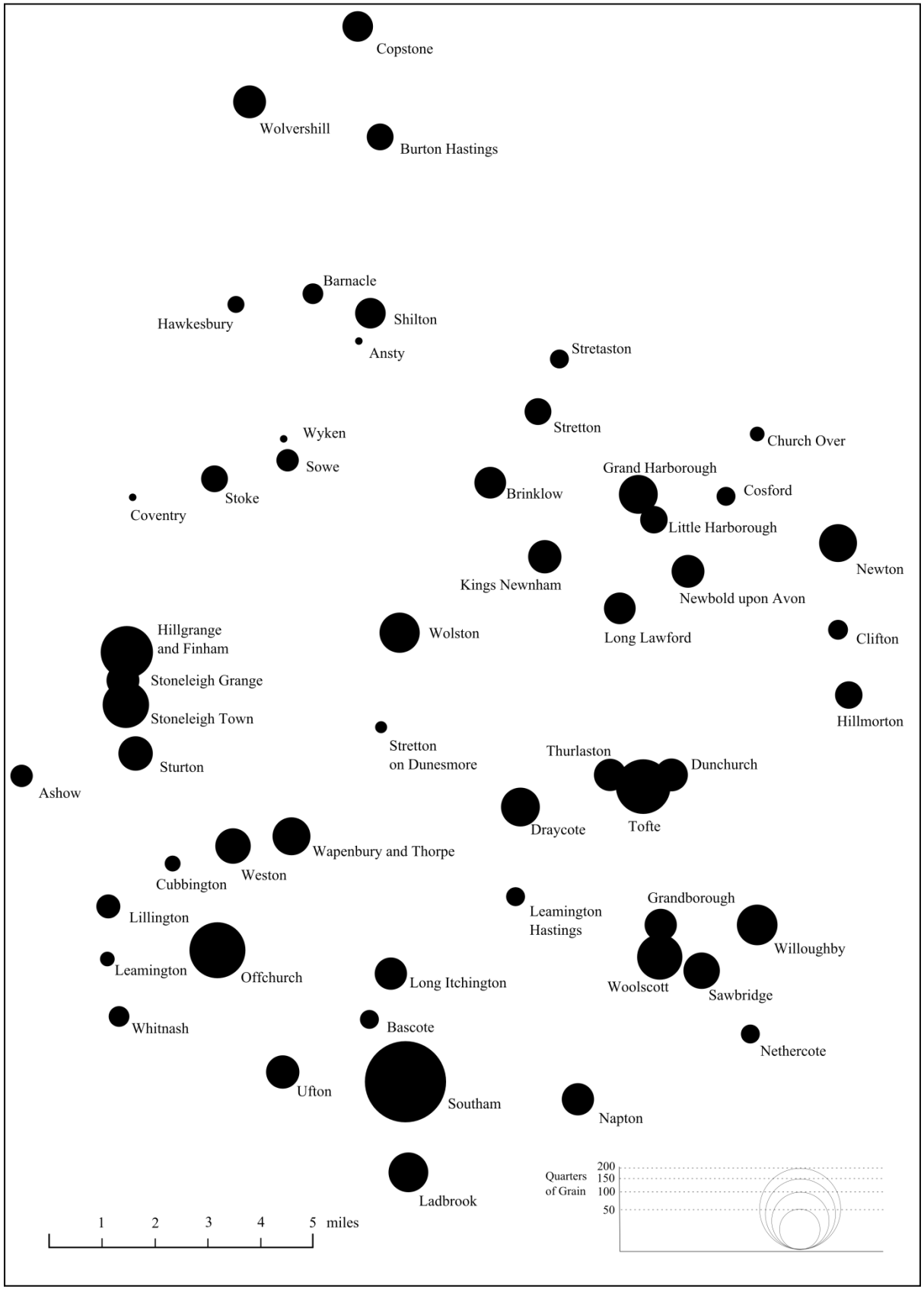
[26] Randall Nielsen, 'Storage and English Government Intervention in Early Modern Grain Markets', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Mar., 1997), pp. 4-5; James Galloway, 'One market or many? London and the grain trade of England' in James Galloway (ed.), *Trade Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration c.1300-1600* (London, 2000), p. 38.
[27] CRO BA/C/2/1/1 [Grain Census of The Knightlow Hundred].

Itchington, Southam and Ladbroke. The ex-monastic estates at Stoneleigh also produced considerable amounts of grain and citizens of Coventry owned arable land at Stoke and Sowe.[28] However, while the acute nature of the mid-century crisis and the bald reality of the city's geographical position might have produced an incentive for the civic elite to act, it does not explain the political philosophies behind their responses, or the methods by which they chose to deal with urban poverty.

Controlling and understanding networks of the victualling trade was a vital expression of the traditional responsibility of civic government. It was also a tool used to maintain order and political power against the potentially divisive poverty caused by rising food prices. Through their control of the city's food supply, the civic elite were working within a recognised tradition of corporate governance extending back into the medieval period. In the years 1540 and 1541, for which there is a single surviving roll of Leet court fines, there were sixteen individuals fined for breaches of the byelaws of the Leet involving the trading of grain. These included men and women forestalling grain by purchasing outside the marketplace, allowing grain to be stored in the city from market day to market day and the engrossing of grain by buying up supplies in the market place with the object of increasing the price or obtaining a monopoly. All these offences were specifically forbidden by acts of Leet.[29] Yet, some men still used intermediaries to trade for them, such as Thomas Smyth, a draper who was fined for causing 'good wif chambers to by and engross Rie owt of the markett' while Rauf Dale was fined for buying for his associates. Arthur 'the Hosteler of the Aungell' was fined for selling rye to carriers, presumably to be transported out of the city.[30] Other men, from outside the county of Coventry, also involved themselves in the urban grain trade. Thomas Miles of Berkeswold in Warwickshire, six miles to the west of the city, was fined for forestalling, with the help of Richard Parnell, a shoemaker and citizen of Coventry, who

[28] CRO BA/C/2/1/1 fo. 11v.
[29] *Leet Book*, pp. 666, 780.
[30] Fox, 'Some New Evidence of Leet Activity', pp. 237-43.

Figure 5- Grain Stored in the Knightlow Hundred c. 1555



stored the grain that Miles had bought.[31] Most of the men being fined listed other trades and two of them sat upon the Leet jury suggesting that the trade in grain was a widespread sideline for townsmen.[32] Fifteen men and women were also fined 4d for selling ale against the statute including Hugh Lawton, a former mayor of the city. As well as regulating the quality and price of bread and ale and enforcing parliamentary statutes, the Leet court controlled the access of foreign bakers to the Coventry market. Economic injunctions were often combined with the moral regulation of alehouses and tipplers.[33] These regulations must have been supplemented by the bakers' rules. Only the seventeenth-century ordinances of that company survive; however, it is likely that they were based on earlier rules which sought to regulate food supplies.[34] The continued prosecution of offenders for activities, such as regrating or forestalling, was a way of indicating the city's commitment to commonwealth thought. Much of this regulation had medieval antecedents and the control of victualling by the civic authorities was based on traditional moral ideas. However, these ideas were successfully built into a new civic philosophy dealing with the provision of food to the poor citizens of Coventry.

Grain surveys, such as the one in 1555, became a regular method of dealing with shortage in Coventry. At various times the civic elite also took note of crops from villages within the county of Coventry.[35] At the same time that the famous census of the city was made in 1520, the aldermen also ordered a survey of 'all maner of Cornes' held in the wards of the city, in response to dearth and the rising price of grain.[36] In 1585 the annals of the city record another census. Again, in consequence of the scarcity of grain, houses in the city were searched and farmers in the locality were questioned to see what they might bring to market and a survey of the population was made.[37] Some of these measures were undoubtedly prompted by royal proclamations, which ordered

[31] Ibid p. 234.
[32] Ibid. p.237.
[33] *Leet Book,* pp.637, 624 ;CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14(a) 1570], fo. 68r.
[34] CRO PA8/1 fo. 3v-10v [c. 1610].
[35] CRO BA/C/2/1/2.
[36] *Leet Book,* pp. 674-5.
[37] British Library Harleian, MS 6388 fo. 39v.

justices of the peace to search houses and barns for stored grain which could be sent to market.[38] However, the corporation of Coventry seems to have gone beyond the measures demanded of them in their responses to grain shortage. The problem of high grain prices was treated in a considered manner during the entirety of the sixteenth century, as civic responses were rationalised by a coherent philosophy of government held by the urban elite. The aldermen prized their collective virtue highly, and this virtue was only to be obtained through actions to increase the wealth and commonweal of the city's inhabitants. It has often been thought that the 1590s was a high point for the regulation of urban food supplies, during a time when government intervention exhorting civic magistrates to action, through the books of orders, and the religious and charitable responses of the civic elite, were at their height. Because of this, the 1590s is often the starting point for studies of responses to urban poverty in the seventeenth century.[39] Coventry undertook similar measures to many towns in the 1590s in an attempt to prevent disorder. The city created a civic storehouse which collected and sold grain at regulated prices in 1595 and 1596, leaving a record of even the very smallest transactions.[40] However, complicated and nuanced responses to grain shortages, influenced by the commonwealth rhetoric of the civic elite and ideas of social obligation, were already underway by this point in time. By the late sixteenth century the civic elite were already looking outwards to the broader locality, and enthusiastically intervening to understand and control the economic networks involving the city's food supply.

Civic thought about dearth and poverty was also visible in the efforts that the civic elite made towards the reform of the common lands. Demands for equitable access to the city's land were often connected to popular protest and the requirements of Coventry's freemen who were allowed to hold their cattle on the common lands.[41] The city had long recognised the ancient right of freemen to graze animals on land, which lay mainly to the west of the city, and also partly in

[38] Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 139; *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, eds. Paul Hughes and James Larkin (3 vols., London, 1964-9), i, p. 242.
[39] Steve Hindle, 'Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England', *Past and Present*, no.172 (August 2001), pp. 44-86; Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, pp. 200-3; Slack, 'Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666', pp. 164-203.
[40] CRO BA/C/2/1/4 [Granary Storehouse Book].
[41] Mary Dormer Harris, 'Laurence Saunders, Citizen of Coventry', *English Historical Review* (1894), 9:36, pp. 633-51.

Stivichall, Hersall, Whitley and Stoke Heath. In 1501 enclosures of this land were made with the money to go into a 'common box' which was to collect these rents and fines paid by the freemen in the craft companies. There were protests over access to the commons in the early sixteenth century, and rioting in 1525, in response to further enclosures along these lines.[42] The rioters barred the gates to the city in front of the chamberlain's procession, held at Lammas to herald the opening of the common land to pasture, and secured the cooperation of the mayor, Nicholas Heynes, who was captured by a crowd which proceeded to attack the corporation treasury and seize the common box of the city. The crowd then threw down hedges and demanded an end to enclosure.[43] The capture of the 'common box' suggested that the rioters wished to safeguard the money taken in rents and ensure it was spent in furtherance of the commonweal of the city.[44] The ideas reinforced by the crowd continued to have an effect on the civic elite, and their responses to urban problems, throughout the century. Recent historiography has emphasised the conservative, rational nature of crowds and their understanding of gestures and symbolism.[45] The aim of the rioters was nothing less than radical change in the financial administration of the city; however, the use of tradition as a model for behaviour allowed the citizens to uphold traditional civic and moral principles. During the serious riots and insurrection in the 1520s the citizens articulated a clear idea of the social contract existing between the civic elite and freemen. Events such as this helped to lay the groundwork for more rhetorically complex visions of civic political life.

The need to achieve a balance between the needs of the poor, the freemen and other interest groups was a constant problem. Throughout the 1540s the craft of the butchers lobbied the city for their right to graze cattle on the common.[46] Prompted by these demands, the corporation continued to make interventions into the regulation of the common land-holding. In 1541, the earl of Warwick

[42] William Yates, *A Map of Warwickshire* (Warwick, 1793).
[43] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 254-7; British Library, Harleian MS 422 fo. 59 [*L&P*, v.4, pt. 1, 1743]; British Library, Cotton Titus B/I fo.81 [*L&P*, v.4, pt. 1, 1568]; Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire, c 4 fo. 16v; *Leet Book*, pp. 679-80.
[44] Ethan Shagan, 'The Two Republics : Conflicting Views of Participatory Local Government in Early Tudor England' in John McDiarmid (ed.), *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 28.
[45] Roger Manning, *Village Revolts : Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640* (Oxford, 1988) pp.137-9; Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, 59:1 (1973). pp. 51-91.
[46] *Leet Book*, pp. 792-3.

leased the park of Cheylesmore to the corporation, which was transformed into a grant in fee-farm in 1568.[47] This acquisition eased some of the pressure on the common land. Nevertheless, throughout the sixteenth century the corporation constantly reconfigured the rules controlling the common land-holding to meet the needs of the city, in terms of food and fuel, and the demands of different interest groups. In 1543 the Leet court forbade citizens from grazing sheep on the commons and dealt with the butchers' demands for privileged access to grazing lands.[48] More serious alterations to the regulations had been made in 1538 when the Leet ordered that a certain proportion of the common land was to be held in severalty and enclosed. This measure was reversed in 1548; however, the enclosures were reinstated in 1557 along the same lines the 1538 act.[49] This may seem a confused and contradictory policy motivated by self-interest, factional politics or financial concerns. Yet, apart from periodic interruptions, the council moved steadily towards a system in which more of the common land was enclosed and rented out to Coventry's citizens.

Co-opting the language of the earlier protests, at an elite level, an act of 1538 argued from the communal principle that the commons should provide a 'universall profite and commoditie' for all citizens. Not all of the citizens had cattle which grazed on the commons. Therefore, the corporation proposed that renting out some of the land, the profit to be delivered to the 'common box', was fairer and accorded with the traditional principles of civic government which prized 'auncient orders and good custumes' as well as the promotion of the commonweal.[50] The act of 1538 granted the citizens a degree of authority over the common lands. It allowed the 'ten men', as head of the 10 wards of the city, to appoint a further 10 men from each ward to oversee the rents obtained from the commons. This paralleled the 50 Coventry citizens who had, in previous years, ridden out on Lammas day, with the chamberlains, to open the breaches in the walls which allowed cattle onto

[47] *Selected List of Charters and Other Evidences Belonging to the Corporation of Coventry*, ed., John Featherstone (Coventry, 1871).pp. 5-8; CRO BA/G/1/25/1 fo. 41r.
[48] *Leet Book*, pp. 769,792.
[49] *Leet Book*, pp. 728-38; CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A 14 a] fo. 10r-15v.
[50] *Leet Book*, p. 730.

the common. Communal cooperation, for the public good, was created by the civic elite to encourage citizens of Coventry to act for the common profit of the city.

The city reversed some of its previous enclosures in 1548, when 90 of the enclosed closes were again thrown open to common pasture. However, during the 1550s, the city was faced by an increase in the numbers of the poor requiring charitable relief to survive. Consequently, on 19 November 1555, the mayor's council resolved to 'make some p[r]oysion for relieff of the poore and avoid... va[g]abondes'.[51] In 1557 the enclosures were reinstated by another act of Leet which restored the system first tried in 1538.[52] The 'ten men' were also placed in charge of a scheme which allowed land in the Cheylesmore Park to be tilled and sown with rye to be sold 'to the co[m]ens and poor of this citie... under the ^ co[m]en p[ri]ce in the m[ar]ket iiijd in ev[er]y shelyng'.[53] This money, as well as that gained from the rents of the commons, was to be used in 'bying of stockkes of corne or woll' to feed impotent poor and to see 'lustye people kept in worke'.[54] The driving force behind this change was the immediate crisis in the city during the 1550s. This time, in 1557, the rhetoric accompanying the act was not simply humanist or 'traditional' but displayed a discernible concern for classical republican values.[55] The preamble to the 1557 act began by encouraging men to serve both 'god and.. ther countrey', which could be achieved by working for the 'hono[r] and glorie of the oon/ And the welthe [and] comoditie of the other'. The act depicted the quasi-contractual arrangement existing between freemen and the urban elite. In exchange for following the rules set by the city and the craft companies and trading within a regulated environment, freemen could expect certain rights and protections. They had the right to see their trading interests safeguarded, as well as certain privileges, such as the education afforded to them by the 'free' school and the use of the loan monies.[56] During hard times they could expect the charitable indulgence of their craft guild. In return, the citizens were expected to come together

[51] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14a] fo. 10r.
[52] Ibid fo. 15v.
[53] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 3r.
[54] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 3r.
[55] Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism And Republicanism In English Political Thought 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 54-118.
[56] Barry, 'Civility and Civic Culture' (Oxford, 2000), p. 189.

to provide common solutions to civic problems including the poverty that was rife in the city during the 1550s and which must have seemed threatening and dangerous. Describing this obligation, the act indulged in an extended metaphor in which citizens were 'bounden as the naturall chyldrur[n] unto ther mother' to a city which 'kepeth... and carefully defendeth us'. It was 'an unkynde cityene yee no cityene in deide' who could not see that the reciprocal duty he owed towards the '^city ~~com[on]onwelthe~~' (the clerk, Thomas Gregory, could not decide which word to use) required him to work for the health and prosperity of the urban community which included dealing with poverty.[57] Finally with the assent of the mayor, John Nethermill, and the agreement of the mayor's council, the act was put into force.[58] For all its fine rhetorical and classical overlays the act was designed to reassure citizens and freemen that their position in civic society would be safeguarded throughout a troubling and destabilising period during which their rights to common pasture were encroached upon. Mindful of the riots of 1525, the civic elite sought to project a harmonious vision of civic life and politics. Sublimating individual desires to the promotion of the common good of the city, the measure was designed to prevent division and faction in civic government, and also to eliminate discord and the lawless desires of the mob.[59] In many ways this was a traditional way of conceiving of the mutual duties of citizens and the body politic. These complex ideas were used to justify methods of solving civic problems because they melded well with the traditional moral ideas of the urban community. In trying to define a citizen in terms of the wealth that they contributed to the city, the act drew a picture of civic virtue in terms of what the individual could contribute to the commonweal.

As well as the provisions of the act, which sought to alleviate poverty by obtaining income and grain from the common land, the act of 1557 also attacked the practices of the craft companies. Echoing the rhetoric of the 1530s, which decried the money spent on civic entertainments, the act argued that the 'pou[ver]tie of the city is great & yet nev[er]theles dyv[er]s vayne thynges rather

[57] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 1v.
[58] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14 a] fo. 15v.
[59] Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, ii, pp. 24-6.

for pleasure then otherwise [are] still menteyned' by the companies.[60] As the costs of civic entertainments were great, the corporation ordered that the playing of the pageants should be 'for this yere emytted' and levied fines from each of the companies to pay for repairs to civic property.[61] It is probable that it was not puritan religious scruples that formed much of the objection to civic pageantry. Instead, it was a sober civic spirit, bred from traditional ideas of duty and service to the city, which eventually made ceremony and the pageants objectionable. The increasingly utilitarian spirit present in Coventry, inspired by attempts to find solutions to urban moral problems such as disease, dearth and poverty, began to make civic pageantry seem like a waste of urban resources. Rather than reinforcing the political culture of the city, civic ceremony and its accompanying entertainments now seemed an unnecessary distraction from charitable projects. The act also made provision for the employment of three priests, attached to the two parish churches and the church of the White Friars, to be paid for by money levied from the craft guilds.[62] Through this action the city associated their measures to relieve poverty with an attempt to achieve a more general religious and moral renewal and accord with the stated aim of advancing 'godes hono[r]'.[63] The civic elite envisaged the solution to the problems of poverty emerging from a recalibration of civic virtues. It is possible that the evangelical figures in civic government such as John Nethermill, the mayor in 1557, and others in his council, also intended some subtle manipulation of confessional identities through the ability to select and appoint their own ministers. Despite the arrest of Coventry citizens like John Careless and the flight of men such as Richard Hopkins, the sheriff of Coventry, the evangelical grouping seems to have remained strong during this time. Aldermen on the Leet court in 1557, such as Thomas Riley and William Smallwood as well as the town clerk, Thomas Gregory, supported the Protestant cause. However, although the act may reveal a confessional bias, its civic language deliberately resulted in a document designed to be conciliatory and unifying. This language helped avoid division over poor relief and resulted in policies that could be applied consistently in the sixteenth century. In 1596

[60] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 2r.
[61] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 3r.
[62] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 4r.
[63] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 4r.

and again during the 1630s, rye was sown on the common land in an attempt to alleviate grain shortages, as it had been in the 1550s.[64] The political ideology present in Coventry during the early parts of the century set a pattern for charitable provision.

These ideas were continued throughout a period of institutional reform. After the dissolutions, the civic elite made a concerted effort to take the city's almshouses into the corporation's hands. Of the city's three almshouses, two were obtained by the corporation, after the chantries acts confiscated land dedicated to intercessory purposes. Ford's almshouse, also known as the Grey Friar's almshouse, founded in 1529, and re-endowed by the Leicester merchant William Wigston, continued to be administered by the city.[65] Bond's almshouse, in Hill Street, was the focus of a lengthy and expensive battle, between the corporation of Coventry and Thomas Bond, the grandson of the original founder, who disputed his father's will.[66] A parliamentary attempt was made to retain the house in 1549; however, the case was eventually resolved in favour of the corporation in 1552 by a suit in the Court of Chancery.[67] Subsequently, the almshouse and its endowment were included in the purchase of lands made that year by the city in the Court of Augmentations.[68] In 1554 they were extensively repaired.[69] Obtaining civic lands was undoubtedly important to the continuing power and prestige of the civic elite. However, the corporation did not wish to simply restore these facets of charitable provision to their pre-Reformation state, but wished to incorporate them into their existing provisions. Although institutional poor relief was only a small part of the corporation's charitable efforts, the structural changes of the Reformation, and the increase in the power of the elite, exposed private charitable endowments to an ideology of civic governance which was already very much in evidence in Coventry from the early part of the sixteenth century.

[64] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 [A14 a] fo. 83v.
[65] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 3r-15v.
[66] CRO BA/D/4/1/1-3.
[67] TNA: PRO C1/1209/52, PRO C1/1471/10-14; *Journal of the House of Commons, Volume 1, 1547-1629* (London, 1802), p. 5.
[68] SBTRO DR10/1859 fo. 8r-11v.
[69] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Edward VI 1550-1553* (6 vols., London, 1924-9), iv, pp.337-43.

The city's attitude towards the poor was demonstrated in 1521, before the first Henrician vagrancy act of 1536, when the Leet court ordered that every alderman in his ward was to issue badges of 'the signe of the Olyfaunt', part of the city's coat of arms, to the impotent poor, which licensed them to beg within the confines of the city.[70] In the 1520s the civic elite were already making the sort of division between the deserving and undeserving poor that was common during the latter part of the sixteenth century, especially in other urban jurisdictions.[71] Later, the corporation attempted to further categorise the urban poor in one of the first great civic surveys of the poor in England. An act of Leet, in 1547, called for a survey to be made which counted the number of poor householders in each of Coventry's ten wards and ordered the aldermen to punish vagrants in their wards, or banish them from the city. Clothiers receiving charitable loan money from the corporation were also instructed to employ the poor in spinning and weaving.[72] This was not simply the articulation of a negative ideology. The idea that the poor should be provided with the work that would make them a contributing part of the civic body was central to the political philosophy of the city. In 1552, a commission granted to the mayor of Coventry, Richard Hurt, empowered him to use the money from the fee farm of the city to aid the employment of the poor and repair civic property.[73] As has been discussed, the 1557 act of Leet made provision for wool to be purchased, from money obtained from renting the common lands, and in 1563, in the furtherance of this act, £30 was spent 'to sett the poore on worke'.[74] By these measures, the 1557 act of Leet advanced a specifically commonwealth programme of poor relief in which the impotent were given charitable payments and poor and honest householders were provided with work. This enabled even the poorest to contribute to civic life by virtuous labour towards the commonweal, which was the mark of a true citizen. At the philosophical level, for the civic elite, dealing with the poor was as much about preventing dissent within the civic body, by bringing the poor within a band of sanctioned and civil behaviour than about simply dealing with a problem of disorder and

[70] *Leet Book*, p. 677.
[71] Steve Hindle, 'Civility, Honesty and the Identification of the Deserving Poor in Seventeenth Century England', in Henry French and Jonathan Barry (eds.), *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1994), pp. 38-55.
[72] *Leet Book*, p. 785.
[73] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Edward VI 1550-1553* (6 vols., London, 1924-9), iv, p. 432.
[74] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 1r-4r; CRO BA/H/3/20/2, p. 3.

poverty through punishment. By the mid-sixteenth century these methods of poor relief were already well established, independently of governmental intervention.

During the mid-century period the civic elite decided that its newly acquired almshouses were to fit in with this pattern of provision. As well as humanist and classical inspirations for charitable ideologies, the civic elite also looked to other archetypes, such as the city of London, to guide their own poor relief schemes. Again, the city utilised a successful parliamentary campaign to secure access to charitable resources. During the parliament of 1563, Coventry's MPs successfully lobbied for special provision to be made for the city in the poor relief act which ordered the appointment of collectors for the poor in each corporate town or rural parish. In a special exemption granted to Coventry the poor rate was to be paid to the 'the Goveno[r]... of the hospital of poor people', selected by the mayor and aldermen.[75] The stipulation regarding Coventry mirrored the provisions made for London, in which the money collected in poor rates was to be delivered to the governor of Christ's Hospital. The MPs for Coventry in that year were Thomas Dudley, a local gentleman, and Richard Grafton, a printer and chronicler who had been one of the founders and first treasurer of the London hospitals and the Bridewell.[76] Both had connections with Lord Robert Dudley, who often influenced the city's choice of MPs, as well as civic officers, in midland towns such as Coventry and Warwick.[77] However, it would be wrong to think that this left Coventry with MPs who were simply Leicester's retainers, poorly qualified to understand the needs of the corporation. Grafton received a substantial payment from the city, in 'rewarde for his paynes taken at the p[ar]liam[en]t', and it is more than likely that he had a hand in promoting and drafting the poor relief act dealing with Coventry.[78] Moves towards these forms of urban poor relief were partly the result of an energetic elite Protestant culture and the networks of influence that this generated.[79] Many of the men behind such policies, including Grafton and many of the

[75] *The Statutes of The Realm*, iv, p.414.
[76]John A. Kingdon, *Richard Grafton Citizen and Grocer* (London, 1901), pp. 119-21; Carol Manzione, *Christ's Hospital of London, 1552-1598* (London, 1995), pp. 25-38.
[77] Adams, 'The Dudley Clientele and the House of Commons, 1559-1586', p. 225.
[78] CRO BA/H/3/20/2 p. 12.
[79] A.L Beier, 'Foucault Redux?: The Roles of Humanism, Protestantism and an Urban Elite in Creating the London Bridewell, 1500-1560' in Louis A. Knafla (ed.), *Crime, Gender and Sexuality in Criminal Prosecutions*, *Criminal Justice History*, 17 (Westport, 2002), pp.33-60; Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Poor Relief,

civic elite in Coventry, were committed evangelicals. Moreover, it is likely that reformed preachers in Coventry encouraged the development of new attitudes to pre-Reformation institutions. Thomas Lever, preaching in 1550, typified these new Protestant concerns regarding the nature of poverty and sin. He castigated the civic elite of London for their misuse of monastic wealth and evoked the duties of magistrates amongst the community of Christ when he argued that the poor were 'members of the same bodye' and that 'One member ought to be provided for, as a nother'. On another occasion he attacked the city's elders for their failure to prevent vagrancy.[80] Lever was present in Coventry in the late 1550s and early 1560s, as civic preacher and then archdeacon of the city, and it is likely that his preaching followed some of the same themes.[81] Reformed evangelical thought brought a moral and religious aspect to ideas centred on the charitable behaviour of the civic elite; however, the new Protestant preachers also had prominent urban concerns which became part of their invective against sin. In this way it was possible for religious figures to share in the traditional idea of urban society as an organic body. It is easy to see how the attitudes of preachers such as Lever could contribute to the promotion of urban projects and concepts of civic virtue.

As well as being part of the Protestant elite and sharing Lever's concerns, Richard Grafton's manifestly civic agenda fitted nicely with that of Coventry's elite. The provisions of the act displayed an attempt to follow London's recipe for charitable provision, as well as traditional civic principles and attitudes to the poor built up over the previous decades in Coventry. According to Grafton's abridgement of chronicles, published before the parliamentary session in 1563, poor relief in London was based upon a division into 'three degrees of poore people' for which the aldermen 'erected iii hospitals' in 1552. St Thomas's Hospital was for the old and sick, Christ's Hospital for children and the Bridewell for the 'sturdy vagabond'. Grafton's justification for this method of poor relief also accorded with the objectives and ideology of Coventry's civic elite.

Humanism and Heresy' in Natalie Zemon Davis (ed.), *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford 1975), pp. 17-64.

[80] Thomas Lever, *Sermons, 1550*, ed. E. Arber (English Reprints, 5, 1570), p. 37.

[81] TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 82v; *The Zurich Letters*, ed. Hastings Robinson (2 vols. Parker Soc., 50-51, 1842-5), i, p. 86, xxxv.

Displaying a characteristic humanist sentiment, he argued that a hospital for children would 'nouryshe the... chylde in some good learning and ecercise, profitable to the common weale'.[82] Indeed, the idea that the city should 'nourish' its poor inhabitants, thereby turning them into citizens, seemed to reflect the language of the 1557 act of Leet for the relief of the poor in Coventry.[83] The civic elite used their connections to provide themselves with MPs and preachers who understood and sympathised with their approach to civic poor relief and could help them to further their cause in parliament. Townsmen were using a common civic philosophy to drive the development of national political thought in the pursuit of their own objectives.

Although a complete system of poor relief did not come into being until the 1570s, the efforts of the civic elite continued to build up charitable institutions throughout the next decade. The site of Bond's almshouse, at a site known as Bablake on the corner of Hill Street and Spon Street, behind the former collegiate church of St John's, became the focus for the aldermen's new charitable ideas, informed by civic practice in London.[84] In the early 1560s a hospital for boys was founded on the same site and extensively endowed through the will of Thomas Wheatley, an ironmonger and card-maker, who had been mayor of Coventry in 1556, and was later feted by the aldermen who added his painting to the corporation's collection.[85] In 1570, using the influence of the earl of Leicester, the corporation obtained a licence to hold lands in mortmain to the value of £100 for the maintenance of the Bablake Hospital and the relief of the poor.[86] Further to this, in 1570, a Bridewell was founded at Bablake, and apart from an interruption due to the plague in the 1570s, the institution operated continuously during the sixteenth century.[87] In 1580 the corporation appointed George Baker, a master draper, to be head of the Bridewell with the aim that the cloth made by the inmates would allow the house to become independent of civic funding. In the early seventeenth century the master of the Bridewell, who was paid a salary by the corporation, had

[82] Richard Grafton, *An Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* (London, 1562), STC (2nd ed.) / 12148 fo. 148v-9r.
[83] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 1r-4r.
[84] CRO BA/D/8/17/1-2.
[85] TNA PRO PROB 11/49 (Thomas Wheatley, 1567); Robert Tittler, *The Face of the City: Civic Portraiture and Civic Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007), p. 173.
[86] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Elizabeth I 1558-1582* (9 vols., London, 1939), v, p.362; CRO BA/D/4/25/1.
[87] MS Top Warwickshire d.4 fo. 20v; CRO BA/H/3/20/1 p. 37; CRO BA/H/3/20/2 p. 37.

responsibility for looking after inmates and their children.[88] Despite the novel nature of these institutions and their reflection of metropolitan civic culture, the aldermen of Coventry had already developed strands of political thought which sought to discriminate between different forms of urban poverty. This discrimination was based on the new understanding of the role of the citizen as someone who contributed to civic society, or had shown themselves worthy of the city's protection. The vagabond was not merely a nuisance to the city, but fell outside these idealised descriptions of the citizen. Through these institutions, and their accompanying ideas, the poor were increasingly conceptually divided from ordinary urban society.

Other evidence for the punishment of poor offenders in Coventry during this period is scant; a cuckstool was erected in the city in 1552 and as with most civic jurisdictions the chamberlains maintained a set of stocks.[89] However, it is notable that the desire to set the poor to work was not inextricably linked to a philosophy of punishment inside institutions like the Bridewell. The main thrust of this effort was intended to help poor and honest householders fulfil their civic duty through their industry. Indeed this had been part of civic political thought in the city since at least the 1530s. Humphrey Reynolds, a yeoman and citizen of Coventry, presented a long supplication to the king in 1538 providing his own solutions to urban problems. Reynolds's rhetoric has been portrayed as self-interested, and in considerable part a product of his own disillusionment with civic politics and failure to progress upwards through the hierarchy of civic life during the 1530s.[90] Yet, his attitudes to the poor were indicative of the city's own poverty and economic difficulties. Reynolds complained that 'wee have many poor folke and vagabondes'; however, 'Where as actes be made to punishe vagabondages it were expedient to fynde a meanes/ How they myght be set to worke'.[91] He also complained of the avarice of the gentry, suggesting that it was their greed which had acted to unbalance the civic body; a view that would become common in the 1550s.[92] Through his plea to the king, he promoted the provision of work for the poor as part of a plan for the

[88] CRO BA/H/9/14/1-3.
[89] CRO BA/A/1/23/3 pp. 223, 226, 229.
[90] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 258-62.
[91] TNA PRO SP 1/141 fo. 55r [*L&P*, v. 13, pt. 2, 394].
[92] *The Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, ed. G. E. Corrie (Parker Soc. xvi, London, 1844), pp. 247-8.

economic renewal of the city. By the 1550s Reynolds himself had seen his political career in civic life comprehensively rehabilitated with positions in civic office and the Drapers' Company.[93] His religious beliefs now fitted well with the evangelical grouping which dominated the city's government from the early 1550s and he was close to those men who drafted the 1557 act of Leet.[94] The institutions in Coventry, set up to deal with endemic urban poverty, reflected the tradition of civic political rhetoric that he played a part in creating.

Bequests to the poor, in a private capacity, followed the same unwritten rules and stipulations as the urban government and betrayed the same concerns as the civic elite. Giving to the poor, in Coventry, was at no point sufficiently indiscriminate to provide the contrast between pre-Reformation and post-Reformation giving that some historians have suggested. Throughout the early modern period many men and women who gave money to the poor trusted the instincts of their executors and overseers, or the parish priest or curate, with the question of who should be the object of their charity.[95] Others sought to perpetuate the relationships that they had built up in civic society, giving money to their poor neighbours, or the poor of the city in their street or ward.[96] This maintained the social links present in civic society and underscored some of the traditional duty felt towards the poorer members of the urban community. The Coventry priest, William Godfrey, dying in 1551, gave money only to the poor people he knew and had been accustomed to give a weekly dole.[97] Members of the civic elite, such as Margery Nethermill, widow of Julian Nethermill, who had been amongst the wealthiest Coventry merchants, left money to 'to such poore house holders as are no comon beggers'.[98] The witnesses of her will were Protestant evangelicals, such as John Careles, Richard Hopkins, Nicholas Hopkins, Thomas Riley, Thomas Gregory and her son John Nethermill; however, the will also contained the names of religiously conservative aldermen at the centre of civic government, such as Christopher Warren. The presence of members of this evangelical elite civic grouping during the making of wills seems to

[93] CRO PA154 fo. 28r; *Leet Book*, pp. 765,788,790,795,796,800,803.
[94] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 59r.
[95] LRO B/C/11 (Coventry Wills, 1520-1580; Aawood-Yardley).
[96] LRO B/C/11 (John Anthony 1558, Richard Arneway 1558, Clemence Rytton 1558, John Stafford 1540).
[97] LRO B/C/11 (William Godfrey 1551).
[98] LRO B/C/11 (Margery Nethermill 1551).

have led to many elite testators to prioritise contemporary civic concerns in their bequests. John Chamber's will of 1550, which was witnessed by the preacher of St Michael's and humanist schoolmaster, Leonard Cox, as well as the alderman William Bayley, bequeathed money to 'my poore spynneers and knytters and to such as they shall know[n] to be neady in trade and willing to worke if they weer able'.[99] These bequests displayed the belief that only the industrious poor should be in receipt of civic charity and showed a keen awareness of the views and beliefs of the civic elite. In this context, giving was defined by the social interaction of the testator at the end of their life. The closer that the individual will-maker was to the political culture of civic government then the more likely they were to express the immediate concerns and priorities of the corporation. There were also notable changes in patterns of giving due to the effects of the Reformation and the abandonment of the doctrine of purgatory.[100] However, bequests to charity tended to follow a common urban ethos. Charitable giving played a part in forming a specifically urban identity in the individual. It was self-interested in that it marked the giver out as a citizen who had fulfilled their charitable duty and in return was owed the protection of the city and the urban community. Even in death charity had the ability to raise the status of the individual and their family's standing within the urban community. For the majority of testators, civic culture and morality, as well as the possibilities presented by the new civic institutions, guided their view of post-mortem bequests.

Will-makers in Coventry seemed to gain confidence in the new civic and charitable institutions because of the backing of the civic elite. During the 1550s and 1560s the re-founded almshouses and the hospital for boys gained in popularity amongst Coventry testators. The hospital for boys, at Bablake, was particularly popular amongst elite will-makers who gave to these institutions in the form of one-off payments and bequests of money, but also in houses and land which added to the original endowments.[101] Testators were responsive to the development of new charitable

[99] LRO B/C/11 (John Chambers 1551).
[100] Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 93-124.
[101] LRO B/C/11 (Charles Bruche 1543, Richard Arneway 1558, Roger Bromwych 1545, Thomas Corbeyn 1551, John Gardener 1559, John Hyndman 1564, Elizabeth Roo 1563, John Richardson 1562, John Rawton 1561, Alice Saunders 1568, Robert Walker 1556); TNA PRO PROB 11/47 (Edward Waltropp 1564); TNA PRO PROB 11/48 (Nicholas Hopkus [Hopkins] 1566); TNA PRO PROB 11/49 (Thomas Wheatley 1567); TNA PRO PROB 11/49 (Henry Waver 1567); Steve Hindle, 'Good, Godly and Charitable Uses': Endowed

institutions and priorities as well as religious change. Most took notice of the provision of poor boxes in the city's parish churches, during Edward's reign; substituting the money customarily given to their 'mother church', or the altars in the parish churches, for small payments made to the parish fund.[102] Providing loan money to the young men of the city, through bequests, was increasingly popular, and a good way of perpetuating the post mortem virtue and fame of the donor.[103] These bequests were well within the idea of mutual duty expected of men who had gained wealth through charitable loans. [104] Indeed, the attention to contemporary civic concerns did not obliterate the old tradition of charitable giving. As well as a focus on values like *honestas,* desirable amongst poor recipients of charity, the most common stipulation made for money given to the poor during this period was that it should go to those most deprived of food and fuel, where there was 'moste pety and nede'.[105] Despite the fact that the poor ceased to be the focus of intercessory bequests, they still took part in funerals and received doles, as they were a necessary part of the civic community which required representation. Although some testators reflected the immediate humanist concerns of civic governance during the 1550s, there was a broad spectrum of attitudes when it came to making provision for the poor in a will. This reflected a wide range of acceptable civic behaviour and the evolving and changing nature of urban political culture at different levels of society.

The third pre-Reformation charitable institution in Coventry, St John's almshouse, was transformed into a grammar school following the grant of its landed endowment to the humanist reformer, John Hales.[106] On the surface, given the civic elite's concentration on schemes for urban improvement, the plan to create a grammar school from the lands and endowment of the almshouse should have been supported by the aldermen. However, the Trinity guild had maintained a school for the citizens before the Reformation, and the dissolution of the guild effectively took

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Charity and the Relief of Poverty in Rural England, c. 1550-1750', in Anne Goldgar and Robert Frost (eds.) *Institutional Culture in Early Modern Society* (Leiden, 2004), pp.164-88.
[102] Mary Dewar, 'The Authorship of the 'Discourse of the Commonweal', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1966), pp. 388-400.
[103] CRO BA/D/BL/1/1-2 [Corporation Loan Books].
[104] *Leet Book*, p. 785.
[105] LRO B/C/11 (Henry Lyngham 1553).
[106] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 163; CRO BA/A/1/7/1 fo. 4r.

educational provision out of the hands of the townsmen and turned educational provision into Hales's private fiefdom. His purchase of the lands of the White Friars, along with its church, in which the grammar school was situated during the 1550s, frustrated the plans of the corporation to found a third parochial church in the city.[107] With the city's acquisition of the church at the White Friars, the school was forced to move to St John's almshouse. Moreover, Hales's possession of lands in Coventry came to be seen as a direct attack on the authority and jurisdiction of the corporation. The civic elite were not satisfied with the matter until the remaining land, given to Hales in a grant from the Court of Augmentations, had been purchased by the city in 1575 and some of the tithes owed to the city had been recovered.[108] The failure to endow the new school properly, as opposed to paying a yearly stipend, which was the practice that Hales followed in his lifetime, was also of considerable concern to the aldermen and council. This practice put the entire institution on an uncertain footing until 1580 when the establishment of the school was confirmed by act of parliament.[109] These are only the most obvious sources of tension, but there may even have been others. The set of Coventry annals, attributed to Hales, surviving in a seventeenth century copy made by Sir Simon Archer, contains contemporary entries for the late 1540s and early 1550s. The removal of the enclosures, and the opening of all of the city's land to common in 1547, are praised by Hales in the document. [110] This was hardly surprising given his other writings and official involvement with the enclosure commissions during Edward's reign. Yet, it does suggest that he might have taken an interest in civic policy, and the corporation's attitudes and programme of poor relief, which would have jarred with the city's desire for self-governance and their later moves towards more enclosure of the common.

Despite the tension between the corporation and Hales over the endowment and running of the school, his interest in education in the city provided notable benefits to the corporation and its ability to deal with urban problems. In this sense Hales's goals were in tune with those of the

[107] TNA PRO SP1/136 fo. 161 [*L&P*, v. 13, pt. 2, 394]; TNA PRO SP1/137 fo. 238 [*L&P*, v. 13, pt 2, 650]; TNA PRO SP1/138 fo. 45 [*L&P*, v. 13, pt. 11, 719]; TNA PRO SP1/152 fo. 210 [*L&P*, v. 14, pt 1, 394].
[108] CRO PA 96/12/1/2; CRO BA/H/17/A79/68B; CRO BA/H/C/17/1 fol 73v-r [Mayor's Council Book].
[109] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, pp. 164-5.
[110] SBRO DR37/2/123/7 fo. 15r-24r.

corporation and he attracted men to the city who had similar civic concerns. In 1549 he was responsible for the humanist Leonard Cox's presence in Coventry, where he was a preacher at St Michael's church in the city. Cox was also listed as a master of the free school later in the sixteenth century; part of a tradition which says that he taught at the grammar school in Coventry.[111] He had been master of the grammar school in Reading during the 1540s, and was present in Coventry during the early 1550s, during which time he held a licence to preach. [112] In 1549 he also published a new edition of his translation of Erasmus's paraphrase of St Paul's epistle to Titus, including a dedication to John Hales.[113] Therefore, it is hard not to believe that Hales had instigated his appointment, as preacher of St Michael's, with the specific intention that he would be master of the free school. In ensuring this appointment, Hales provided a resource for the growing Protestant community within the civic elite. The patterns of thought shown by men like Leonard Cox were entirely consistent with civic culture and politics in Coventry, and Cox was an early imbiber of reformed religious ideas as well as humanist opinions. He had lectured at the University of Krakow in the 1520s, where he was a noted admirer of Erasmus. Cox's *Arte and Crafte of Rhethoryke*, aimed specifically at the young, was also heavily influenced by Philip Melanchthon's writing on the subject.[114] In 1540 he was working on another larger book on rhetoric that was to have been dedicated to his patron, Thomas Cromwell.[115] The corporation recognised the value of education in dealing with contemporary urban concerns. It was this recognition which would eventually result in a measure of support for the school, despite the fact that its foundation had caused diminution in the city's immediate capacity for institutionalised poor relief.

Cox's interest in rhetoric prefigured many other English works on rhetoric, designed to teach the principles of disputation to the students of the new schools. The grammar schools, such as the free school in Coventry, were mainly dedicated to the teaching of Latin and classical languages, for

[111] Thomas Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica* (London, 1784), p. 205.
[112] SBTRO DR37/2/123/7 fo. 24r; LRO B/C/11 (Thomas Corbeyn 1552).
[113] J. M. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford, 1965) p. 247; Leonard Cox, *The Paraphrase of Erasm[us] Roterdame vpon [the] Epistle of Sai[n]t Paule vnto his Discyple Titus* (London, 1535), STC (2nd ed.) / 10503.
[114] Henryk Zins, 'A British Humanist and the University of Krakow at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century: A Chapter in Anglo-Polish Relations in the Age of the Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies*, 8:1 (1994), pp. 13-39.
[115] TNA PRO SP1/160 fo. 63 [*L&P*, v.15, 706];TNA PRO SP1/159 fo. 159 [*L&P*, v.15, 614].

which John Hales wrote his own text, the *Introductiones ad grammaticum.* Yet works commonly possessed by schools, like the series of dialogues, *Exercitatio linguae Latinae*, by Vives, taught grammar through recognisable humanist forms.[116] By 1601 there was also a library in the school which allowed the acquisition of an extensive collection of works by classical authors and contemporary religious writers. The rules of the school allowed the masters to favour the sons of citizens, for whom tuition was provided free of charge. This sort of education provided some of the training required by an elite mercantile class interested in trade and absorbing reformed religious ideas.[117] Of those boys of the school that received White's scholarship to St John's College Oxford in the sixteenth century most took clerical orders; however, argument and rhetoric also remained integral parts of civic life. A basic principle of the *vita activa* was that only when wisdom was united with eloquence, through oratory, could other men be persuaded to take morally acceptable actions.[118] The conciliar style of government, present in all of the corporate towns in England, drove the need to apply the tenets of a humanist education to urban political life. The fear of division and conflict meant that the forms of persuasion were vital to a form of government which relied on the unanimous decision making of an aldermanic council. The school also began to take its own part in civic ceremony. The civic chamberlain's accounts record payments to the schoolmaster to make an oration at the school in 1574 in the presence of 'm[ast]er mair and his bretherene'. The examination of the scholars also involved the presence of civic officials.[119] The necessity of oratory, upon important civic occasions and royal visits, helped to make the school an important part in civic life and in turn the oral rhetorical style taught in schools mirrored that required in civic speech making. The corporation may have been displeased with Hales and annoyed enough to complain to the Queen during the 1560s over his appropriation of the lands and endowments of their almshouse.[120] However, the civic elite understood that education played a vital part in creating the political environment in which they lived. Although many schools

[116] Ian Green, *Humanism and Protestantism in Early Modern English Education* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 127-9.
[117] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 175.
[118] Hanna H. Gray, 'Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1963), pp. 497-514; Thomas F. Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 107.
[119] CRO BA/A/1/26/2 pp. 2-3, 12.
[120] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire c 4 fo. 22r-24v.

emerged unscathed from the turmoil of the Reformation, some of the new 'free' grammar schools experienced considerable difficulty in ever becoming fully funded institutions.[121] Yet, after Hales's death, and the act of parliament in 1580, full support for the school and its masters was forthcoming and it started to attract other charitable endowments from elite will-makers and, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, gifts of books for the newly constructed library.[122] Having lost the educational provision that the monastic institutions and guilds provided, the corporation realised the importance of the school to the freemen of the town. The provision of education was one of the rewards that the citizens and freemen expected for bearing the charges of urban charity and following the rules of civic life. The eventual support for the school was a result of the same civic and political ideology which informed attitudes to other civic problems and urban institutions.

New religious imperatives played a strong part in creating a new language for dealing with poverty in Coventry. Protestant rhetoric explained poverty as the result of the sin of poor men as well as the avarice of the governing elites. This philosophy provided a rationale for the treatment of the poor in Coventry and the creation of new civic institutions to deal with the growing number of poor in the city, particularly during the 1550s. It placed a moral duty upon the civic elite to find work for the poor and divided them by the creation of new and separate institutions to tackle poverty on a sustained basis. It is notable that in Coventry, an alliance of governing evangelicals seems to have produced most of the acts dealing with these new initiatives, backed by a strong tradition of preaching supported by civic elites. The corporation's efforts not only implied a powerful statement of self-governance, but relied upon the skilful manipulation of Protestant parliamentary and aristocratic networks. However, these new attitudes were often couched in humanist and civic language. The need to maintain a semblance of civic unity during a period of difficult religious division in the city led to the search for common intellectual values and civic beliefs. The civic elite found those values not only in an intellectual culture of civic humanism, promulgated by those educated enough to understand and use classical texts, but also in an appeal to the traditional

[121] Jay P. Anglin, 'Frustrated Ideals: The Case of Elizabethan Grammar School Foundations', *History of Education*, 11:4 (1982), pp. 267-79; Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns*, p. 133.
[122] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, pp. 172-6; TNA PRO PROB 11/42B (Richard Stanfeilde 1559); Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 4467-8 [Library Donor's Book].

virtues of civic life. Just as the citizens and freemen of Coventry were expected to support charitable efforts and deal with urban problems, in turn they expected the city to protect them from the turmoil of urban life and secure and confirm their privileged status. Unity was a much prized commodity in civic politics, and the civic elite went to great rhetorical lengths to justify their new initiatives and attitudes in terms of the unifying effect that they would have upon the city and their value to the commonweal.

5. Religion and Dispute

The arrival of revisionist historiography to the Reformation debate has heralded a re-assessment of the background to the English Reformation. It is no longer possible to understand the religious picture in English towns by plotting the evolution of a nebulous minority of proto-Protestant heretics into a coherent and popular movement, pitched against the resistant, but ultimately moribund, traditions of orthodox Catholic belief.[1] The revisionist attack has not only included a substantial reassessment of the popularity of traditional religious piety but also a new understanding of heterodox religious ideas and philosophies and their successful integration into civic life and the urban community. Coventry, with its strong centre of orthodox piety, including two large religious guilds, a monastic cathedral and houses of friars, had a particularly rich and diverse religious landscape by the end of the middle ages. It also had a considerable reputation for heterodox piety. However, there are good reasons not to construct a division of orthodox and heterodox piety in the city. Before the late 1540s, separate Protestant and Catholic identities had not been formed and historians have recently questioned the centrality of binary divisions to early modern thought and theology.[2] Moreover, religious change and the formation of religious identities were also shaped by already present civic and political identities. It was the political necessity of providing a unified civic government, and keeping relations amongst the urban elite within the limits of civic behaviour, which blunted the force of religious division amongst the townsfolk. During the tumult of the Reformation both the changes imposed centrally by the government and the gradual seepage of ideas present in European Reformation thought worked to expose the differences in late medieval practice and piety. Incidents which display the breakdown of civil language and behaviour in Coventry help to elucidate not only the principles on which civic government was based but also the way in which they modified religious disagreements.

[1] Alec Ryrie, 'Counting Sheep, Counting Shepherds: The Problem of Allegiance in the English Reformation' in Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 84-110.
[2] Ethan Shagan, 'Beyond Good and Evil: Thinking with Moderates in Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, 49:3 (2010) pp. 488-513.

The late medieval city of Coventry has become notorious, not only for the variety of orthodox piety, but also the presence and persistence of late medieval heresy. Bishop Geoffrey Blyth prosecuted Lollards in the city as late as 1522; however, the last substantial drive to uncover heresy took place from 1511-12. Despite the high number questioned during these years, and the comparative richness of evidence provided by the Lichfield Court Book, there has still been considerable debate about the degree to which Lollardy penetrated the upper ranks of the civic society.[3] Many historians have been willing to argue that the adherents to late medieval Lollardy, with some important exceptions, came from the poorer sort of people.[4] These opinions are often tied to a description of late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Lollardy as a scriptural movement which transmitted ideas through the circulation of manuscript forms within small communities of adherents. This was a movement which lost its power to provoke substantial religious change and failed to produce any major new texts or new scholarly supporters in the late medieval period.[5] Many of the instances of Lollard beliefs in late medieval Coventry appear to follow this pattern. Most of those prosecuted in Coventry during this period were poor tradesmen and artisans who possessed a few biblical principles which allowed them to form a critique of mainstream late medieval religion.[6] If Lollard heresy constituted a sect which sought to divide itself from a society that it regarded as sinful, as has often been thought, then it is difficult to understand how this heretical tradition could exist amongst the civic elite without a considerable degree of dissembling

[3] J. Fines, 'Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1511-12', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xiv (1963), pp. 160-73; J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 108-16; Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Men and Women in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 37-45; Imogen Luxton, 'The Lichfield Court Book: A Postscript', *BIHR*, 44 (1971), pp. 120-5; P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Coventry's "Lollard" Programme of 1492 and the Making of Utopia', in Rosemary Horrox and Sarah Jones (eds), *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200–1630* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 97-116.
[4] Richard Rex, *The Lollards* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 133-9; Rob Lutton, 'Connections between Lollards, Townsfolk and Gentry in Tenterden in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', in Margaret Aston and C. Richmond (eds.), *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1997); Derek Plumb, 'The Social and Economic status of the Later Lollards', in Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of the Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 103-31.
[5] Anne Hudson, *Lollards And Their Books* (London, 1985), pp. ix-x; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), p. 456; Andrew Hope, 'Lollardy: The Stone the Builders Rejected' in Peter Lake and Maria Dowling (eds.), *Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England* (London, 1987), pp. 24-6.
[6] McSheffrey and Tanner (eds.), *Lollards of Coventry, 1486-1522*, pp. 1-56.

on the part of its adherents.[7] This is especially so when the combined religious and civic ceremonies of urban life are considered. Aldermen had to attend mass in the company of the mayor and were also required, as part of their craft guild, to support masses at the guild chapel, attend the burial of their members and contribute payments towards wax for tapers and the rood light. The distribution of the 'holy-cake', to those who had not been at mass, was a city-wide activity, administered from door to door, following the same route as the watch throughout the wards.[8] Any involvement in political life in the city, as an alderman, or even simply as a freeman and citizen, required an individual to participate silently in supporting traditional religious practice, through the payments to the civic organisations that granted them their trading privilege.[9] Much of the ceremony surrounding civic life was theoretically objectionable to a group which denied the power of the priest to transform the host as well as the 'real presence' during the mass. The supposed fixed nature of Lollard beliefs remains open to question. The participation of the civic elite in forms of collective religious behaviour meant that, either the civic elite were not Lollards, or Lollardy had a more flexible creed than has sometimes been accepted by historians. This flexibility might have allowed its adherents to fulfil the duties of civic and parish functionaries, as late medieval Lollards have been shown to do in the role of churchwardens.[10] However, there is little evidence from the Coventry prosecutions in 1511, that elite men and officeholders took part in any of the Lollard conventicles. What contact there was between the civic elite and poorer Lollards appears to have been marginal. Although the patterns of elite piety allowed for much variation in beliefs and practice, resulting in distinct religious traditions, elite beliefs in Coventry did not seem to be deviant, unusual or heretical.

Aldermen were more likely to ignore these slight differences in religious opinion, in pursuit of collective political unity, mindful that they needed to prevent disorder within the city. As a

[7] Margaret Aston, 'Were the Lollards a Sect?', in Peter Biller and Richard Dobson (eds.), *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life* (Studies in Church History, Subsidia, 11, Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 164-5.
[8] *Leet Book*, pp. 669, 680, 793; CRO PA154 pp. 5-20 [Drapers' Accounts, Transcript]; CRO PA 3 fo. 191r-164r [Carpenters' Accounts]; CRO PA1494/20 fo. 44r-66r [Cappers' Accounts]; PA100/17/1 fo. 2r-35r [Weavers' Accounts].
[9] John Craig, 'Co-operation and Initiatives: Elizabethan Churchwardens and the Parish Accounts of Mildenhall', *Social History*, 18 (1993), pp. 357-80.
[10] R.G. Davies, 'Lollardy and locality', *T.R.H.S.*, (6th ser., vol. 1 1991), p. 206.

consequence there are very few incidents of men and women being exposed to ecclesiastical sanction by their orthodox neighbours in the early sixteenth century. Prosecution of elite men and women for heresy was almost as rare, but the diocesan records do provide information on elite piety in Coventry. Only at the very edges is there evidence of elite involvement in Lollardy. As the record of the Lichfield Court Book shows, high status women, such Joan Coke and Alice Rowley, both wives of former mayors, admitted to teaching heretical beliefs and were found to have been reading vernacular scripture to others within the Lollard conventicles in Coventry in 1511.[11] As women, they were less subject to the dictates of elite civic behaviour and were more able to contravene the rules of their society, which included consorting with poorer men and women as well as breaking religious taboos. It may be significant that Rowley's husband had died in 1506 leaving her free from any compulsion to follow the orthodox example displayed by him in his will.[12] As elite townsfolk, they were also unusually well equipped to deal with the requirements of supporting their co-religionists, and literacy amongst this group was extremely high.[13]

This is probably the point at which differences between traditional and heretical beliefs tend to become unhelpful. The distinction between the behaviour of committed Lollards and the traditionally pious was not always obvious, even to contemporaries.[14] There were discernable and different religious movements within the civic elite, tied to association between the aldermen, but not necessarily beliefs that could be defined as heretical. At the heart of civic government, William Banwell, Thomas Bond, William Pisford and Richard Coke and others formed a group of friends which was active in political life around 1500; a fact shown by their business dealings.[15] These men also shared common devotional practices. Richard Coke, mayor in 1486, possessed a copy of the *Vita Christi* and two English bibles, one of which he bequeathed to the Trinity Church in

[11] McSheffrey and Tanner (eds.), *Lollards of Coventry, 1486-1522*, p. 102, 106, 107, 110, 116 123-4, 125, 130; LRO B/C/13 fo. 2r, 6v, 8r. [Lichfield Court Book].
[12] TNA PRO PROB 11/15 (William Rowley 1506).
[13] McSheffrey and Tanner (eds.), *Lollards of Coventry, 1486-1522*, pp. 41-5.
[14] Richard Rex, 'Which is Wyche? Lollardy and Sanctity in Lancastrian London', Thomas Freeman and Thomas Mayer, *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c.1400-1700* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 88-106.
[15] TNA PRO PROB 11/15 (William Rowley 1506, Thomas Clerk 1506, James Preston 1507, Thomas Bonde 1507, Richard Cooke 1507, William Forth [Ford] 1508); CRO PA54/286/11; CRO PA54/286/15; CRO BA/B/16/344/4; CRO BA/A/2/60/3; CRO BA/D/11/4/7; SBTRO DR10/401.

Coventry.[16] The aldermen displayed a move towards a biblical religious devotion, promoted by vernacular scripture and traditional pious books. In the late middle ages some elite groups, such as those in Coventry, practiced an increasingly christocentric piety evidenced by the rise of Jesus guilds and altars and the decline of the local saints' cults.[17] Although this did not make them heretics it did tend to foster links between the civic elite and Lollard groups. Thomas Ford, a grocer and alderman, lent his copy of the Old Testament to the wife of Thomas Trussell, who confessed to its possession in 1511. Ford might never have realised that she was part of a heretical network. While the possession of works of vernacular scripture tended to provoke suspicion, elite men, monastic institutions and priests managed to own Wycliffite bibles without prosecution.[18] Other men and women in Coventry who abjured in 1511 also argued that Richard Coke and William Banwell, a wealthy member of the Mercers' company, as well as Thomas Bond and William Pisford, founders of almshouses in Coventry, were in concert with their beliefs, mentioning them by name in their testimony. Such concern for the poor has often been seen as a marker of Lollard belief. Thomas Wrixam said that Pisford, along with an unidentified member of the powerful local family, the Wigstons, had 'pulcherrimos libros de heresi'. Alice Rowley even testified that the vicar of St Michael's Church, Dr James Preston, favoured their group and had borrowed a book of the 'nova lege' from her.[19] The Lollards certainly believed that they had been shown some sympathy by the elite. However, it seems likely that they had simply noticed a certain group, within the aldermanic class, with a penchant for scriptural materials and lavishly illustrated traditional works of devotion. Despite an investigation by the bishop there was little cause to prosecute any of the aldermen; although several of those mentioned by the Lollards were safely dead by this point.

An examination of elite wills of townsmen from this period attests to this distinct pious tradition, but not a movement that can be separated from mainstream religious belief. The witnesses of

[16] TNA PRO PROB 11/15 (Richard Cook 1507).
[17] Rob Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 72-6.
[18] McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, pp. 41-5; Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp. 233-4.
[19] McSheffrey and Tanner (eds.) *Lollards of Coventry, 1486-1522*, pp. 125,157, 185; LRO B/C/13 fo. 7r. [Lichfield Court Book].

Richard Coke's will, made in 1507 were Bond, Pisford and Banwell, as well as men who would pursue their Christian humanist inclinations further, such as John Rastell the town clerk and coroner, brother-in-law of Thomas More, who visited Coventry in 1506.[20] Although these wills have entirely orthodox elements, they also have marked similarities with each other and lengthy and idiosyncratic preambles. William Ford, a Coventry man, merchant of the staple and a member of this group, begged that his soul should be received by god 'into the nombre of righteous p[er]sones....not by my merits but by the habundant goodness of hym... in the which I have most singly trusted'.[21] Despite seeming to reject the possibility of post-mortem intercession, Ford then went on to mention the saints and the prayers of the poor. This preamble shares aspects, including common forms of expression, with the will of James Preston, the vicar, and others.[22] In short these wills were not notable for falling one side or another of a supposed confessional divide, but in their marked similarity to each other, displaying an intense piety coupled with a strong concern for urban charity which is absent in the wills of their contemporaries.[23] The civic elite did leave bequests to monastic institutions and many were members of Coventry's Trinity guild. They also favoured poor women with gifts of spinning wheels, and all of these men were involved in the founding of almshouses in some way. As well as providing poor relief, it has often been supposed that almshouses were in a large part a vehicle for providing intercessory piety and most usually contained a chantry to their founder. However, the will of Thomas Bond also ordered that his almshouse be provided with a master who would preach forty sermons a year. The executors of his

[20] A. W Reed, *Early Tudor Drama: Medwall, the Rastells, Heywood, and the More Circle* (London, 1926), pp. 224-9.
[21] TNA PRO PROB 11/15 (William Forth [Ford] 1508).
[22] TNA PRO PROB 11/15 (William Rowley 1506, Thomas Clerk 1506, James Preston 1507, Thomas Bonde 1507, Richard Cook 1507, William Ford [Ford] 1508, William Shukborowe 1514, William Pysford 1519).
[23] TNA PRO 11/12-23 (William Hopkynne[s]1501, Richard Stanwardyn 1501, Richard Howes 1501, John Smyth 1501, Thomas Grene 1502, Thomas Byckeley 1505, Thomas Padlande 1505, John Lee 1505, John Bixton 1506, William Rowley 1506, Thomas Clerk 1506, James Preston 1507, Thomas Bonde 1507, Richard Cook 1507, William Forth 1508, Thomas Wardlowe 1508, Harry Marler 1509, John Sherman 1509, John Norton 1510, Richard Lee 1510, Richard Jackson 1510, Thomas Turnor 1510, Elyn Sawnders 1511, Thomas Sawnders 1511, Richard Thekuys 1511, John Hogges 1511, Edmond Hadley 1512, Robert Swyfte 1512, Joanne Padlande 1514, Richard Foxale 1514, William Shukborowe 1514, Thomas Lonesdale, 1514, Roger Sutton 1514, Alice Lonesdale 1514, John Padlond 1516, Thomas Lee 1516, Humfrey Grene 1516, Thomas Turnor 1518, Henry Rogers 1518, Thomas Forde 1519, John Barube 1519, John Gaddoy [Haddon] 1519, Johane Chamber 1519, William Pysforde 1519, Nicholas Burwey 1520, John Hardwey 1520, Thomas Hill 1521, John Hopkyns 1521, Thomas Bemyche 1522 , Hugh Dawys 1522, Robert Grewe 1524, John Stonge 1524, John Clerk 1524, Richard Boreway 1524, Henry Pysford 1525, Joane Grene 1527, Richard Marler 1527, William Dawson 1530,Thomas Waryn 1530, Henry Kylbye 1530).

will exercised their power to select and dismiss these preachers throughout the first half of the sixteenth century.[24] A rich landscape of religious institutions allowed the aldermen to exercise the high degree of religious freedom that their wealth afforded them. However, these men also had to deal with others who possessed more conventional, less ostentatious and less evangelical pious beliefs. Transactions involving urban land, as well as charitable bequests, such as the founding of the almshouses, relied upon feoffments arranged by a group of individuals coming together to ensure property was safeguarded in pursuit of a common purpose. They required the support of all of the political class. A strong centralised political culture based on economic necessities and the common duties and privileges of citizens bound the civic elite strongly to each other, while differences in elite piety and religious practice failed to provide a reason for disagreement. Certain strands of late medieval elite piety in Coventry leaned towards being highly scriptural and even evangelical in their nature; however, at the same time they were very definitely part of a mainstream traditional religious and civic culture.

It was only during the 1540s that these religious differences would come into play as part of a larger dispute which involved a series of public confrontations and lawsuits. The entire conflict was packed into a period of four months, between April and July in 1542. It was occasioned by a sermon preached in Coventry which resulted in a complaint from one of the townsmen, then the prosecution and imprisonment of the complainant by civic and diocesan authorities. This was followed by an appeal to the Court of Chancery which resulted in a commission, headed by local gentry, to investigate the truth of the original allegations and the validity of the actions taken. Those who gave evidence to the chancery commissioners, against the will of the corporation, became the subject of politically motivated indictments, under the act of six articles. The townsmen indicted under the act pressed for a writ of *certiorari*, but the case was only abandoned after a Star Chamber suit had been commenced on their behalf. Religious division and doctrine proved to be side-issues in a dispute which imposed the politics of an ongoing national religious contest onto the city. The involvement of the parish clergy in Coventry, the diocesan authorities,

[24] TNA PRO PROB 11/115 (Thomas Bonde 1507); CRO BA/D/4/1/1-3.

the secular courts and the Warwickshire gentry produced a cacophony of competing interests which only added to the difficulty of ensuring harmony in the city.

The dispute also had a distinct religious dimension. The primary figure, and the man who made the initial complaint against the preaching in the city was Richard Banwell, a draper, who was at various times supported by his friends and associates. Banwell came from the tradition of biblically literate and ostentatious elite piety in Coventry through which he probably acquired some of his own religious leanings. His uncle was the important merchant William Banwell, named as a supporter by the heretics in 1511, and his mother was the sister of Richard Coke, the mayor in 1489 also named by the Lollards.[25] The transmission of belief through family and community took place in Coventry, as it did in other areas.[26] The family was considered to be the smallest unit of civic political life with the individual male citizen at its head. Just as with higher status and noble individuals, who shaped their own familial piety, the household could be created and imagined along the lines of an idealised religious community.[27] Within this unit, the teaching of scripture and pious behaviour were sanctioned female roles which contributed to the godliness and good order of the city. This was a responsibility that was closely guarded and defended by Richard Banwell's own wife who, in 1542, was heard to boast that she could 'say a gospel in my house for me and my s[er]vantes aswell as eny p[r]ist can'.[28] Banwell was the product of this unusual tradition of familial piety, which prioritised the reading of scripture, and helped to shape his own religious priorities. He was also the product of a tradition of political involvement in civic life and government.

Banwell had come from a high ranking urban family, well accustomed to holding civic office in Coventry. By 1542, when the incident in question took place, he was already a significant figure in the Drapers' Company who had married and set up a household on his own, taking on

[25] TNA PRO PROB PROB 11/15 (Richard Cook 1507).
[26] Nesta Evans, 'The Descent of Dissenters in the Chiltern Hundreds', in Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 208-308; Christopher Hill, 'From Lollards to Levellers' in M. Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes* (London, 1978), pp. 49-67; Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion*, p. 19-26.
[27] R.G.K.A. Mertes, 'The Household as a Religious Community' in J. Rosenthal and C. Richmond (eds.), *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987), pp. 123-39.
[28] TNA PRO KB9/129 fo.8r.

apprentices.[29] His father, Thomas Banwell, was one of the foremost men in the company and in the city, and had been mayor and head of the Trinity guild.[30] This might seem to suggest that he had entirely ordinary religious beliefs; however, given the political connection between heads of the guilds and the governing elite, it actually says much more about his commitment to orthodox civic behaviour. The almost mechanical progression of former mayors to the headship of this guild suggests that holding that office was as much a part of the progress of the aldermanic career as it was about the strength of personal beliefs.[31] Memberships of the wealthier urban religious guilds, such as those in Coventry, often had an extensive political dimension. The care that guilds took about the behaviour of their members was about preserving the honesty, and by implication the image and status, of the group in power rather than simply dealing with individual religious morality.[32] Despite this apparent success, familial achievement in civic politics brought with it some sources of tension. As with many aldermanic families, civic achievements bred a sense of quasi-dynastic expectation. Perhaps it was necessary for young men to aspire to power and influence in civic life; nevertheless, displays of naked ambition coupled with an attempt to overturn established hierarchies could upset the delicate balance of urban life. Richard Banwell was certainly vulnerable to overreaching himself in this way. There was also the complex aspect of trade and the internal politics of the craft guilds, which regulated the cloth industry. As well as following the standard aldermanic career path, Thomas Banwell was aggressive and successful in his business dealings and spent most of the 1530s bullying a succession of smaller dyers and craftsmen in a dispute over wages.[33] The moral ethos of the city required that men who had gained wealth through urban privileges, as citizens and freemen, contributed to the commonweal of the city by helping to uphold the peace and prosperity of the urban community. Men like Thomas Banwell, who forcefully transgressed these moral values while monopolising access to cheap

[29] CRO PA154 pp. 5-20 [Drapers' Accounts, Transcript] fo. 8, 24.
[30] TNA PRO PROB (Thomas Banwell 1543); *Leet Book*, pp. 637-768.
[31] *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry,* ed. Geoffrey Templeman (Dugdale Soc., Publications, 19, Oxford, 1944), Appendix I.
[32] Ken Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c.1470-1550* (York, 2001), pp. 15-7; Ben R. McRee, 'Religious Gilds and the Regulation of Behavior in Late Medieval Towns', in Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond (eds.), *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1987), pp. 108-22; Ben R. McRee, 'Religious Gilds and Civic Order : The Case of Norwich in the Late Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 67:1 (January, 1992) pp. 69-97.
[33] TNA PRO C1/1013/45,48.

labour in the cloth industry, might eventually come to be seen as a threat to the city. This was equally true of his son.

The dispute, in 1542, was as much about the breaking of civic codes, the political niceties of the city and the politics of trade, as it was about religious belief. Richard Banwell had already proved himself to be hot tempered and hasty. In 1540 he was fined 3s 4d in the Leet court for an affray on John Herries.[34] However, it was unlikely that such events affected his standing in the city and many high ranking men were fined for their sometimes violent behaviour in the same year. It was Banwell's objections to a sermon preached by John Ramridge, the vicar of St Michael's Church in Coventry, which would see him and his friends embroiled in a long lasting dispute with the corporation. Ramridge, educated at Merton College Oxford, was a friend and contemporary of Richard Smyth and shared many of the same preoccupations as the humanist - but religiously conservative - circle in which he moved at Oxford.[35] In particular Smyth criticised those who sold benefices and took the tithe income from rectories 'w[i]t[h] out preachynge to the people' and giving 'only as a stipend to thē that do preach gods word'.[36] He was moved to defend the economic privileges of the clergy, not simply from the anticlerical minority, but from avaricious laymen and their impropriations of rectories and tithes, which Smyth regarded as not just wrong but irreligious. For Smyth, lay impropriation was tantamount to simony, as it would inevitably result in the buying and selling of clerical offices by their patrons.[37] Smyth and his friends attacked the process of the Reformation, but still indulged in some of the humanist criticism of individual avarice present in 'commonwealth' thought from the late Middle Ages.[38] The acquisition of a position in Coventry in 1539 gave Ramridge the platform he needed to expound these views to a wide public; albeit from the comfortable hypocrisy of having acquired several rectories himself, to supplement his livings in

[34] Fox, 'Some New Evidence of Leet Activity', pp. 235-43.
[35] A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford, A.D.1501 to 1540* (Oxford, 1974), p. 472; *The Letter Book of Robert Joseph, Monk-Scholar of Evesham and Gloucester College, Oxford, 1530-3*, ed. Hugh Aveling (Oxford Historical Society, ns, 19, 1967), 73,98; LRO B/A/1/14iii fo. 16r; CRO PA 813/1.
[36] Richard Smyth, *A Brief Treatyse* (London, 1547), STC (2nd ed.) / 22818 pp. Biiii-Ci.
[37] Richard Smyth, *A Godly and Faythfull Retractation* (London, 1547) STC (2nd ed.) / 22822 p. Biii.
[38] Steven Gunn, 'Edmund Dudley and the Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51:3 (2000), pp. 509-26.

Coventry.[39] The dissolution of the monastic Cathedral in Coventry left John Ramridge as one of the main sources of clerical authority in the city. As head of the largest civic parish of St Michael's he was bound to preach several sermons a year to the clergy who assembled in Coventry for this purpose, as they had done in the late medieval period. The difficult logistics of these occasions, and the fact that the number of parish churches and chapels were small in comparison to the number of townsfolk, meant that Coventry had a tradition of open air preaching.[40] On 17 April 1542 Ramridge preached, not in St Michael's, but in the yard of the nearby Holy Trinity Church near to the recently constructed cross. Speaking to a congregation of assembled townsmen, as well as his parish clergy, Ramridge chose a theme that he calculated would please both groups. Dispensing pastoral advice to the clergy he provided three ways in which they were to conduct their ministry; 'fyrst w[i]t[h] the word of god ij w[i]t[h] vertuse example of leving th[i]rdely w[i]t[h] kep[i]ng of hospital[it]y and gevyng the surplus of ther levyng to the pore'.[41] He continued, addressing his clergy, 'howbe hit to speke this to you th[a]it neditnott for you have nothing laft you'.[42]

The citizens of Coventry could have understood this as an attack on their rights as freemen of a corporate town. The desire to protect their trading privileges and their freedoms created political associations, such as the corporation, the Leet court and the guilds which sought to uphold these rules. One of the side effects of these collective actions was the increased desire to exercise corporate control over civic property. Given this desire, Ramridge's reassertion of the property rights of the clergy might have been unwelcome. On the other hand, after the Reformation, many individuals with little or no association with the city had been granted or purchased advowsons in the court of augmentations. In 1542, John Hales held the tithes belonging to St John's almshouse, originally appropriated by the prior of St Mary's as rector of Holy Trinity in Coventry.[43] Some of the livings belonging to the dissolved priory of St Mary's, along with their tithes, made their way

[39] TNA PRO E334/2 fo. 22v. [Rector, Hockliffe, 1541]; ORO d.105 [Rector; Garsington, 1548], p. 127; LRO B/A/1/14 iv fo. 48r [Prebendary; Pipa Parva].
[40] *The Zurich Letters*, ed. Hastings Robinson (2 vols. Parker Soc., 50-51, 1842-5), i, p. 86, xxxv.
[41] TNA PRO C 47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[42] Ibid fo. 4r.
[43] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 fol 73v-r.

into the hands of townsmen, such as the alderman Henry Over, who was active in presenting men to these livings. Others were bought by outside speculators seeking to enrich themselves, including the brother of the former prior Michael Cameswell and Leonard Chamberlain of Woodstock.[44] In the atmosphere of frenetic profit-making that existed after the dissolutions it is more likely that a sermon attacking individual greed at the expense of the clergy was seen as timely and relevant. Although the advowsons of St Michael's and the Holy Trinity were held by the crown after the dissolution, Ramridge's association with Richard Smyth suggests that he meant to criticise the lay impropriation of benefices, not the assertion of royal control over the church. Yet, this did not prevent the vicar's words angering some of the townsmen or conflicting with their own ideas of loyalty to the King and their urban community. As well as making reference to the more general condition of the clergy, Ramridge looked to his own position as the primary example of decayed clerical livings. It was this part of the sermon that proved most explosive. Referring to clerical taxation, in the form of the first fruits and tenths, he argued that 'when the kynges portion and the curates wages be taken out... his part therof was like a bambery chese, that is to saye nothinge but paaringes'.[45] Here, the vicar showed a marked carelessness with his speech. It was perhaps a mark of Ramridge's stubbornness, and the fact that he was unaware of the important and delicate political manoeuvring required of him within a large and complex urban community, that he never paid his first fruits or found anyone to stand surety for him after becoming vicar of St Michael's.[46] By contrast, when the vicar of the neighbouring Holy Trinity Church, Roger Capp, was appointed in 1543, the Coventry alderman Henry Over stood surety for his first fruits.[47] This suggests not only that the townsmen were able to exercise some choice over his appointment but he may have been known to them and better versed in the trials of urban political life. Though Ramridge later claimed that his words had been taken out of context, he ended his sermon with a stern biblical

[44] TNA PRO E334/2 fo. 144r; TNA PRO E334/3 fo. 51v; TNA PRO E334/4 fo. 180r [Composition Books]; TNA PRO C 142/145/4; TNA PRO C 142/147/210 [Henry Over, Inquisition Post Mortem], TNA PRO E 315/212 fo. 2 [*L&P*, v.15, 1032].
[45] TNA PRO C 47/7/9 fo. 4r; The phrase describes a thing or a person that was perceived to be too mean or thin, cf. John Marston, *Iacke Drums Entertainment*, (London, 1601), STC (2nd ed.) / 7243, "Put off your cloathes, and you are like a Banbery cheese/ Nothing but paring".
[46] *Acts of the Privy Council*, i, p.231.
[47] TNA PRO E334/2 fo. 132r.

warning to 'loke w[ha]t measure yo[u] do meete unto us the same measure shall be moten unto you'.[48] Some of the townsmen were affronted by this apparent display of disloyalty and opposition to the religious changes imposed by royal authority.

On the day after the vicar preached to the synod in Coventry, John Howes, a friend and supporter of Richard Banwell, who had a shop in the drapery in Coventry adjacent to Banwell's own, was sent to inform the vicar that Banwell 'was a feynd very sore' with the sermon.[49] Friendship within the urban community was used to inculcate codes of civil behaviour and ensure the proper conduct of civic life and politics. More dangerously, such alliance could be used to undermine urban government through a direct attack on prominent figures like Ramridge, through the invocation of royal authority and accusations of disloyalty, without recourse to the political body of the city. To this end Richard Banwell prepared a 'byke of the words of Ramrigges semone' which he took to the mayor Christopher Warren, asking him to present it directly to the King's council.[50] He also told others that the vicar's sermon suggested that Ramridge was criticising the King for taking his living away. Banwell might not have realised that there were men on the mayor's council willing to defend the vicar. However, his actions went beyond merely causing personal offence and upsetting religious sensibilities. The attack subverted the hierarchies of the urban community as well as the collective power of the corporation and the guilds. Banwell had never held aldermanic office, nor any of the more minor roles in civic government, and going directly to the mayor and invoking royal authority undercut the ordinary political structures of the city. In attempting to sideline the ancient constitution and charter of the city, Banwell left himself open to attack because he forfeited the mutual protections owed to him as a freeman of the city. Why his father did not intervene at this point to protect him from this growing political storm might seem puzzling. Perhaps his political influence was already on the wane in the years before he died in 1543.[51] He had remarried at least once by this point and his legacy was eventually the focus of a lengthy legal dispute between his widow and his son which suggests that some degree of tension was already

[48] TNA PRO C 47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[49] *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity*, ed. Geoffrey Templeman, p.136, TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[50] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[51] TNA PRO PROB 11/29 (Thomas Banwell 1543).

present in the relationship.[52] Most probably he had a limited degree of power against the outside influences and anger invoked by all sides in this dispute. Certainly events moved quickly from this point.

John Ramridge could also call upon powerful authorities and friends. In this case it was the vicar general of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, Dr David Pole, who was present in Coventry for the synod, deputising for the Bishop, Rowland Lee.[53] Shortly after his confrontation with Howes, Ramridge complained to Dr Pole that he did 'kepe my self in as wele as I coude and yett I was synestry taken by Richarde Banewell as it was p[ur]ported by one Jhon Howes'.[54] Later in the 1540s Ramridge and Pole exchanged books which suggest that they had a close working relationship based on shared religious and intellectual values, both of which helped to condition Pole's response to the accusations against the vicar.[55] It was this friendship which led to Pole's support for Ramridge rather than any immediate outrage at Banwell's religious beliefs. The following day Dr Pole went to confront Banwell and pressed him as to his meaning. After some equivocation Banwell responded that Ramridge's sermon to his clergy 'soundyd th[a]t the kyng shuld take ther lyving away'. Pole, defending Ramridge's view of impropriated clerical livings, suggested that there were 'other ways mens levynes are taken away and not inp[ro]euted unto the kyngs highness'. It was at this point, when faced with Banwell's obstinacy, that Pole became angry, accusing him of being a 'knave', and that he did 'myserep[r]ove' Ramridge, whereby there would be no preaching and 'the kynges inn[j]coones shall nott be executit'.[56] Pole's defence reflected not only the protestations of loyalty present in other defences of contentious religious beliefs, but also the claim that malice and misinterpretation would undermine all preachers if it went unchecked. It was the idea of his enemies as a subversive danger towards the political community of the city and the realm which spurred Pole to instigate Banwell's prosecution. He

[52] TNA PRO C 1/945/6-7.
[53] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r; A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford, A.D.1501 to 1540* (Oxford, 1974), p. 730-4.
[54] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[55] *Records of All Souls College Library, 1437-1600* ed. Neil Ker (Oxford, 1971), p. 141; Bernardi Abbatis, *Opera Omnia*, (Paris, 1527) [ASC SR 74 v. 2.8] Johannes Justus Lanspergius, *Sermones* (Cologne, 1539) [ASC SR 74 d.6].
[56] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.

demanded that Christopher Warren, the mayor, have Banwell bound to appear before the king's justices of oyer and terminer. It is notable at this point that no religious doctrinal motive had yet been ascertained for Banwell's actions. As we have seen, Banwell belonged to a native pious tradition which differed from the religious beliefs and doctrines of many of the citizens of Coventry and emphasised scripture, but which stopped short of any truly reformed influences. However, it was not this religious difference but an angry disagreement over money and loyalty as well as the wilful disregard for political and civic speech which sparked the dispute. Because these values were central to the urban community, Pole seems to have been aware that it was a far better tactic to attack Banwell as one who damaged godly preaching and good order rather than on narrowly doctrinal grounds. This also put his views in line with that of royal authority and a King who was anxious to prevent religious disputation and disagreement between his subjects.

After his outburst, and his refusal to provide sureties to appear before the justices, Banwell was imprisoned in the city's gaol house. At this point, the mayor, Christopher Warren, seems to have been reluctant to push the case against him too far, as Banwell still had his friends and supporters within the urban community. A corporate town, such as Coventry, was made up of many smaller interlocking wards and neighbourhoods forming a diffuse and complex society. In urban society neighbourliness remained an important social safety net, providing charity for poorer men and women who could not claim citizenship or association with a trade.[57] It is precisely because the early modern English town retained the aspects of community and neighbourhood we think of largely in the rural context, that these links remained important. Even for Banwell, who could claim to be a citizen by birth, and through his association with the Drapers' Company, which bound a powerful political community to him through social and economic obligation, his neighbours were still important. Moreover, since the politics of the city were structured through its wards it was natural that the more important men in each ward should associate together. It was these men, claiming to be Banwell's neighbours, who sued the mayor for his release. While one of the men, John Pynnyng, was later alleged to have sympathies with the religious beliefs that

[57] Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish', pp. 18-22; Alan Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1977), p. 177.

Banwell espoused, there is no evidence that the others shared these beliefs. Two of the supplicants on Banwell's behalf seem to have been regarded as trustworthy because of their age and longstanding relationships with the city. Rauf Dale an inn-holder and grazier, who was a member of the corporation in the late 1530s and Geoffrey Clowth, a dyer, were both over seventy years old.[58] However, Richard Humphrys, a considerably younger man, was a current member of the Leet jury in 1542.[59] All were resident in the Smithford Street ward of the city, but it was Humphreys, as an alderman and the half-brother to the mayor, who was most ideally situated to secure Banwell's release and to this end he pressed his case while at supper with Warren and his brethren.[60] Banwell was eventually delivered on bail to the four men at the end of April 1542. His house, in Smithford Street, was searched and two books recovered, but the mayor denied ordering the action, claiming instead that the vicar general of Coventry and Lichfield had ordered him to do this and send the books to him, perhaps aware that it was prudent to lay the blame on Pole as an attack on personal property might result in more upset in the city.[61] Even at this stage the corporation seems to have been wary of moving too quickly to undermine the harmony and peace of the city and upset the delicate balance of neighbourhood and friendship.

From this point the dispute only expanded. Banwell, or one of his friends, seems to have sought redress in the equity side of the Court of Chancery, probably through a writ of *habeas corpus cum causa*, which questioned either the original imprisonment of Banwell, or the failure to grant bail to him.[62] Although the original complaint is lost, the case produced a set of interrogatories which were administered orally to Dr Pole, the mayor Christopher Warren, and the vicar, John Ramridge. This commission of investigation heard a great deal of other evidence in its efforts to ascertain the truth of Banwell's interpretation of the vicar's sermon.[63] Over several days, from 17 to 22 July 1542, it put various questions to over 40 townsmen including civic officials. The commission was headed by William Marler, a Coventry gentleman, Sir William Fielding, who was a member of the

[58] *Leet Book*, pp. 700-1, 706-7, 736-7; SBTRO DR10/1851 fo. 3.
[59] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[60] Ibid. fo. 4r.
[61] Ibid. fo. 4r.
[62] Baker, *History of The Laws of England 1483-1558*, vi, pp. 171-90.
[63] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.

commission of the peace for Warwickshire, and William Lucy.[64] The expanding remit of the investigation, and much of the vitriol that the enquiry seemed to produce in the townsmen, was probably due to Lucy's presence. The relationship between gentry and urban centres was complex. The seat of the Lucy family was at Charlecote, near Warwick, where the increasing fortunes of the family in the 1540s and 1550s allowed Thomas Lucy, the son of William, to extensively remodel the house in 1558, giving him a commanding rural seat of power.[65] However, it would be misleading to define the relationship between towns and the gentry as a struggle to prevent an exclusively rural class of county gentlemen from interfering in urban political affairs whilst establishing imposing seats of local influence.[66] Throughout the sixteenth century many of the class of urban lawyers and officeholders were acquiring land and seeking to class themselves as gentry as well as serving the city. Some aldermen, like Henry Over, had extensive holdings in the county of Warwick, but led a mostly urban existence. Over divided his time between Coventry and London and chose to class himself as a grocer, which placed himself amongst more powerful merchants from the capital.[67] On the other hand men like William Marler, one of the commissioners, had risen through the hierarchies of trade and urban life, being a citizen by virtue of his birth, whilst acquiring land and beginning to style himself as a gentleman. Far from attacking the status of the urban environment many gentlemen sought to acquire the privileges that citizenship offered by paying fines to the corporation of the city, who then granted these economic rights to them. Through these links to the urban political community, gentry could assist the smooth running of civic politics. Moreover, their involvement was a mark of the status of the city. Gentry also helped to facilitate a relationship between towns and the nobility which could prove lucrative for all concerned. Opposition to urban interests was not an integral part of the identity of gentlemen.

[64] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[65] *The Victoria History of the County of Warwick*, v, p. 33.
[66] Rosemary Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century' in J.A.F. Thomson (ed.), *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988), pp. 22-44.
[67] *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1509-1558*, iii, p. 552.

The corporation had no objection to these sanctioned interactions. Nevertheless, Lucy's interference in urban affairs was different in a number of ways. In intervening in an internal dispute Lucy was undermining the combined authority of the aldermen which was the foundation of their political power. Whether Banwell, or his companions, had solicited Lucy's attentions or not is unclear; however, it was most obviously the religious doctrinal aspect of this dispute which attracted his interest. William Lucy's associations were entirely on the evangelical side of the spectrum; he corresponded with men like Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester, whom he seems to have counted as a personal friend and he communicated with John Johnson, the reforming merchant, which connected him to networks of godly evangelicals in London.[68] Perhaps his most famous gesture of support for the evangelical cause was the employment of the matryologist, John Foxe, as tutor to his children in the late 1540s.[69] He also had a history of intervening on the side of his co-religionists in urban disputes. In 1538 he wrote to both Cromwell and Latimer in an attempt to protect Edward Large, a priest of Hampton Bishop, who seems to have incited the wrath of the townsmen of nearby Stratford-upon-Avon and was consequently subject to an attempt to indict him for heresy and treason.[70] According to Lucy's version of events, Large had incurred much displeasure for speaking against 'sych things as they oft long tyme have abused'. Lucy professed himself unwilling to intervene further as it had only gained him the 'displeasure not only off most stretforde and off the most part off thys cuntrey bit also off the most parte off the gentyllmen yn thys shere'.[71] However, this was a slightly disingenuous statement meant to display himself as a man of singular honour and religious morality, who was defending the preaching of God's word from a tide of malicious accusations. Rhetorical demonstrations of conformity and loyalty towards the crown had to come first. It did not stop him being involved in the prosecution of the parson of Whatcote, in 1539, for failing to read out the king's injunctions, nor from having John Watwod, head of the collegiate church of St Nicholas in Warwick, arrested for ringing bells on St

[68] TNA PRO SP 1/199 fo.39 [*L&P*, v.20, part 1, 369]; TNA PRO SP 46/5/Part 1, fo. 70.
[69] Thomas S. Freeman, 'Foxe, John (1516/17–1587)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[70] TNA PRO SP 1/123 fo.43-5 [*L&P*, v. 12, part 2, 302]; SP 1/123 fo. 47 [*L&P*, v. 12, part 2, 303]; SP 1/130 fo. 136-40 [*L&P*, v. 13, part 1, 603]; [*L&P*, v. 12, part 2, 496].
[71] TNA PRO SP 1/123 fo.45 [*L&P*, v. 12, part 2, 302].

Laurence's day.[72] This time Coventry men, Roger Wigston, the recorder of the city, and Baldwin Porter, an alderman, intervened by petitioning Thomas Cromwell on Watwod's behalf.[73] In both these incidents Lucy was assisted by the local gentlemen John Grevill and John Combes, also clients of Hugh Latimer, proving that he still had powerful friends in the locality who were sympathetic to his religious agenda.[74] It seems that his interference in Coventry during 1542 led to just as much disquiet; although this time much of the ire of the townsmen seems to have been directed at Richard Banwell, and those who gave testimony to the commission, rather than Lucy himself.

Lucy had used interrogatories to support his arguments before this time and had no difficulty in finding men who would testify against the clergy in Coventry. The men who gave evidence to the Chancery commission, over which he presided, had cause to remember other things that the vicar, John Ramridge, had preached aside from the sermon in April. At this point it becomes readily apparent that the politics of national religious change was having an impact on the religious life of the city as townsmen demonstrated a wide knowledge of doctrinal changes. The prosecution of Banwell and his friends was partly a result of their use of this knowledge, probably at Lucy's prompting, to try to wrong-foot the vicar and the civic authorities. At stake was the perceived loyalty of the clergy and consequently Henrician conservatives were often very cautious when making pronouncements about contentious religious issues. In 1539 Ramridge, perhaps aware that his conservatism might be a cause to question his loyalty to the King, inscribed a book purchased in 1539 with the words 'yf ther be anything in this booke...or in any other booke of myne here contrary unto the goodly laws and statutes...I unterly renounce it'.[75] Such demonstrations of conformity in the face of the religious changes imposed directly by royal authority were designed to inoculate himself against criticism for his more contentious beliefs. Nevertheless, in his sermons it appears that Ramridge was drawn to defend prayer for the dead from further incursions by

[72] TNA PRO SP 1/106 fo. 228r, [*L&P*, v. 11, 514]; Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, p. 56.
[73] TNA PRO SP 1/106 fo.153 [*L&P*, v. 11, 431].
[74] TNA PRO SP 1/144 fo.128 [*L&P*, v. 14, part 1, 542].
[75]Johannes Justus Langspergius, *Sermones* (Cologne, 1539) [ASC SR 74. d. 6], N. R Ker, *Records of All Souls College Library 1437-1600* (Oxford, 1971), p. 138.

reformers and interpret the king's policy in a manner that was sympathetic to the conservative cause. William Waters, a townsman, told the commissioners that Ramridge 'lyconyd pourcatori to a mase of scalla celi wiche was a goode mase but onely for the abuse and so is ther a porcatori but the abuse caused the name therof to be taken away'. Like his contemporaries, Richard Smyth and Roger Edgeworth, he advocated post mortem intercession but was careful about talking explicitly of purgatory, which was officially proscribed.[76] Perhaps there was also some genuine discomfort about the use of non-scriptural terms from men who were imbibing and accepting much of the Erasmian biblical humanism of their time.[77] Most of the townsmen questioned by the commissioners thought that Ramridge had kept cautiously to the official formula, put forward in 1536, citing, not purgatory, but the 'th[i]rd place' or asking his parishioners to 'caullehit what you will'.[78] Others were less circumspect and more willing to attack Ramridge, by careful selection of passages taken from his preaching in Coventry.

In doing so they were not simply taking part in a religious argument, which pitted traditional religion against the ideas of reformers. In the minds of the council and the aldermen they were also attacking forms of preaching which were an important part of corporate political life and governance which were increasingly necessary in a city denuded of its religious provision by the dissolutions. Godly behaviour, incited by preaching, was seen as a vital way of creating an ordered urban society. It was this political imperative, as much as religious and doctrinal disagreement, which formed the basis for the dispute and the defence of preaching ministry by the corporation. This is probably why some of those who supported Banwell were later indicted along with him for heresy. These men told the commission that the vicar had disobeyed the King's injunctions by using the word purgatory and producing 'iij grete bokes' to prove its existence.[79] These were the books of the church fathers including Ambrose and Jerome. Ramridge was an acquisitive collector of books: he possessed over 450 volumes by his death in 1568, encompassing everything from the

[76] Peter Marshall, 'Fear, Purgatory and Polemic' William Naphy and Penny Roberts, (eds.), *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester, 1997), p.163; Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead; Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, c.1450-1700* (New York, 2000), pp. 34-9.
[77] Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000), pp.79-81.
[78] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[79] Ibid, fo. 4r.

histories of Polydore Vergil and Bede through to conventional works of Catholic piety, the 'bishop's book' and the 'king's book', as well as volumes by Erasmus, Bullinger and Melancthon.[80] Moreover, he was particularly fond of using his books as a prop to add almost literal weight to his arguments and possessed a broad collection of writers with which to do so. Robert Perte even described how the vicar said that 'marten Lewtter caulled it porcatori and to prove it the vicar leyed ij grete bokes upon the poulpyt'. Several men remembered that Ramridge had also preached of the widow of Nain, saying 'Where thinke yo[u] that christe hathe called the sprite of this childe n[ei]ther out of heven nor out of hell.... where shoulde he calle hym iudge you but from the thyrde place, which is purgatorie'.[81] It was obvious to all concerned that in producing such a forthright demonstration of the doctrine of purgatory Ramridge was sailing extremely close to the wind. To what extent those testifying to the commission were involved in the political and religious dispute and were consciously shaping their evidence is unclear. These men would later claim that they were simply demonstrating their loyalty towards the king and doing their duty towards the commissioners, not casting aspersions on the vicar or misinterpreting his words.[82] However, in doing so they were using the same rhetorical trick that William Lucy had used to protect his favoured preachers. As well as making vague accusations about the superstitions of the men of Stratford, Lucy thought it was politically safer to portray his enemies as acting out of motiveless malice and lack of concern for good order. By contrast Lucy presented himself as upright and honest, which enabled him to sideline the obvious religious differences in favour of a discussion about secular legitimacy. Those who had testified to the commission took a similar line. Both sides understood that loyalty, duty and personal probity were important values in the city. This is why both sides sought to demonstrate the possession of these values to defend themselves against accusations of religious impropriety in what was a nakedly political quarrel.

According to the evidence given to the commission there were also other preachers in Coventry. These included William Hubbardine, a man who was used to inciting controversy, having attracted

[80] Chris Coppens, *Reading in Exile: The Libraries of John Ramridge (d. 1568), Thomas Harding (d. 1572) and Henry Joliffe (d. 1573): Recusants in Louvain* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 39-106.
[81] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[82] TNA PRO STAC 2/3 fo. 61r.

the hatred of Hugh Latimer in the Lenten sermon controversies in Bristol where he defended the 'real presence' in the Eucharist.[83] What he was doing in Coventry is unclear; he seemed to have no stipend, but did have his supporters on the mayor's council. Cuthbert Joyner, a former mayor of the city and member of the mayor's council, probably thinking that his own religious feelings were under some question, admitted that he had paid Hubbardine for the efforts that he 'toke in Coventre in prechynge of godes worde' but argued that he did 'att no tyme preche... no other wise bitt rightwysely and accordingly unto the kynges iniuncones'.[84] Again, when townsmen were under direct attack they fell back on arguments which emphasised their own loyalty and honesty, in line with the political values of their community. It was evident that support or opposition to this set of preachers was sometimes based on their religious values. Hubbardine expressed a strong conservative viewpoint and made repeated efforts to uphold the position and status of the clergy through rhetoric, persuasion and sometimes fear. Thomas Rogers heard him defend the necessity of deathbed confession and repentance, saying that, 'who so ever dyed w[i]t[h]oughtt confession of a pr[ie]st dies unto everlasting damnacoon'.[85] Yet, often sermons could induce anger for other reasons. Preaching was a potentially divisive issue because it encompassed some aspects of personal property and therefore involved a considerable amount of civic policies. Hubbardine could have been preaching some of the commemoration sermons that were the result of bequests to the church of St Michael's in Coventry for that purpose. While it is obvious that institutions like almshouses and chantries produced questions of communal and familial property rights, endowed sermons also had the potential to produce division and claims of ownership. One of the most divisive aspects of Hubbardine's preaching was not his beliefs but the casual style of his pronouncements, which upset some of the more intensely religious and scripturally minded individuals. William Norton, a capper and former warden of the city, complained that Hubbardine 'whulde rede out the gospel or pslyt[er] and then ley it by hym and medle not fyther w[i]t[h] it butt onely upon tryfyle and lyghtt thynges'.[86] The expectation of the biblically literate townsfolk of

[83] *Remains of Hugh Latimer,* ii, p. 317-2; Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, pp. 38-46.
[84] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[85] Ibid fo. 4r.
[86] Ibid fo. 4r.

Coventry, with their desire for serious scriptural exposition from their preachers, was somewhat at odds with Hubbardine's style and character. It was also more effective to attack him as a man who made a mockery of serious matters through his jokes and attempts to engage with his audience, than to let him be seen as an ardent and effective conservative. This was an assessment apparently agreed upon by John Foxe, who had probably gleaned his information from the evangelical community in Coventry, amongst whom he resided in 1547 with his father-in-law. Foxe noted that Hubbardine's sermons were apt to be made up of 'forged tales and fables, dialogues dreams, dancings, hoppings and leapings'.[87]

It was probably this energy which caused 'a grete multytude' to assemble to hear him preach a sermon on Christmas morning 1541 in St Michael's Church, where he spoke of the role of the family in the teaching of godly behaviour. The reaction against Hubbardine seems to stem partly from his mastery of civic and political values, which he used to support his conservative religious cause. The training, apprenticeship and work that was organised around the family meant it was fundamental to the economic prosperity of the city as well as a mechanism of political control. It was the moral foundation of the city as well as a powerful support network for the individual citizen. In an effort to associate traditional religious values with the familial control that was exercised over the young, Hubbardine told the assembled congregation that 'ther was a boy in his country caulld Jacke of whome he comandyd wather he caude sey his pat[e]r nost[e]r'. The boy then recounted to him how he learned his paternoster, line by line, from each member of his family and recited the prayer in Latin. However, the boy then said 'I can tell you of my self a new pat[e]r nost[e]r'; apparently this was the prayer in English. To which Hubbardine responded 'Goo thy way boy and larne to kepe and do as thy forefathers have done before the and let this newfanglynges alone'.[88] Hubbardine was doing more than trying to associate the theological changes of the Reformation with intemperate and incautious youth.[89] He was trying to mark out the 'new learning', and by implication also the tradition of vernacular scripture that existed amongst the

[87] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. Stephen Cattley (8 vols, London,1837-41), vii, pp. 477-8.
[88] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[89] Susan Brigden, 'Youth and the English Reformation', *Past & Present*, 95 (1982), pp. 37-67.

civic elite, as fundamentally antithetical to the good governance of the household and the city. Hubbardine displayed a keen awareness of the importance of these values in urban society, but he was using them to make an essentially polemical point about the legitimacy of the English scriptural tradition that existed in the city. He seems to have understood that for his polemic to carry any weight it had to engage with the moral values of the urban community. In this sense the dispute was as much about the ownership of these values by divided religious parties as it was about simple theological disagreements.

The Chancery commissioners were also informed of the other preaching ministers in Coventry. John Ramridge's curate, Henry Hibbert, and Dr Robert Shirwood both preached in support of purgatory according to the evidence given by the townsmen.[90] Shirwood was a former monk of Coventry notable for his study in Louvain and his translation of Ecclesiastes.[91] Whilst at Cambridge he marked himself out as a conservative by writing in support of the Queen when the universities were solicited for support for the King's divorce and exchanged angry letters with Hugh Latimer.[92] Unlike Hubbardine, Shirwood had a stipendiary position. As the master of St John's almshouse in the city he was bound to preach a cycle of 40 sermons in the year, making him independent of direct support from John Ramridge.[93] Although no prosecutions, or indeed any further action, were imposed on any of the preachers, the mayor and the civic elite resented the intrusion into their affairs by the commission and tended to blame those who gave evidence against the preachers in Coventry for stirring up contention. William Yngram, William Waters, Thomas Rogers, John Pynnyng, George Mathew, Robert Crowe, Richard Maxfield and Robert Pie complained of being persecuted by the mayor and council.[94] All of these men had been questioned by the commission and given evidence of preaching in Coventry. Pynnyng and Maxfield were members of the Drapers' Company and Mathew was a member of the similarly powerful Mercers'

[90] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r; CRO BA/D/4/1/2 fo. 20r.
[91] G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester, 1983) p. 189; *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, ed. George Corrie (2 vols, Parker Soc., xxxiv, 1845), ii pp. 309-17.
[92] Richard Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 176; Richard Rex, 'The English Campaign against Luther in the 1520s', *T.R.H.S.*, Fifth Series, 39 (1989), p. 91.
[93] CRO BA/D/4/1/2 fo. 1r-25r.
[94] TNA PRO STAC 2/3 fo. 61.

Company, while the others belonged to more minor trades.[95] All of the men were members of one or other of the city's companies, except Robert Pie who is listed as a minstrel. Another man, Robert Crowe, was responsible for re-writing the pageant book of the shearmen tailors in 1536 although he was a capper.[96] There is nothing to suggest that the men were not fully involved in civic life or pageantry. Arguably the more important facet of this involvement was that all of the individuals, except Alice Banwell and Robert Pie, were citizens of Coventry. This meant that in exchange for their economic privilege as citizens they theoretically undertook to uphold the peace of the political community of the city and contribute to its commonweal. The failure of the men to conform to the model of the ideal citizen gave the city a legitimate reason for proceeding against them when they disturbed the peace of the city by attacking the city's preachers.

As a result of their testimony to the Chancery commission the corporation decided that those who gave evidence against the preachers were not only failing to fulfil their political role but were actually aiding and abetting the city's enemies and those who would sow division and confusion. In July 1542, at the height of summer, the council of the city moved to indict the men for offences against the six articles, shortly after the chancery commissioners had left the city. The group were indicted by a writ authorised by members of the mayor's council and the vicar general of Coventry and Lichfield, David Pole. They were alleged to have made various heretical and anticlerical statements, mostly in the Holy Trinity Church in Coventry, during the previous year. The men later claimed that their prosecution was entirely politically motivated as, the mayor, Christopher Warren 'heith w[i]t[h] his owne mowth confessed to such as will avvowe the same theit he woold nev[er] have medled.... nor that this matter had nev[er] begoon' except for the 'comission a genst the vicar'.[97] Indeed, this suspicion is backed up by the measures that the corporation took facilitate the prosecution and impede the ability to trade of those who were indicted. The city often proceeded against offenders, or those who had broken the codes of civic society, by boarding up their shops in the city. Because so much of the business of the early modern town was based upon trust and

[95] CRO BA/C/1/2 fo. 4; LRO B/C/11 (George Mathew 1545, Richard Maxfield 1544).
[96] Bodleian MS Top. Warwickshire C7 fo. 12v ,16v; TNA PRO KB9/129 fo.5r.
[97] TNA PRO STAC 2/3 fo. 61.

association it may have been that the cloud that hung over the men and their prosecution by the corporation meant that they were treated with increasing caution by their business contacts. The unity of the civic elite against the offenders also seems to have been important and in attempting to indict the men, the corporation 'cosented in counsel of the said citie to beare the costs of the sute... of the common box'.[98] In utilising the common box, the mayor and aldermen defrayed not only their own costs in the prosecution, but symbolically divided them from the rest of the urban community. The 'common box' was the collective property of the citizens of Coventry and using it sent out the message that this group were being prosecuted on behalf of the city and commonality, not simply by a small faction from within the civic elite. In the event five individuals were indicted for offences against the six articles by a grand jury sitting in Coventry on 27 July 1542. Richard Banwell, who had mounted the original attack on the vicar, Alice Banwell his wife, Thomas Rogers, Richard Maxfield, George Mathew, Robert Crow and John Pynnyng were all indicted for speaking various heretical words in the presence of others. [99] These men probably had anticlerical ideas which caused them to have sympathy with religious reformers. During his first outburst in April of 1542 Richard Banwell told John Ramridge that he could not have made sermons at 'powescrose as he hath made' in Coventry.[100] He clearly had some knowledge of what was being preached there in the late 1530s.[101]

Beyond the events of the 1542 disputes there are other suggestions of the early influence of reformed religion in Coventry. Amongst the documents associated with the church of the Holy Trinity, the church of which most of those charged with heresy were parishioners, are notes on a sermon by the Lutheran preacher Robert Barnes. The sermon dates to the late 1530s and was most likely made at Paul's Cross on midsummer's day, as it criticises traditional midsummer entertainments. For this reason it was a document which might appeal to townsfolk in other urban contexts, especially those who were already sceptical of traditional religion and were exposed to

[98] Ibid fo. 61.
[99] TNA PRO KB9/129 fo.1r.
[100] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[101] Millar MacLure, 'A Register of Sermons Preached at Paul's Cross 1534-1642', *Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies* (v.6 , Toronto, 1989), pp. 18-25.

similar urban rituals. Craig and Maas in their recent analysis have argued that this sermon is entirely aberrant within its context; however, they do not deal explicitly with its provenance.[102] The manuscript sermon is bound together with other documents from the Trinity Church from the sixteenth and early seventeenth century in a volume which is now located in the Warwickshire Records Office. The book itself is the work of Thomas Sharp, a Coventry antiquary who was paid by the corporation to reorganise and compile the records of the city and the parish churches around 1820. Later descriptions of the book point to the fact that it was compiled from documents found from the parish chest within the vestry of the church and describe it as the 'vestry book'.[103] The connection between it and certain religious ideas and individuals in Coventry is made more likely by the fact that there was already a tradition of manuscript circulation connected to elite piety and late medieval heretical traditions. Moreover these theological ideas were highly mobile. Just as conservative ideas and preaching seemed to move easily throughout the larger English towns, from Oxford to Bristol and then to Coventry, the ideas of the reformers and their connections with London are equally apparent. This makes it plausible, even likely, that the sermon was possessed by someone in Coventry who witnessed the preaching himself, and wrote the words directly, or at least acquired it later from someone within the network of reformers and evangelicals in London. The sermon itself was used to promote a moderate Christocentric piety, arguing that 'Christ dyed alone and rose ageyn alone and went to hell alone... whye shuld he not have all preyse alone'.[104] Barnes also rejected the power of saints, ceremonies and post-mortem intercession, all of which might have appealed to reformers and evangelicals. Yet, even if the sermon could be definitively traced to a group of believers in Coventry, it might not suggest any great development in their theological outlook.

Barnes's attacks on ceremonies appealed to Lollards as well as reformers and evangelicals and he is known to have had contacts with Lollard groups and to have sold English bibles to them.[105] In

[102] John Craig and Korey Maas, 'A Sermon by Robert Barnes c. 1535', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55:3 (2004), pp. 542-51.
[103] Bodleian MS Top. Warwickshire e3 fo. 41r.
[104] WRO DR0801/12/68, fo. 68r; Craig and Maas, 'A Sermon by Robert Barnes c. 1535', pp. 542-51.
[105] John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (3 vols., Oxford, 1822), 1, pt. 2, pp. 50-6.

the same way, the indictments of Banwell and the Coventry men and women contained alleged heretical statements which had a great deal of similarity with the Lollard ideas discovered in the early sixteenth-century prosecutions. It was argued that the defendants complained about the wealth of the church to the extent that John Pynnyng wished there were no parish churches in England 'for I could take my rightes upon a hill'.[106] Alice Banwell made generalised anticlerical statements and complained that 'all p[r]istes be knaves' and that 'auriculer confession is of no force', while denying their power to save her from damnation.[107] The fact that the attack on these individuals was politically motivated does not preclude the allegations being true. The hatred of ceremonies and clerical privilege, as well as the love of scripture, seems entirely consistent with late medieval Lollard beliefs present in Coventry and even, to a certain extent, with more mainstream forms of piety in the city. The men also attacked images and, in a formulation that sounds much like Lollard complaints about money given to post-mortem intercessory institutions, Pynning said that he would rather 'give a peny to be hanged as to give a peny to be prayed for when I am deid'.[108] Even the rather odd statement by Maxfield, made when present at mass in the church of the Trinity in Coventry, that 'The bodie of o[ur] Lord is not now in the canapee or pixe ou[r] the high aulter ther... but [only] at the tyme of consecracion therof by a p[r]ist being at masse' seemed to reflect something of the conditional powers that were allowed to priests by the Coventry Lollards in 1511.[109] The apparent lack of originality in these documents suggests that neither the mayor of Coventry nor the vicar general, David Pole, was trying to uproot new Lutheran heresy amongst Lollards, as might have been the case elsewhere.[110] Rather, it suggests that the men were prosecuted as a result of the religious and civic politics of the town, perhaps at Pole's insistence, but primarily because they had broken some of the important political codes of the city by involving themselves in an extended spat with the vicar of St Michael's Church. Although Pole was later castigated for the religious persecution he enacted in a pseudo-Chaucerian poem, the

[106] TNA PRO KB9/129 fo.7r.
[107] Ibid fo. 2r.
[108] Ibid fo. 6r.
[109] McSheffrey and Tanner (eds.) *Lollards of Coventry*, p. 17.
[110] Craig D'Alton, 'Cuthbert Tunstal and Heresy in Essex and London, 1528', *Albion*, 35:2 (2003), pp. 210-28.

Ploughman's Tale, during this incident he seems to have been more interested in defending the preachers in Coventry.[111] Those accused were also minded to see the event as arising from entirely political motives and denied the accusations against them. Nor is there any indication in the surviving wills, those of Maxfield and Mathew, that the men displayed any unconventional religious sentiments.[112] Indeed, the only truly reformed voice detectable within the whole incident is that of William Lucy, who was content to make mischief for the conservative clerics within the town through the limited powers of the commission of investigation.

Much of the focus of recent Reformation historiography has been about the shaping of individual religious identity as English Protestantism gradually acquired common modes of understanding and expression which came to define reformed religion. [113] This had focused on men like William Lucy, who could consciously 'fashion' their own religious identity through the narrative invention of their own past, or through disputes in which they could act out their own honour and godliness, thereby creating well defined Protestant norms.[114] Yet, in early modern towns there were also much older collective identities in play where the constant self-definition of individuals and groups was just as important. These identities were enacted by the corporation, through the prosecution of the vicar's accusers, in an effort to define urban values and create a separation between true citizens and another set of townsfolk who were thought to be disorderly and disruptive. Whatever the religious feelings present amongst the aldermen, it was often more effective to appeal to these broadly based and popular ideals than the narrower religious and partisan ones. In the local, as well as the national context, the act of six articles has been seen as a major turnaround in religious fortunes for conservative groups and the turning of the tide of the Henrician Reformation. However, prosecutions were not pursued with the fervour that might be expected from such a reading, and the reasons for the composition and implementation of the act

[111] Robert Singleton, *The Courte of Venus* (London, 1563), STC (2nd ed.) / 24650.5 pp. 1-8.
[112] LRO B/C/11 (George Mathew 1545, Richard Maxfield 1544).
[113] Peter Marshall, 'Evangelical Conversion in the Reign of Henry VIII', Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (ed.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 14-37.
[114] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago, 1980).

were more varied and opaque.[115] It was probably the relative ambivalence of the ecclesiastical authorities which allowed it to become a tool of local politics and dispute. In the end Richard Banwell and his fellow accused managed to have their case dismissed by accusing the mayor and the corporation of bias and impropriety in their proceedings.[116] This suggests that the central authorities found these accusations of local politicking more than plausible. It may be that they felt the use of the act in this situation, to enforce civic values, was indicative of the way that it tended to be utilised in the local context. If, as the men's complaint suggested, Christopher Warren came to regret ever pursuing the case, then its eventual dismissal seemed like an acceptable outcome for both sides. Banwell and his fellow accused had been sent a sharp warning, and the collective power of the corporation had been asserted, but no harm or damage had been done which might cause rancour and bitterness.

During the 1540s the religious picture began to change in Coventry. Dr Robert Shirwood was dismissed from his post as head of St John's almshouse in 1546 and another man, Baldwin Norton, was appointed in his place by the executor of the founder, John Bond. Perhaps this was simply Bond exercising his patronage and influence in a local context; however, it reflected a more general decline in the fortune of religious conservatives in the city.[117] At the same time, in 1546, William Bennett, a man of reformed opinions, was appointed as vicar of the Trinity Church.[118] He was almost certainly a client of William Lucy and Hugh Latimer and his presence in Coventry added considerably to the tension in the city.[119] Moreover, Latimer was living at Baxterley in Warwickshire from 1539 in close proximity to Coventry. Despite this, Ramridge continued to promote his own religious agenda, having one Thomas Saunders of the city imprisoned for having a 'boke touching religion' in 1544.[120] However, despite these outbursts the city had a restraining effect on religious division. The religious landscape of Coventry during the later 1540s was filled

[115] Glyn Redworth, 'A Study in the Formulation of Policy: The Genesis and Evolution of the Act of Six Articles [1539]' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 37 (1986), pp. 42-67; Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, pp. 20-33.
[116]TNA PRO STAC 2/3 fo. 61.
[117] CRO BA/D/4/1/2 fo. 20r.
[118] LRO, B/A/1/14iv fo. 31r.
[119] TNA PRO SP 1/144 fo.199 [L&P v. 14, part I, 638].
[120] *Acts of the Privy Council*, i, p. 277.

with a densely packed and widely diverse mix of religious ideas and controversial figures. John Ramridge and his church were barely 200 yards from the church of the Holy Trinity and the Protestant, William Bennett. Both men must have felt the tension arising from their relationship and their seniority and precedence within the city. Moreover, there were obvious religious and doctrinal differences encapsulated by a surviving epistolary controversy between the two men. At some time in the late 1540s, in a protracted exchange of letters, Ramridge defended a belief in the 'real presence' with recourse to his vast library, quoting the church fathers at Bennett, who responded with rather plainer expositions of scripture to support a memorialist position.[121] However, the physical proximity of the two men robbed the debate of its rancour. Aside from the scholarly respect that each man clearly had for the other, there was recognition that bringing the growing evangelical grouping under Bennett into conflict with the more traditionalist elements in the city might prove disastrous for both men. A dispute along the lines of that in 1542, in which both men ranged their supporters against each other, would clearly have been unpalatable to aldermen of all religious opinions, as it represented another unwarranted and unsanctioned interference in the city's affairs. Toleration was not an ideal situation for either man but acceptance of the differences in ideas and opinions was forced on the two men by the dictates of a national Reformation, which encouraged caution, as well as a civic government dedicated to maintaining good order. Moreover, it was useful to fall back on some of the ancient ideals of the urban community. Ramridge admonished his opponent 'acording to charitye' and promised, in what seems to have been his last letter, that he would not 'medill with yow or in yowr cure or in yowr church' and asked his opponent to do likewise.[122] These references to common urban ideals were helpful in the process of retreating from the inflamed rhetoric and language of religious dispute when circumstances demanded it.

Although some of the main protagonists in the dispute of 1542, most notably Richard Banwell, were marked by an unusual brand of familial urban piety influenced by scripture and Lollard manuscript traditions, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that they were affected by the

[121] WRO DR0801/12/8.
[122] WRO DR0801/12/8.

ideas of the European Reformation. Even if Barnes's sermon could be connected to this group it might only prove that they were attracted to the denunciations of ceremony present within this preaching. Indeed, if a tradition of christocentric and anti-clerical piety had existed amongst the civic elite since the 1480s, the sporadic prosecution of offenders would suggest that the decision to proceed in the heresy prosecution, made by the corporation in 1542, was primarily based on a perceived political necessity. It was these moral and political values that would come to the fore in this dispute. The initial disagreement was not sparked by differences over religious doctrine but by a high-minded and zealous attempt to protect the King's primacy in religious matters. Banwell did not wish to portray himself as unusually godly and pious, a distinction that many in Coventry might have laughed at anyway given his reputation for brawling. Instead, he displayed an ostentatious loyalty towards royal authority in his dealings with the vicar of St Michael's. Religious disagreement, when it was present, was brought by outsiders, foreign to Coventry's urban political environment. The involvement of Lucy and Latimer, on one hand, and the conservative clergy in Coventry, on the other, was enough to foment a religious conflict which proved to be a continuation of the dispute of the 1530s. Having been displaced from Bristol in the 1530s conservatives like Hubbardine saw Coventry as another theatre for confrontation with reformers. If the aldermen disliked the presence of these disputing parties in the city, they were probably not much happier with the interference of the diocesan authorities who led the call for heresy charges. Nevertheless, the necessity of re-imposing order made the corporation more willing to contemplate the heresy prosecution for solidly political reasons. Those men who testified to the commission had usurped the authority of the governing council of the city by siding with outside interests and had transgressed the boundaries of civil language and behaviour. Therefore, for the corporation, recourse to the law seemed an entirely appropriate way of dealing with these individuals. After this shock was administered, the evidence suggests that the city and aldermen were successful in re-establishing harmonious relations to the extent that all of those prosecuted remained in the city and continued to pursue their craft or trade. Despite this, the dispute and the accompanying fight for religious influence in the city were important in shaping religious factionalism in the next decade.

6. Conflict and Continuity

The religious changes that Coventry experienced in the mid-sixteenth century were profound. Aside from the dissolutions, and the large transfers of urban land to the corporation, this period heralded a significant change in personal religious identity.[1] Beginning among small groups of believers, Protestantism eventually became institutionalised within the civic hierarchy. The economic decline of the clergy and clerical livings in the city gave comparative outsiders the opportunity to influence the religious environment of the city. At first, evangelical groupings provided a challenge to the established hierarchy of the city. These groups were small initially but had powerful external backers with competing ideas of how civic society should be organised. Men and women were provided with a choice between two rapidly divergent forms of Christian behaviour and belief. They were also faced by the potential duties of loyalty and obedience towards the monarch and choices between powerful patrons with personal religious and political agendas. Nor should we forget the recent admonition of historians to understand the politics of power and influence at the level of the parish and the urban community.[2] In some cases men and women were faced with loyalty to their neighbours and community or their allegiances with their co-religionists. The maintenance of peace and order in the city was not simply due to the triumph of Protestantism amongst the civic elite. The continued coherence of the civic community when faced with these divisions was a testament to the strength of civic political culture and ideals and the adaptability of the means of expressing and representing civic hierarchies during a period in which the city was faced with religious turmoil.

The potential for religious conflict was increased by the development of reformed religious communities in the city, which began in the 1540s. Part of the reason that these groups were allowed to have any influence at all was that the wealth of the clergy was declining in Coventry, as it was in many other urban settings. This provided a golden opportunity for lay patrons and those with personal religious agendas to influence urban religion. Having only two parish churches, the

[1] Mark Knight, *Religious Life in Coventry, 1485-1558* (Ph.D., Warwick, 1986), pp. 250-60; Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns,* p. 72.
[2] Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish', pp. 47-89.

city avoided some of the rationalisations of parishes and livings made in other urban areas.[3] Nevertheless, it experienced substantial decline in clerical incomes and the number of urban clergy, which has been seen as a feature of the Reformation in urban areas.[4] Coupled with the late medieval economic contraction that the city experienced, which lessened the income from tithes, this seriously damaged the position of the clergy.[5] Before the dissolutions, the advowsons of both civic parishes were in the hands of the monastic cathedral in Coventry which allowed the prior of St Mary's to select a vicar for both urban livings. The vicars of the two churches retained the responsibility for collecting tithes but paid a fixed fee to the prior, and subsequently the crown, as rector of both civic parishes. This situation was the root of most of the money worries of the clergy in Coventry as it left the parishes with fixed fees and declining incomes. An attempt to ameliorate this situation was made in 1538 when the prior remitted the £5 owed to him by the vicar of St Michael's, against the background of decreasing income from urban tithes.[6] However, there were still obvious problems. The increase in clerical taxation during the 1530s continued to chip away at clerical wealth.[7] As the vicar of St Michael's Church claimed explosively in 1542, his income from tithes was unable to match his fixed outgoings in the form of the wages paid to his curate and parish priests, and his payments to the crown, which was, since the dissolution, the rector of the parish.[8] By the beginning of the 1550s the parish had a legacy of unpaid tax and the clergy in Coventry were claiming that their poverty affected the vital pastoral duties of the clergy, including charity and hospitality.[9]

[3] David Palliser, 'The Union of the Parishes at York' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xlvi (1974), pp. 87-102.
[4] Skeeters, *Community and Clergy*, pp. 135-74; R.N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 191-251.
[5] *The Itinerary of John Leland in or About the Years 1535-1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (5 vols, London, 1906-10), ii, p. 107.
[6] *Abstract of the Bailiffs' Accounts of Monastic & Other Estates in the County of Warwick,* ed. W. F. Carter (Dugdale Soc., 2, Oxford, 1923), p. 53.
[7] J.J. Scarisbrick, 'Clerical taxation in England 1485- 1547', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xi (1960), pp. 41-54; Felicity Heal, 'Clerical Tax Collection under the Tudors: The Influence of the Reformation', in R. O'Day and F. Heal (eds.), *Continuity & Change. Personnel and Administration of the Church in England 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), pp. 97-122.
[8] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[9] *Acts of the Privy Council*, i, p. 231.

As a consequence of declining incomes, clerical positions in the city suffered from extended periods of vacancy. In 1546 parishioners of the smaller parish of Holy Trinity petitioned the crown, claiming that the poverty of the living meant that no man 'laboureth or regardeth to be our pastor to ffede us ghostly with gods worde and to minister unto us the holy sacraments as to Christ's flock behoveth'.[10] Even when a minister of the right opinions and standing was obtained by the parish, the corporation was forced to remit money to the new minister in exchange for the tithes of his parish.[11] In an attempt to achieve stability the vicar farmed out the tithes of his parish to a small group of aldermen in 1550 in exchange for paying 'pencions porcions tenths and other duties'.[12] Despite these measures, the end of Henry VIII's reign was probably the low point in clerical numbers and pastoral provision in the city. Coventry suffered from the dissolution of the chantries and guilds, with their attendant clerics, as well as the flight of monastic brethren who, despite their pensions, were left to compete for secular livings elsewhere.[13] The costs and charges of office, including the payment of curates and minor parish clergy, also had an impact on the senior clergy in both parishes, resulting in vacancies and a lack of clerical leadership. If anything the surrounding parishes and the dependent chapels of St Michael's Church fared worse during the mid-century period. Many of these posts, within the corporate county of the city, remained unfilled in 1560, having been vacant for a number of years.[14]

Nor was the shortage of clergy the limit of the corporation's worries regarding religious provision in the city. Concerns also extended to the material conditions of the city's churches, including the simple desire for the provision of sufficient buildings to hold the growing urban population. Efforts to preserve the monastic cathedral of St Mary's were connected to the prestige of the city. The aldermen were desirous, along with the Bishop Rowland Lee, to preserve this as a secular institution.[15] The likelihood that the two parish churches might become overburdened with the

[10] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, pp. 5-7.
[11] CRO BA/G/1/25/1 fo. 43r.
[12] WRO DR0429/74.
[13] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 72; TNA PRO E301/37; TNA PRO E301/53; TNA PRO E301/57.
[14] CCCC MSS 97 fo. 31v.
[15] Scarisbrick, 'The Dissolution of St Mary's Priory' pp. 158-68; TNA PRO SP1/136 fo. 161 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. ii, 394]; SP1/137 fo. 238 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. ii, 650]; SP1/137 fo. 259 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. ii, 674]; SP1/138 fo. 45 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. ii, 719]; SP1/152 fo. 210 [*L&P*, v.14, pt. i].

sheer weight of people after the dissolution of monastic churches in Coventry was also foremost amongst the fears of the corporation.[16] Although the aldermen talked of other issues, such as the possibility that the two large parish churches, and their large congregations, might spread the plague more easily, the idea that the urban population might be deprived of godly ministry because of the lack of adequate buildings was uppermost in the minds of the corporation.

Despite the relative poverty of the parochial environment, it is easy to overstate the case for lay influence. As others have pointed out, civic clergy were not necessarily experiencing terminal decline or a loss of status despite the inevitable attacks on them which came with the Reformation. The cream of the urban clergy were expected to be a professional class of men with a university education who could both preach successfully and originally, while providing moral leadership and pastoral provision to the civic community.[17] The corporation demanded educated men to lead its civic parishes and the two vicarages were generally able to attract high quality graduates.[18] Clerical leadership remained important. The vicar of St Michael's was a key figure in the city with the ability to choose his own parish clergy and influence the choice of other preaching ministers in the city.[19] Yet, the economic problems of urban religion sometimes provided an opportunity to recalibrate the relationship between the clergy, laymen and civic leaders.[20] The involvement of the laity in supporting the clergy added to the possibility for religious factionalism within the urban environment and the development of a community of evangelicals.

One of the ways in which Protestant laymen could have influenced the growth of the evangelical community was by giving encouragement to Protestants trying to obtain preferment in the city. This might include forms of economic support such as standing surety for the clerical taxation owed to the crown on obtaining a benefice in the form of the 'first fruits'. Without the provision of what was, in effect, a loan to pay these taxes it would have been impossible for any individual

[16] TNA PRO SP 1/136 f.161 [*L&P*, v.13, pt. ii, 394].
[17] Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation', p. 70; Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland 1521-1547* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 39-40.
[18] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, pp. 76-7.
[19] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[20] Diarmaid MacCulloch and John Blatchly, 'Pastoral Provision in the Parishes of Tudor Ipswich', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22:3 (1991), pp. 457-74.

cleric to take up a beneficed position. As others have argued, the lay evangelical community in London were assiduous in supplying this form of sponsorship to their co-religionists.[21] Things are certainly less clear cut in the case of Coventry, partly because there were fewer clerical positions and therefore less evidence to draw upon, but also because other avenues through which assistance could be provided seem to have been important. Some clergy, like the Catholic George Bruche, appointed to the vicarage of the Holy Trinity in 1554, were clearly sponsored by a family member.[22] Others, such as the returning exile Thomas Lever, although initially supported by the evangelical community in Coventry, were provided with sureties through their rapport with the London godly community. When Lever was made archdeacon of Coventry in 1560 his sponsors included Henry Bull, born in Warwickshire, but living in London by 1560.[23] Bull was well connected to national networks of Protestants and was a part of the publishing effort that produced Foxe's matryology.[24] Because of their links to evangelical communities or family elsewhere, many of the more important clergy were less dependent than they might have been on local links. In this sense, even the local reformation had a national character, as many of the clergy who received preferment to positions in Coventry had powerful sponsors elsewhere.

That is not to say that local influence was not important in clerical provision in Coventry. The city's aldermen, such as the mercer and Coventry MP, Henry Over, did support the clergy by standing surety for their 'first fruits'. Probably of a reforming mindset, Over was described by the monastic visitor to Coventry, Dr. John London, as a 'lively politic man' who interested himself on behalf of the King.[25] He was also keenly aware of the needs of the city. Along with the alderman Christopher Warren he managed to arrange a loan from Sir Thomas White for the purchase of the dissolved monastic lands in Coventry by the corporation. It seems that his involvement in the affairs of the city did not damage his business dealings and by the mid-sixteenth century he was

[21] Brett Usher, 'Backing Protestantism: The London Godly, The Exchequer and the Foxe Circle' in David Loades (ed.), *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective* (Aldershot, 1999) pp. 105-34; Brett Usher, 'The Silent Community: Early Puritans and Patronage of the Arts' in Diana Wood (ed.), *The Church and the Arts* (Studies in Church History, 28, Oxford, 1992), pp. 287-302.
[22] TNA PRO E334/4 fo. 168r.
[23] TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 82v; TNA PRO E334/2 fo. 49v.
[24] Susan Wabuda, 'Bull, Henry (d. 1577)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[25] TNA PRO SP 1/142 fo.161 [*L&P*, v.14, pt. i, 150].

one of the three richest merchants in Coventry. [26] His sense of civic responsibility extended to supporting clergy in the city, by standing surety for their 'first fruits'. Over stood surety for Roger Capp, the vicar of the Holy Trinity in Coventry in 1543.[27] He acted in a similar manner for clergy in the county of Warwick, as did his son Richard, possibly connected to the family's ownership of land and advowsons.[28] Whether his actions denoted any attempt to effect religious change in the city is unclear. Supporting the civic clergy in this way might simply be the conventional response of an alderman who had become so enmeshed in the life of the corporation that he was expected to make efforts to obtain pastoral provision for the city.

Other gestures of support were more certainly motivated by an attachment to new religious ideas. When one Thomas Saunders of Coventry was committed to the King's Bench prison in 1545, after John Ramridge, the vicar of St Michael's Church, accused him of offences against the Act of Six Articles and the ownership of prohibited books, he could evidently draw upon assistance from like-minded individuals in the urban community. Saunders was eventually freed after the Privy Council found that his books contained nothing heretical.[29] However, he also managed to retain his links with the civic community. In 1563 alderman Edmund Brownell of Coventry stood surety for Saunders's 'first fruits', when he was appointed to the living of Allesley, another of the city's neighbouring rural parishes.[30] Support for the clergy fulfilled a religious imperative for Coventry's evangelicals, but it is also evidence that ministers could draw upon the social sentiments and the loyalty of the civic body toward one of their own. Though their religious identities are less easy to pin down, other men in Coventry were active in providing sureties for clergy appointed to positions in the county of Warwick, possibly for social as well as religious reasons.[31] Joint action by the Protestant community could help to create a sense of collective identity amongst those with similar religious ideas. Men like Saunders could also rely on their previous good standing in urban society,

[26] TNA PRO PROB 11/49 (Henry Waver 1567).
[27] TNA PRO E334/2 fo. 132 r.
[28] *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1509-1558,* iii, pp. 33-4.
[29] *Acts of the Privy Council*, i, p. 277.
[30] TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 175r; LRO B/A/1/14iv fo. 43r.
[31] TNA PRO E334/2 fo. 144r; TNA PRO E334/3 fo. 51v; TNA PRO E334/4 fo. 39v; TNA PRO E334/4 fo. 180r; TNA PRO E334/4 fo. 196v; TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 93v; TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 180v.

as well as a network of friends to provide them with support and credit. Such support helped to foster the evangelical community, in opposition to what was still largely a city wedded to traditional religious belief.

Of course ad hoc opportunities to provide economic help to the clergy had always been present. It was not uncommon for money to be left directly to clergymen, although this might show a familial relationship, not simply a gesture of support for a particular set of religious beliefs.[32] In other cases it is possible to see a partisan religious objective. In 1542, the aldermen Cuthbert Joyner admitted that he had supplied gifts of money to the conservative preachers in the city, indicating that aldermen sometimes sought to shape civic godliness against the tide of reformed thought. [33] The proponents of religious disputes were naturally inclined to support those who could contribute erudite arguments to their cause and, just as with the evangelical groupings in the 1540s, there was some desire to co-opt moral and intellectual leadership to a conservative cause.

The relationships between preachers and their lay patrons were not always born of mutual agreement and social subtlety. John Bond, a citizen of Coventry, displayed the direct and powerful hold that he had over certain preachers in Coventry when he used the provisions in his grandfather's will to dismiss and appoint clergy to the almshouse that he founded in 1511, replacing the religiously conservative incumbent in 1546 with another man.[34] Whether this resulted in a more evangelical preacher is unclear. However, there is no doubt that when large bequests were administered in this way they did provide for a great degree of personal choice within the civic environment. More often, gifts to endow series of sermons ended up in administration of the corporation of the city, which allowed the civic elite and the corporate body to make decisions about the preacher who was appointed on each occasion. This meant that the same endowments which were used to support conservative preachers, who spoke against the new evangelical groups in the 1540s, could be converted to promote the puritan preachers that Coventry

[32] LRO B/C/11 (Thomas Byrd 1525, William Balaie 1542, Robert Clawghton 1555, Stephen Cordre 1568, William Dayll 1558, Thomas Enderby 1545, Alice Grene 1538, Joan Grephyn 1548, William Godfrey 1551, Thomas Greffyn 1551, Richard Herryng 1554, Thomas Letherbarrow 1556, John Moyle 1554, Richard Tully 1558, John Yardly 1557).
[33] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[34] TNA PRO 11/115 (Thomas Bonde 1507); CRO BA/D/4/1/1-3.

entertained during the 1570s and 1580s.[35] In the hands of strongly partisan civic administrations, sermons were a way of achieving religious change. However, there were also strong elements of continuity which helped to smooth over periods of religious difficulty and civic strife. The civic government were able to utilise these endowed resources continuously to provide sermons which promoted good order, godliness and charity through a difficult period of religious change. It was usual for benefactors to receive a few words of adulatory praise from the preacher, who extolled them as an example of civic charity.[36] In the case of money given to provide civic sermons, the initial goal was the glorification of the memory of the individual, within the context of civic society. This was a goal which remained a consistent feature of preaching, from both sides of the Reformation divide, throughout the sixteenth century.

As we have seen, economic opportunity proved to be an important factor in promoting a new religious environment in the city. The presence of an educated socially and geographically mobile group of elite townsmen was also important in promoting Protestantism. McClendon may be correct in the assertion that it was in the interests of aldermen and civic leaders to minimise religious differences between townsmen, even to the extent that preventing confrontation formed part of a political creed.[37] However, it does not follow from this that the civic elite were successful in preventing the ingress of religious tensions. Nor did they protect themselves from national politics or religious movements, as a way of preventing internecine strife. Coventry was situated at the centre of major road networks, within a few days' ride of London, and close to other centres of Protestantism in southern Warwickshire and Oxfordshire. Despite the economic problems which the city faced, its elite were still wealthy and powerful. As others have argued, urban elite groups possessed a largely homologous outlook, developed through common exposure to forms of education and the same economic privileges and trading connections.[38] Frequent trips to London, or other major urban centres, to purchase goods or to pursue suits in the law courts gave these men a single material and political culture which helped to break down geographical barriers between

[35] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 26r; CRO BA/A/1/26/3 pp. 1,12,27,33.
[36] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 26r.
[37] McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation*, pp. 253-8.
[38] Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth*, p. 159-94.

them. This meant that they could participate in national political life as well as local urban politics. Access to social networks of reformers in England, through friendship and economic links, helped to move forward the more religiously radical elements of the Reformation. The result of this was that the religious and social horizons of townsmen were considerably larger than the immediate urban community. Thomas Gregory, the town clerk of Coventry, was a good example of someone with these broad social horizons. Gregory lent money to various clergymen, mostly connected with Magdalen College Oxford. He probably had some quasi-official role in managing the college's financial affairs in Warwickshire, obtained because of his legal experience. Merchants, lawyers and aldermen were used to lending such small amounts when there was the possibility of financial gain. However, given Gregory's strong personal beliefs and commitment to the Protestant cause, it was not surprising to find him supporting the evangelical circle at Magdalen, which included the martyrologist John Foxe. In 1553 he lent money to Thomas Cooper, the schoolmaster of Magdalen College School and in 1563 to Thomas Hancock, vicar of Willoughby in Warwickshire, appointed by Laurence Humphrey as president of Magdalen College, which possessed the advowson. He also lent money to a 'doctor peters at magdalene' in the same year.[39] Sixteenth-century English towns were centres for the social engagement of the rural clergy with each other as well as energetic and interested laymen. Like many men of that status and importance, Gregory's religious worldview was not only conditioned by the town and its environs, but was based on a wide-ranging circle of friends in evangelical strongholds in southern Warwickshire and Oxfordshire as well as civic and urban allegiances in Coventry.

An examination of other civic figures can only magnify the impression of the broad social reach of religious alliances and friendships, which was required to support the growing evangelical community in Coventry. By the late 1550s, the contacts of Coventry men with prominent evangelicals were extensive. Thomas Gregory's lending was dwarfed by the amounts that Thomas Riley, a draper and alderman of Coventry, lent to Bishop Thomas Bentham in 1560, when newly returned exiles began to be appointed to clerical roles and needed money to maintain their

[39] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 25r, 39v, 48v.

household and cover the first instalment of the 'first fruits'.[40] In the 1560s Riley lent over £500 to the bishop, probably through Thomas Lever, the archdeacon of Coventry. Riley must have had connections to the returning exiles and the community of evangelicals who had remained in England under the Marian regime. In some cases it remains hard to separate partisan religious support from the possibility of profit where lending was concerned. However, in the case of Gregory and Riley it is obvious that they were involved in promoting a geographically wide-ranging reforming movement. In its turn this national movement, through powerful aldermen like Gregory and Riley, also had a powerful effect on the progress of the Reformation in Coventry.

During the 1540s and 1550s, the evangelical community often relied on the support of these external influences, to promote reformed religious belief in the city. When the Holy Trinity Church found a vicar, after a period in which the living was vacant, the church was provided with an ardent Protestant, William Bennett, who had been supported throughout his career by the evangelical gentleman William Lucy.[41] While there is no direct evidence to connect Lucy to this appointment, his previous interventions, on behalf of reformers in Coventry and Stratford, suggest that he might also have been influential in this case.[42] Other instances of support for the growing evangelical community in Coventry are clearer. After the dissolutions, John Hales, a gentleman whose family were influential in Kent, acquired land in Coventry, through his office holdings and the friendships which he cultivated at court. As a condition of this grant of land from the dissolved St John's almshouse, he was bound to found a school in Coventry. Hales's status, as a relative outsider, and the failure to endow this school, made him unpopular amongst some of the townsmen and aldermen.[43] However, the suspicion in which he was held does not seem to have been reflected throughout the entirety of civic society and urban government. In 1549 the conservative element in the city was in abeyance after John Ramridge, the vicar of St Michael's and his curate were made to 'recant their popish errors' in the pulpit in Coventry.[44] Faced with a declining number of clergy

[40] *Camden Miscellany xxvii*, 'The Letter-Book of Thomas Bentham', pp. 146, 181, 188, 229.
[41] LRO B/A/1/14iv fo. 43r; Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 76.
[42] TNA PRO C47/7/9 fo. 4r.
[43] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 76.
[44] SBTRO DR37/2/123/7 fo. 22v; Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 11.

and the need to support a growing number of evangelicals, it was Hales who stepped forward to provide a preacher. This man was Leonard Cox, a humanist schoolmaster and former client of Thomas Cromwell, who dedicated his translation of Paul's epistle to Titus to Hales in 1549.[45] Subsequently Cox became attached to St Michael's Church. Whether he was supported by the entire corporation, as a civic preacher, is unclear; his actual status is confused and there is no reference to him, or any payments made towards a civic preacher at this time, in the corporation accounts.[46] The divisions within the mayor's council over religious matters might have prevented the appointment of a civic preacher. After a period during which conservatives were in the ascendancy in Coventry, there was naturally a tension between conservatives and reformers. It was better not to act and risk creating religious division over partisan figures such as Cox, even when there was an obvious pastoral need for the preaching and ministry which he provided. In any case, the ability to influence some civic appointments was out of the hands of the corporation. Some later histories, including a manuscript list of the masters of Hales's free school, have assumed that he was made schoolmaster around 1580, although this timeframe is implausible given that he was born around 1490.[47] If he held this role at all it must have been considerably earlier in the century, when Hales was alive and had complete control over the school.

Cox first obtained a licence to preach in 1547, in the first year of Edward VI's reign. Although the death of Henry VIII represented something of a liberation for evangelicals, preaching was still tightly controlled. However, these limitations did not prevent aristocratic patrons supporting their own preachers, and obtaining licences to preach.[48] This allowed the nobility or wealthy gentry to support itinerant preachers. Cox was unusual in adopting a parish community in Coventry, finding support there, and providing encouragement in return. He already had a considerable reputation as a teacher and became involved in the pastoral life of the parish during the 1550s, witnessing a

[45] McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics*, p. 151.
[46] CRO BA/A/1/26/3 fo. 204v-220r; CRO BA/G/1/25/1 [A9] fo. 42r-45r.
[47] S. F. Ryle, 'Cox, Leonard (b. c.1495, d. in or after 1549)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[48] Melissa Franklin-Harkrider, *Women, Reform and Community in Early Modern England: Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, and Lincolnshire's Godly Aristocracy, 1519-1580* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 91.

number of Coventry wills. These wills are characterised by Cox's unusual preamble which asked, through the merits of Christ's blood, 'to be the childe of Everlasting Salvacion', as well as expressing a distain for the 'mortal and corruptable body'.[49] In all, Cox witnessed 9 surviving wills in Coventry and, along with John Farmer, a parish priest of the neighbouring Holy Trinity Church, was one of the witnesses who appears most often in 1551. This is a small number but it was representative of a small but growing evangelical community in the city and a substantial fraction of those wills made during 1551.

The making of wills was above all a social phenomenon, and a cooperative enterprise. In extreme cases wills could constitute a political and provocative statement of faith, delivering a powerful individual rebuke to the ecclesiastical establishment and royal authority.[50] However, such expressions of faith were unusual. This was not because wills were considered a private and personal document; in fact a will made in an urban context might involve neighbours and friends as witnesses and executors as well as provisions for the members of a corporate body, such as a craft guild, to attend the funeral. Most testators were anxious to ensure a smooth passage to probate and were unlikely to make bequests to institutions like chantries, which would imply a belief in a proscribed doctrine, and risk the confiscation of their wealth.[51] The desire to conform to official precepts as well as the potential for communal involvement in the making of a will, including the influence of clerics and scribes, have greatly increased the scepticism about what wills can tell us about the belief of the individual.[52] The preamble, which included the 'bequest of the soul', has most often been treated to statistical analysis; however, it could be formulaic and depend on the influence of the scribe and not the testator. Wills are of most value when used to contextualise

[49] LRO B/C/11 (Richard Bromwych 1550, John Chambers 1551, Thomas Grerffyn 1551, Thomas Corbeyn 1551 John Leeche 1551, Joan Lunt 1551 Robert More 1551, Thomas Morres 1551); TNA PROB 11/34 (Edward Hopley).
[50] John Craig and Caroline Litzenberger, 'Wills as Religious Propaganda; The Testament of William Tracy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), pp. 415-31; Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 144; for an example from Coventry see, Humphrey Fenn, *The Last Will and Testament, with the Profession of the Faith of Humfrey Fen, Sometimes Pastor of One of the Churches of Coventry* (London, 1641).
[51] Duffy, Stripping of the Altars, pp. 504-16.
[52] Margaret Spufford, 'The Scribes of Villager's Wills in the 16th and 17th Centuries and their Influence', *Local Population Studies* (1971), pp. 28-43; Michael Zell, 'The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century', *BIHR*, 50 (1977), pp. 246-9.

other information, and give a wider picture of the relationships between individuals in urban society.

Combined with other evidence, wills are able to demonstrate the increasing influence of evangelical belief amongst the civic elite in the late 1540s and 1550s. The testators witnessed by Cox demonstrate the presence of evangelical opinions in the city, not simply through their links to Cox, but also to other networks of Protestants outside the city. The wills that Leonard Cox witnessed, from the 1550s, show the testators to be both richer and better connected than their immediate contemporaries because of the relative size of their inventories and bequests. The testators included William Bayly, William Saunders, Henry Westly and Edward Pell, all of whom had been civic officers or aldermen by 1550. The wills also attest to networks of Protestants, such as that linking Robert Dudley and John Bowlat, both members of the Drapers' Company, to the former master of the guild school, Robert Coventre. [53] By the start of Edward's reign, Coventry's evangelicals had already started to build a web of personal contacts which helped to sustain them as a separate community within the corporate body of the city.

These men were powerful, educated and well connected enough to form alliances with other Protestants in the county of Warwick. This provides us with another way in which the social reach of Coventry's citizens helped to advance evangelical religion in the city and, in doing so, helped to support a national movement for reform. The household of Mary Glover, Hugh Latimer's niece, at Baxterley, was a source of spiritual sustenance for many of the Coventry men.[54] John Careless, the Coventry weaver, who warned Hugh Latimer of his impeding arrest in 1554, attended sermons there, as did the Glovers' relations, and other members of the evangelical grouping in Coventry.[55] It is sometimes suggested that men and women with outspoken religious views somehow cut themselves off from the rest of civic society and their neighbours because they were unusually

[53] *Leet Book* pp. 375-812; LRO B/C/11 (Robert Dudley 1563, John Bowlat 1558, Thomas Corbeyn 1551); TNA PRO E301/53.
[54] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1576 Edition; Sheffield, 2004) [http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/], p. 1821.
[55] Susan Wabuda, 'Shunamites and Nurses of the English Reformation: The Activities of Mary Glover, Niece of Hugh Latimer' in William Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *Women in the Church* (Studies in Church History, 27) (Oxford and Cambridge (MA), 1990).

fervent or held religious opinions that were far from the norms regarding the belief and practice of religion in urban society.[56] However, it seems that these men were well grounded in civic politics and government. Careless was a member of the Weavers' Company and associated with some of the more important members of urban society. In 1550 he witnessed the will of Margery Nethermill, widow of one of the richest and most important figures of the previous decade, Julian Nethermill. In doing so, he joined Protestant figures such as Thomas Riley, as well as prominent Catholic aldermen.[57] After 1547 the atmosphere of religious reform was also supported by the two civic parishes. A tradition of preaching from the city's pulpits, stretching back to the late medieval period, was now turned towards the promotion of the new faith rather than the defence of traditional religion. During Edward's reign another Protestant minister replaced the conservative, John Ramridge, as vicar of St Michael's Church.[58] Hugh Simmons evidently gave support to the evangelicals in Coventry, to the extent that shortly after the accession of Mary, the Privy Council described his 'lewde preaching' and ordered an investigation of the 'slanderous talkers' inspired by him. Presumably these men were Protestants who had complained about the re-imposition of Catholic ceremony, as well as those whose loyalty was questioned through their support for the Grey claim to the throne.[59] During the early 1550s, with two reformers controlling the two civic parishes, evangelicals were in a strong position in Coventry.

Despite the residual strength of Catholicism and traditional forms of piety, by 1547 and the death of Henry VIII, the corporation had already formed strong relationships with nobles and gentry who supported reform. Urban environments had strategic importance for those nobles looking to build local power bases in Warwickshire and the midlands. In the late 1540s, the Earl of Warwick, John Dudley, and the Marquis of Dorset, Henry Grey, were both competing for power and influence in Warwickshire and Leicestershire, through the acquisition of land.[60] The Greys had long laid claim

[56] Muriel McClendon, 'Reconsidering the Marian Persecution: The Urban Context', Muriel McClendon, Joseph Ward, Michael MacDonald (eds.), *Protestant Identities: Religion, Society, and Self-Fashioning in Post-Reformation England* (Stanford, 1999), pp. 195-210.
[57] LRO B/C/11 (Margery Nethermill 1552).
[58] LRO B/A/1/14iv fo. 43r.
[59] *Acts of the Privy Council*, i, p. 333.
[60] Benjamin Baum, *Henry Grey Duke of Suffolk; Noble Politics and Protestantism in Mid-Tudor England*, (M.St. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2004), pp. 26-30.

to power and influence in the city and they had been extensively involved in putting down the insurrections in 1525. A member of that family had even held the vicarage of St Michael's in the 1520s.[61] In the early years of Edward VI's reign they sought good relations with the civic elite of all religious persuasions. From the perspective of the townsmen, these connections were natural, as the civic elite represented a class with as much power and social distinction as the local gentry. Moreover, building relationships with noblemen could help to protect economic privilege, on which the power of the elite was based, by facilitating interactions with royal authority and government. [62] To this end, the civic elite forged relationships with both Grey and Dudley. In 1547 Henry Grey and John Dudley dined with the mayor, James Rogers, and his brethren on separate occasions.[63] Grey seems to have been interested in courting the evangelical grouping in Coventry, as the fact of his later attempts to raise the midlands in revolt, during Wyatt's rebellion, would show. The prominence of these groups amongst the civic hierarchy seems to have led Grey to overestimate the strength of his co-religionists in the city, as well as their loyalty to him. Nevertheless, on the accession of Mary, he found his intentions thwarted, even in strongholds such as Coventry. Any suggestion that the city might have declared its support for Jane Grey and the abortive coup attempted by Dudley, then the duke of Northumberland, were quickly quashed by the civic authorities. The civic annals suggest that Edward Saunders, the city's staunchly conservative recorder, moved to proclaim Mary almost immediately which set the mood of the civic response. At the same time the craft guilds mounted an armed watch on the city's walls.[64] However, this did not mean that townsmen all accepted their new reality and the reversion to Catholicism.

The first indication of trouble in the city came comparatively early in Mary's reign, in the autumn of 1553, shortly after the Queen's accession when 5 men were detained in the city for their 'lewde and sedicious behaviour on All Hallowe Daye'. Baldwin Clerc, John Clerc, John Careless, Thomas

[61] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp. 249-58.
[62] Rosemary Horrox, Urban Patronage and Patrons in the Fifteenth Century' Ralph Alan Griffiths (ed.), *Patronage the Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1981), pp. 160-1.
[63] CRO BA/G/1/25/1 fo. 43r.
[64] *The Chronicle of Queen Jane, and of Two Years of Queen Mary, and Especially of the Rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. J. G. Nichols (Camden Soc., old ser., xlviii, 1850) p. 125.

Wilcocks and Richard Astelyn were taken to London for examination of their offences by the Privy Council.[65] These offences, if their future activities were any guide, probably extended to a clash over religious belief with the aldermen. Although Protestantism had made considerable inroads in Coventry under Edward VI due to the influence of new preachers and ministers, many of the civic elite remained resolutely conservative. While the minor officers of the Leet court and some of the more junior aldermen were more likely to be evangelicals, in part because of their youth, the mayor's council were a generation older and more conservative.[66] This council was made up of around 6 of the most important aldermen, including the mayor, and its business was the everyday running of the city and the maintenance of civic order. The conservative majority on the mayor's council, acting through the common consent of its members, made it more powerful than the evangelical grouping. This division, as well as the natural reticence which accompanied opposition to official policy, meant that the city's support for evangelical causes, such as Thomas Wyatt's rebellion in 1554, was far from assured.

Even so, the revolt of 1554, over the Spanish marriage, provoked further disquiet in the city. Henry Grey, elevated to duke of Suffolk under Edward, found his position increasingly uncomfortable under Mary's new regime. Grey's anxiety over his position and personal honour provoked him to join Wyatt and Edward Courtenay in revolt in 1554. Courtenay set off the rebellion prematurely by confessing all to Mary on 21 January 1554, throwing himself upon the Queen's mercy.[67] In an attempt to make the best of the situation, Grey travelled from Sheen to Bradgate, his seat in Leicestershire, to raise men for a march on London.[68] He had taken pains to prepare the ground in Coventry, sending his servant Thomas Rampton ahead to meet with 'an old familiar', Anthony Corbett, who in turn introduced him to other townsmen who would come out in support of the duke. The Coventry men were confident of their abilities to capture Warwick castle and confident that the city would support them.

[65] *Acts of the Privy Council*, iv, p.231; CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 227.
[66] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 fo. 10r-12r; *Leet Book*, pp. 797-813.
[67] David Loades, *Two Tudor Conspiracies* (Cambridge, 1965), p.24.
[68] TNA PRO SP 11/3 fo.49 [*CSPD Mary*, 84].

The confession of Thomas Rampton names the Coventry men as Richard Astlyn, Francis Symcocks, William Glover, a draper, and a man named Clerk who had just arrived from London when Rampton met him. It seems likely that Clerk and Richard Astlyn were the same men who were imprisoned and sent to London in the previous year for their offences at All Hallows.[69] Rampton had noted that Clerk was a committed Protestant, as was Glover, who told him that Grey's cause was 'right well knowen [as] it is godes quarrell' and assured him that when the duke arrived the town was 'most assuredly his own'.[70] It has been suggested by historians that these men held no civic offices and were of little importance to the urban elite.[71] More generally, others have sought to show that the opposition to Mary in urban England often came from known troublemakers, who obstinately failed to follow the social rules of their community, or that those persecuted were often involved in local quarrels.[72] At least in the case of Symcocks and Glover this does not seem to have been true. Both were well integrated into the town elite. Francis Symcocks would rise to be sheriff of the city in 1575 and eventually an alderman.[73] In the will of Richard Foxall, a Coventry mercer, Symcocks was left an engraved silver spoon, as were 12 other aldermen, including former mayors Thomas Riley and John Hertford, both strong supporters of evangelical belief, for the reason that there had 'been greate famyharitie in our life time' between the men.[74] William Glover was involved in the urban life and government and was also connected to the networks of evangelicals in the county of Warwick. He was probably the 'on Glouer woyse broth[er] of late was burned', referred to in a deposition made by Roger Shakespeare in 1556. The information provided to the government accused 4 men from Coventry, including Glover, of not attending their parish church 'this twelve monethe and a quarter'.[75] Foxe suggests that this William Glover, brother of the martyr Robert Glover, was eventually driven out of the city because of his

[69] TNA PRO SP 11/13 fo.61 [*CSPD Mary*, 781].
[70] TNA PRO SP 11/3 fo.53-5 [*CSPD Mary*, 44].
[71] Loades, *Two Tudor Conspiracies*, p. 24.
[72] Patrick Collinson, 'The Persecution in Kent', in Eamon Duffy (ed.), *The Church of Mary Tudor* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 309-34.
[73] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 25v.
[74] Annals and TNA PRO PROB 11/50 (Richard Foxall 1568).
[75] TNA PRO SP 15/7 fo.128 [*CSPD Eliz*, v. 7, 47].

support for the Protestant cause and died whilst trying to escape the country.[76] Indeed, there is some circumstantial evidence that corroborates this account of him. In 1566, one Nicholas Hopkins of Coventry, an alderman with Protestant views, left a sum of money to each of the children of a man named William Glover.[77] If this was the same man, then some of the rebels of 1554 participated in local politics as well as the evangelical community in Coventry. Those who supported the rebellion in Coventry, usually for religious reasons, were higher up in the social scale and more integrated into civic society than is often supposed. This further shows that there was not a dichotomy between hard-line Protestants who tried to resist the Marian government and their more conciliatory brethren. They often moved in the same social circle, kept the same company and were even accorded the same respect and status. Within this group there were a small number of militant individuals who were fully immersed in civic political and social life, but advocated extreme forms of resistance to the religious programme of the new monarch.

Needless to say, they were not the majority, even amongst the Protestant community. The rebellion failed in Coventry – where one might have thought it was most likely to succeed – because of the ingrained loyalty and commitment to order amongst most of the civic elite. On this matter, there was little difference in attitudes between evangelical or conservative townsmen. Most townsfolk, on both sides of the religious divide, could see that the rebellion was likely to end in chaos. By 30 January 1554 the treason of the duke of Suffolk was being proclaimed in the midlands towns. By the time that Thomas Rampton, the duke's servant, had despatched a messenger to hasten the arrival of Suffolk, preparations were already being made for the town's defence under the supervision of the earl of Huntingdon.[78] As was the case upon the accession of Mary, it was more necessary for evangelicals to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime. The craft guilds put watches upon the city walls, as they did on ceremonial occasions such as midsummer, and set armed men in harness to guard the gates of the city.[79] The element of display was uppermost in the minds of

[76] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1563 Edition; Sheffield, 2004) [http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/], p. 1277.
[77] TNA PRO PROB 11/48 (Nicholas Hopkyus [Hopkins] 1566).
[78] TNA PRO SP 11/13 fo.61 [*CSPD Mary*, 781]; Loades, *Two Tudor Conspiracies*, p. 32.
[79] *The Chronicle of Queen Jane*, ed. J. G. Nichols, p. 125.

Coventry's citizens, so that even the wealthier men wished to deck themselves out in armour for the occasion. The city's evangelical town clerk, Thomas Gregory, lent armour to his in-laws in Coventry from his country house to the south of the city, which enabled them to be personally involved in the ostentatious display of loyalty that constituted the city's defence.[80] From this point onwards the rebellion seemed doomed to fail. Grey's position in the county, in terms of popular support, was never as strong as he imagined. Nor could he rely on the local gentry. His brother-in-law, Henry Willoughby, an experienced soldier, had died in 1549 suppressing Kett's rebels, leaving only the infant Francis Willoughby and his guardian George Melly.[81] After hoping to raise men in Leicester, the duke proceeded to Coventry, only to find the gates of the city shut against him, effectively ending his efforts. However, despite the city's determined loyalist showing in 1554, there were significant numbers of men and women who objected to the new religious policies of Mary I.

In 1554 the government began a concerted effort to return the populace to traditional Catholic practices, through preaching and publishing campaigns as well as the renewed prosecution of heresy. John Careless, the Coventry weaver arrested in 1553 at All Hallows, was one of the first men arrested as part of this effort. He remained in prison in London and became part of a community of evangelical prisoners, including prominent figures such as John Bradford who was eventually executed for his heresy. Many amongst this group of prisoners corresponded with the godly in Coventry. There is the possibility that the connections of the Coventry men with the Protestant community in London could have brought doctrinal division, as well as support and spiritual sustenance. John Foxe, who was eventually adopted as the official historian of these events by the Elizabethan government, made an effort to hide the divide between those who espoused 'free will' positions on predestination and orthodox reformed Protestants, as well as smoothing over other doctrinal irregularities within the Protestant community during the Marian

[80] SBRTO DR10/1870 fo. 21r.
[81] *Willoughby Letters of the First Half of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Mary Welch (Thoroton Soc., R.S., Vol. XXIV, Nottinghamshire Miscellany, No. 4), p. 76, [NUL Mi C 11/2].

regime.[82] While imprisoned in the King's Bench, men from Coventry became involved in this debate, most notably John Careless who became part of a fierce and protracted dispute between the prisoners and their supporters. Careless continued to correspond with the reformed community in Coventry until 1556 when he died in gaol.[83] Foxe, as well as the Swiss clergyman Augustine Bernher, who provided pastoral leadership to the community of Protestants in Coventry and Lichfield during Mary I's reign, became obsessed with the dispute over 'freewill' but, along with others, did their best to smooth over the true nature of the disagreement after the accession of Elizabeth.[84] Yet, despite the disagreements within the London godly, the Protestant community in Coventry remained remarkably coherent in the face of the reassertion of Catholicism.

The first person executed in Coventry was not John Careless but Laurence Saunders, who attracted more attention because of his higher social status. Saunders moved in evangelical circles in London, but was preaching in Northampton when he was arrested. He was also part of the evangelical group in Coventry through his correspondence with John and Robert Glover. His brother Edward was recorder of the city of Coventry and had warned him in a letter that his behaviour was likely to result in prosecution; however, he persisted with his sermons and was later arrested. Saunders was burned in Coventry on 8 February 1555.[85] Although some men, including the Protestant, Edward Underhill, known to his contemporaries as the 'hot gospeller', had fled London to the comparative safety of the evangelical community in Coventry, staying at Bagington with his aunt, Jane Winter, only a few miles from the city, others were hardly safe from the gleeful reassertion of Catholic values which was promoted by some of Coventry's citizens.[86] In the case of Robert Glover, the government and ecclesiastical authorities were no doubt pleased to strike at someone within Hugh Latimer's circle and break up the set of Protestants who had surrounded him at Baxterley. Despite the presence of prominent religious traditionalists amongst the civic elite,

[82] Andrew Penny, *Freewill or Predestination: The Battle Over Saving Grace in Mid-Tudor England* (Woodbridge, 1990), p. 170.
[83] Bodleian MS Bodley 53 fo. 120v-147v [Augustine Bernher's Letter-Book].
[84] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1570 Edition; Sheffield, 2004) [http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/], pp. 1890, 2109-10.
[85] Ibid, pp. 1647, 1665-66.
[86] *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation*, ed., J. G. Nichols (Camden Soc., lxxvii, 1859), p. 171.

Protestant aldermen remained in place after 1554. In 1555, the Protestant mayor of the city, Thomas Riley, showed his support for the evangelical cause and sent 'a priue watchword' to the Glovers' household, at Baxterley, enabling Robert's brother John to flee his impending arrest. Robert Glover was brought to the city instead of John to be questioned in St Mary's Hall, the council chamber. Glover was arrested by the Coventry sheriff and the civic authorities. According to Foxe, it was Christopher Warren, the conservative alderman and member of the mayor's council who questioned Glover. Warren pleaded with Glover to conform, while lamenting his obstinacy and Glover, in return, accused Warren of seeking his death.[87] The religious tensions in the city had the power to stir up local animosities and highlight the differences of opinion at the highest levels of urban government.

While Glover was imprisoned in Coventry, the evangelical community in the city rallied round to support him. According to Foxe, he was visited by 'Hopkins and Dudley' who discussed liberty of conscience with him and later he was visited by Nicholas Hopkins and Katherine Phinnes. Nicholas Hopkins was the Protestant alderman who supported the children of William Glover on his death in 1566, while Katherine Phinnes was the wife of a wool merchant and stapler William Phinnes, the cousin of the evangelical town clerk Thomas Gregory.[88] The burnings in Coventry were ineffective, not because they were a product of an unpopular policy dictated by the government, but because they provoked the Protestants amongst the civic elite to form networks of mutual support and make aggressive claims on urban government. Attempts were made to assert that some of the civic virtues, such as honesty and service to the city, were uniquely Protestant values belonging solely to the evangelical community. When Richard Hopkins, a Coventry Protestant who served as sheriff in 1554, was imprisoned in the Fleet in 1554 he was praised by his fellow prisoner John Bradford who saw him as the archetypal godly magistrate.[89] Hopkins was arrested for his views but was freed the same year and became an exile on the continent, joining

[87] John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1563 Edition; Sheffield, 2004) [http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/], p. 1888.
[88] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 19v; TNA PRO PROB 11/48 (Nicholas Hopkyus [Hopkins] 1566).
[89] *The Writings of John Bradford*, ed. Aubrey Townsend (Parker Soc. vi, London), pp. 244-7; Garrett, *The Marian Exiles*, pp. 187-8.

other English reformers.[90] Again, these links proved valuable to the growing community of reformers in Coventry and it was probably Richard Hopkins who initially acquainted Thomas Lever with the group of Protestants in Coventry. Provided with descriptions of a wealthy but leaderless godly community in the city, Lever was drawn to a role amongst the urban community in Coventry. He may also have had continental examples of civic preachers and presbyterian leadership in mind. In 1558 he came to Coventry and was sustained by the Protestant community in the city for several years before he acquired the position of archdeacon of Coventry.[91] Relationships between reformed communities and preachers provided an answer to the problem of poorly endowed urban livings and a lack of educated reformed preachers. They demonstrate the effect of the urban community in spurring the growth of reformed religion and its ability to build useful social networks out of men with similar religious inclinations. The restoration of Elizabeth allowed figures like Lever to return to England, to places like Coventry, where the godly community of Protestants sought to integrate their religious belief into civic life and government.

Lever encouraged radical ideas of clerical leadership. Starting in 1559, he organised a conference in Coventry for the local clergy, which met every fortnight. The assembled ministers heard a sermon by one of their number and, although lay members were not allowed to speak at the exercises, 'a great nombre of gode and godly people... [were] always present'.[92] This had a wide-ranging impact on the religious life of the city. Primarily it encouraged the civic government to make use of their connections within the local gentry to supply radical visiting preachers, who wished to extend the effects of the Elizabethan settlement. Links with the gentry not only helped to stabilise the city's political position within the county and the nation, but they were also useful to the increasingly Protestant elite who required godly preachers. Southam, on the border of Oxfordshire, was the richest living in the county of Warwickshire and attracted many educated incumbents during the sixteenth century. Clement Throckmorton, a local gentleman with a

[90] Garrett, *The Marian Exiles*, p. 220-1.
[91] TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 82v.
[92] *Archbishop Grindal and the Prophesyings*, ed. Stanford E. Lehmberg (Historical Magazine of The Protestant Episcopal Church, xxxiv, June 1965), pp. 112-3 [Lambeth Palace Library, Fairhurst MS. 2003 fo. 5].

longstanding relationship with the city, possessed the advowson. During his lifetime, Throckmorton appointed a succession of prominent and outspoken preachers to the living.[93] These were men such as Augustine Bernher, friend and correspondent of John Foxe, who was appointed vicar of Southam in 1559.[94] After Bernher's death, a puritan minister, John Oxenbridge, was made vicar of Southam. Oxenbridge officiated at the exercises in Coventry, when Thomas Lever was absent, and even began his own conference at Southam, although this was suppressed by Archbishop Grindal in the late 1570s.[95] Oxenbridge's connections to Coventry allowed him to preach regularly in St Michael's Church during the exercises established by Thomas Lever. He even preached funeral sermons for Coventry's urban elite, who sought him out for his undoubted rhetorical ability.[96] There is little indication of what was discussed at the exercises or preached at the sermons; however, comments made by the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, Thomas Bentham, who was anxious to enforce conformity of liturgical practice in his diocese, suggest that some of the clergy took issue with the form of common prayer as well as the vestments prescribed by royal authority.[97] Consequently, the constraints of the prayer book were often ignored in Coventry and the mistrust of its provisions gradually filtered down to the laity in the 1560s and 1570s. It seems to have been routine for the parishioners of St Michael's Church to receive communion standing in the latter half of the sixteenth century, thereby avoiding any supposed adoration of the host. This uneasiness with the religious settlement of 1559 and lack of deference to episcopal authority was the root of Coventry's later reputation for puritanism.[98] Nevertheless, the corporation's efforts to cultivate contacts with the local gentry were fruitful as far as the progress of reformed preaching was concerned. Despite the ongoing economic problems in the civic parishes, the city of Coventry continued to act as a meeting place for the clergy of the county of Warwick and a theatre for preaching, as it had done before the Reformation.

[93] TNA PRO E334/4 fo. 213r; CRO BA/A/1/26/3 p. 232.
[94] TNA PRO E334/7 fo. 25v.
[95] *Archbishop Grindal and the Prophesyings*, ed. Stanford E. Lehmberg, p. 112.
[96] SBTRO DR10/1870 fo. 59r.
[97] Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 168-72.
[98] CRO BA/H/17/A79/35; Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 18.

The corporation also appointed ministers to preach the commemorative sermons endowed by individual aldermen, usually at Easter. These sermons were usually preached by local figures, such as William James, made Archdeacon of Coventry after Thomas Lever's death. They also attracted figures like the moderate London puritan preacher and playwright, William Waver, whose sermon caused controversy in 1585 when he gave excessive praise to its benefactor the Catholic alderman, Christopher Warren.[99] Alternatives to the parochial model of church organisation were easy to see as there was a small community of Dutch Protestants in Coventry, who were provided with their own minister in the city in 1576.[100] This Protestant community probably had an effect on radical ideas of church organisation and government, including presbyterian elements amongst the aldermen and the clergy. The influence of these radicals and those who dissented from the Elizabethan religious settlement increased in the decades after 1560. John Field, the presbyterian preacher, stopped in the city during his preaching tour of 1573 and figures like the vicar of the Trinity Church, George Cheston, appointed in 1568, also supported an agenda of further religious reform for which he was eventually deprived of his living, only to join a radical puritan grouping in London.[101] There appeared to be a degree of support for further religious reforms, supported by an increasingly anti-Catholic populace who attacked the cross in the city and burned the churchwardens' accounts of St Michael's in 1569 for having remnants of 'popery' in them.[102] Although there is a gap in the records of the Leet Book which leaves the early Elizabethan period somewhat opaque as far as the intentions of the aldermen can be discerned, there was clearly support for radical Protestant and presbyterian ideas.

At the same time, wills show that the legal measures made by the Henrician and Edwardian governments were successful in attacking traditional religious belief. The Reformation changed some of the ways in which people gave money to religious institutions, not least because those individuals making gifts to proscribed practices or institutions risked potential confiscation.

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[99] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 26r.
[100] *Archives of the London-Dutch Church; Register of Attestations*, ed. J.H. Hessles (London, 1892), p. 1; *Epistulae et Tractatus Cum Reformationis Tum Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Historiam Illustrantes*, J. H. Hessels (ed.) (3 vols., London, 1889), iii, pp. 366-7.
[101] Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, p. 126.
[102] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 50.

Bequests to monastic communities ended with the dissolutions and a whole host of intercessory practices were made illegal with official pronouncements against purgatory. The religious guilds of Corpus Christ and the Holy Trinity, previously so important to corporate life, were already in financial trouble by the 1530s and were amalgamated by an order of the Leet court in 1536.[103] The guild was finally suppressed in the second chantries act, at the beginning of Edward VI's reign, having undergone a long decline. This act also had the effect of removing the many small chantries, and their attendant clergy within the two parish churches.[104] The religious changes affected almost the entire spectrum of civic life including the craft guilds. These were primarily organisations which reflected townsmen's status as citizens, and protected the economic privileges and standards of workmanship in that particular craft. However, they were also social organisations which encompassed the duty to protect their members' families and attend their burials. As part of this social role they had a duty towards the souls of their members, through the provision of masses and obits for the dead, often in the guild chapel. The government dispensed with the veneration of images in 1538.[105] This affected all of the guilds which were wealthy enough to have their own chapels and could maintain images with lights before them. Before the Reformation the weavers kept lights burning in front of images of St Osborn and paid the prior's clerk for the maintenance of a light.[106] Consequently, the guild had stopped taking quarterage payments and fines in wax by 1540, presumably because they had extinguished the light beside their images in the guild chapel, in line with official prohibitions. The Drapers' Company contributed to a rood light in St Michael's Church for longer, but even that was eventually extinguished by official prohibitions.[107] Gifts of money to altars in the two parish churches, as well as the guild chapels, were popular before the Reformation. They were often dedicated to a patron saint, such as the goldsmiths' altar in St Michael's Church dedicated to St Eligius, or 'St Loy' as he was known in England, the patron saint

[103] *Leet Book*, pp. 722-3.
[104] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, pp. 35-40.
[105] Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, pp. 116-7, 222-3; Ronald Hutton, 'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformations', in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Oxford, 1987) pp. 130-1.
[106] CRO PA/100/17/1 fo. 2r-25r; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2nd edn. (London, 2005), pp. 407, 504-5.
[107] CRO PA154 fo. 14-18 [Daffern's Transcript].

of goldsmiths.[108] These altars were destroyed along with the official prohibition of the mass under Edward. The smaller crafts could not afford such elaborate devotions, but took part in the pageants and civic drama at Corpus Christi.[109] The pageants were eventually abandoned because of the prohibitive cost of such celebrations, rather than the direct effects of the Reformation.[110] In the latter half of the sixteenth century, when civic drama was resurrected, newly written plays were performed which removed elements of traditional religious belief.[111]

It has often been supposed that townsfolk reacted pragmatically to religious change, by not bequeathing money to religious institutions in danger of being dissolved. [112] However, some conservatives were caught out by the speed and breadth of the transformation. Elizabeth Swillington, wife of a recorder of Coventry, dying in November 1546, was caught out when she attempted to found a chantry for herself and her husband.[113] Swillington's bequest was discovered and confiscated by Clement Throckmorton, who had the surveyorship for Warwickshire in the Court of Augmentations.[114] It seems that at least a few individuals failed to correctly interpret and anticipate the tide of the official Reformation. Sometimes official changes in religious practice led to what has been termed 'cultural adaptation', in which actions and ceremonies lost their religious purpose while retaining a social one.[115] Bequests to 'tithes forgotten' and the diocesan cathedral in Lichfield had ended by 1547 to be replaced by customary payments to the city's poor or the parish poor box.[116] This was a subtle transformation, in which the testator was able to express their empathy with the parish and civic community and still fall within the boundaries of the law. However, as the case of Elizabeth Swillington shows, changes did not always happen so smoothly.

[108] LRO B/C/11 (Margery Tasche 1538).
[109] CRO PA3/1; CRO BA1494/20; Charles Phythian-Adams 'Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year at Coventry 1450-1550' in Peter Clark and Paul Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns* (London, 1972), pp. 57-85.
[110] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 2r.
[111] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire d 4 fo. 26r; CRO BA/H/3/20/2.
[112] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 504-5
[113] TNA PRO E301/131.
[114] *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1509-1558*, i, p. 426, iii, p. 449.
[115] Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (Oxford, 2002).
[116] LRO B/C/11 (Coventry Wills; Aawod-Yardley 1525-1580).

Some members of the civic elite eagerly anticipated the restoration of altars and intercessory devotion under the Marian church. During Edward VI's reign, the vestments of St Michael's Church were taken into the council house, only to be brought out later when the religious situation had reversed upon the accession of Mary.[117] Those from the church of the Holy Trinity were sold to the townsmen in 1547; however, the city had managed to recover a number of copes and vestments, as well as altar cloths by 1558.[118] Despite the presence of prominent evangelicals in the aldermanic grouping and on the mayor's council, the religious conservatism that had existed in the 1540s flourished under the Marian regime, often involving the same figures and families within the elite group. If the strength of the Marian restoration rested in some part upon the question of money and resources, to provide for the altars and chapels that signified the restoration of Catholic worship, then lay support was crucial.[119] Some of Coventry's citizens bequeathed money in the expectation that the apparatus of Catholic worship would be fully restored. In the last months of Mary's reign, in August 1558, the alderman William Hyndman made his will, bequeathing money to the church of St Michael's. This will was a strong counter-claim to the evangelical aldermen who argued that true virtue lay with their beliefs. Hyndman's will equated traditional religious practice with proper civic behaviour. He left the sum of 20 nobles to be buried as all 'alldermen are w[o]nt to be bwryed' and requested his body be placed against the Jesus Altar in St Michael's Church. Furthermore, expecting the full restoration of pre-reformation piety he left more money if the Jesus altar 'be neu made w[i]t[h]in a twelvemonthe after my doethe' and made provision for an obit for himself and his wife.[120] In the late 1550s altars in the city's parish churches were rebuilt and attracted bequests as they had done before the Reformation.[121] In fact by 1558 the tide was probably turning against the remaining Protestant aldermen. The evidence suggests that traditional

[117] CRO BA/H/C/17/1 fo. 20 r.
[118] WRO DR0801/12/13.
[119] R. H. Pogson, 'Revival and Reform in Mary Tudor's Church' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 25 (1974), pp. 249-65.
[120] LRO B/C/11 (William Hyndman 1558).
[121] LRO B/C/11 (John Fytsherbert 1558, Richard Colley 1555); TNA PRO PROB 11/40-2 (William Porter 1557, Robert Pulton 1557, Alyce Wyeth 1557, Richard Gyallre 1558, James Rogers 1558, William Judd 1559, Roger Adnett 1559, William Bayle 1559, Richard Stanfelde 1559).

religion remained an important force during the mid-century period, amongst the populace as well as the civic elite, to the extent that it could successfully resurface after 1554.

Even after Elizabeth I's accession, no one amongst the civic elite seems to have thought that expunging traditionalist Catholics from civic office was a good idea, just as no one thought to question Thomas Riley's support for Protestants under Mary. Despite the advance of radical Protestantism in Coventry, aldermen such as Christopher Warren, mentioned by Foxe as the persecutor of Robert Glover, managed to survive and retain their position and standing in the city. It helped that the three richest families in the city, those of John Nethermill, Henry Over and Christopher Warren, were tied together by marriage.[122] Even given the obvious tensions, there were still points of agreement between aldermen which could be used to forge civic unity over religious matters. Men such as Warren were able to support a tradition of parochial religion in the city that experienced continuous, but not radical, development throughout the sixteenth century. At the centre of this development was the desire to create properly funded civic parishes which provided for the pastoral needs of the city's inhabitants, which maintained order in civic and political life.

In 1555, under the evangelical mayor, Thomas Riley, the aldermanic council assented to an act of Leet which appointed three stipendiary priests at St Michael's Church in Coventry.[123] As part of a wide ranging act, which dealt with the difficult aspects of securing civic finances, the corporation ordered that the pageants be put down in order that the clergy could be funded by the guilds with the money that was saved. The aldermanic body was divided in terms of its attitude to religious changes, but any move which strengthened civic and parochial finances by abolishing the increasingly costly pageants could receive broad agreement. The act put the burden of providing religious provision on the craft guilds, who now owed a fee to the church.[124] This scheme was abandoned in the 1560s, when a vicar was again appointed. In 1558 the city obtained acts of parliament for both churches which replaced the tithes for the parishes with a charge levied on

[122] *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1509*-1558, iii, p. 232.
[123] *Leet Book*, pp. 811-2.
[124] SBTRO DR10/1849 fo. 3r.

householders.[125] There were still considerable questions hanging over parochial finance in 1560. The Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, Thomas Bentham, opined that 'the charge of so great a cure' as St Michael's Church was doing damage to the possibility of continuing pastoral ministry in the city.[126] Rather than continuing to employ civic preachers and ministers on an ad hoc basis, and relying on an increasing stream of radical Protestants moving through the city in the decades after 1560, the corporation continued to provide financial support for the beneficed clergy. A considerable and consistent effort was being made to adequately fund both civic parishes. This continuous effort had the power to unite individuals in the civic elite of all religious opinions. In 1565 the city purchased the rectories of both parishes and pursued a policy of recovering some of the tithes that were lost when land had been acquired by private individuals during the Reformation.[127] Part of the reason that parochial funding was important was that the civic parishes, and their churches, occupied a unique position in civic life and the social hierarchy of the urban community. St Michael's Church was the larger of the two and also the seat of civic power and government, where the mayor and aldermen worshipped. This precedence seems to have been important to the corporation. When it was believed that the church of St Michael was inadequately funded, compared to the other parish in the city, the question of reallocating some of the money that the exchequer remitted to the living of the Holy Trinity was examined.[128] The corporation was keen to ensure that the two parishes were funded according to their respective size and status.

Into the latter sixteenth century the parish churches retained the role in elite political life that they had possessed before the Reformation. However, the markers of civic power and status had acquired a new physical presence. During the 1570s, the corporation continued to install and repair the aldermen's pews and in 1579 27s 9d was paid for the 'trymming and garnishing of m[ast]er maiores seate' in St Michael's Church. In 1577, the corporation also paid a smith to fit ironwork 'whenon the Sword and mace are placed in St michaels church'.[129] During the 1570s the city

[125] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, p. 5.
[126] *Camden Miscellany xxvii*, 'The Letter-Book of Thomas Bentham', p. 255.
[127] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls... [of] Elizabeth* (H.M.S.O, 9 vols., 1939), iii p. 203.
[128] TNA PRO E134/12Eliz/East2.
[129] CRO BA/A/1/26/3 pp. 16, 34.

projected their collective sense of order and hierarchy onto the structure and fittings of the parish churches in an attempt to elevate the standing of the civic elite. In this context the parish churches remained important for the craft organisations. As other historians have noted, public seating became one of the new methods of expressing a renewed confidence in civic and corporate life.[130] In 1579 the Dyers' Company moved to ensure that it retained its allocation of pews and, after 1560, the Cordwainers' Company appointed officers known as 'seat keepers', charged with the maintenance of their pews; a role which members of the company were forced to accept when it was proffered, or risk a fine of 6s8d.[131] The appearance of the parish churches had changed radically after 1558, as their chapels and altars were removed and the vestments were sold off.[132] However, the churches remained important places to represent the hierarchies of urban life. Much was destroyed. There was conflict over the ornamentation of the churches and much hand wringing over the zealous men who 'for avoyding of superstition, hath not left one penny-worth... of brasse upon the Tombes' in St Michael's Church.[133] Nevertheless, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the churches in Coventry, and St Michael's Church in particular, remained at the heart of corporate worship. Through their considerable remodelling, during the Reformation, the urban parish churches heralded the beginning of a new way of representing civic power in the religious setting. This was, at the same time, a vision that served to reinforce some of the old certainties about corporate and civic government.

The governing cause of religious change in England during the sixteenth century was the change in monarchs and the religious politics of the court. However, within this framework there was room for local variations on religious change. The difficult financial situation for the clergy left opportunities for lay benefactors to influence the religious environment in Coventry. In this situation it was possible for an active civic elite to create positions for evangelical ministers and preachers and influence the urban religious environment. This was due, in part, to the nature of the

[130] Robert Tittler, 'Seats of Honor, Seats of Power: The Symbolism of Public Seating in the English Urban Community, c. 1560-1620', *Albion*, 24:2 (1992), pp. 205-23.
[131] Bodleian MS Top Warwickshire c 6 fo. 102r, 113r.
[132] Sharp, *Illustrative Papers*, pp. 76, 94-6, 120.
[133] Sir John Harrington, *A briefe view of the state of the Church of England... to the yeere 1608* (Wing, H770, 1658), p. 85.

city and its permeable urban political culture. The ability to foster a wide range of social contacts and friendships between the Protestant nobility and gentry, as well as the other urban elites, helped Coventry's governing class to create and promote a new religious ideology. Religious traditionalism remained a powerful force in the city. However, despite the religious disagreements of the 1540s and 1550s, civic politics never seems to have been factional and never seems to have divided on solely religious lines. The necessity to maintain the principles of elite civic culture, and the hierarchy upon which this was based, took precedence. Although a brand of increasingly radical Protestantism thrived in Coventry during the late sixteenth century, this was modified by other factors which came together to ensure that the power of the elite class was consolidated. Despite the city's reliance on passing puritan lecturers, the two parishes, and their clergy, were supported and strengthened because they were crucial to the civic political hierarchy. The parish churches provided the element of consistency that the civic elite could use to justify their position in the social hierarchy.

Conclusion

From the early 1540s onwards the pace and degree of religious change in Coventry was swift and substantial, as the city was engaged in debating some of the more contentious religious and doctrinal issues of the Reformation. Coventry was not insulated from national religious change, nor did the urban elite attempt to insulate the city from any of the wider changes happening in the nation. As a consequence of this there was the potential for division, disorder and even violence amongst the poorer citizens and inhabitants of the city. Latent tensions over religion were increased by the economic dislocations and the convergence of social pressures with religious change. These pressures included the demands on the common land of the city, the urban food and fuel supply, and the demographic pressures of a population that was gradually growing from its low point in the early sixteenth century. That neither economic changes, or the religious change of the Reformation, managed to provide a positive challenge to any of the conventional social structures in the city is remarkable. This was partly due to the fact that the economy of the city, and the social networks around which it was built, were successfully reconfigured to retain the city's position as a commercial and social centre. It must also be due to the avoidance of some of the more violent national confrontations over religious belief that took place on the continent and the comparative stability of the Elizabethan religious settlement. However, local urban factors were at play. Peace was safeguarded by the city's efforts to maintain a secure food and fuel supply for the city, based on the traditional moral principles of urban life. This was reinforced by the use of rhetoric to persuade the civic elite of their responsibility and obligation towards the broader urban community. These principles, going back to the middle ages, formed the backbone of urban conceptions of morality and civic leaders often made conscious attempts to refer back to these traditions when dealing with civic politics.

Civic rhetoric also had another important function. It maintained the unity of the civic elite, as a group, as well as ensuring the continuity of the urban hierarchies upon which their power and status was based. The ability of the civic elite to regulate their surroundings was important.

However, a concentration on this aspect of urban life has led to a number of assumptions about how law and order in early modern urban settings was maintained. It has often been thought that keeping the peace in the city was a simply a function of how well the civic elite imposed order upon poorer inhabitants and the capacity of urban societies to regulate themselves. As a result, much of the debate about urban communities, and early modern society more generally, has been taken up by an attempt to divine the balance between coercion by elite groups and self-regulation when it came to keeping order in towns. However, as this thesis has shown, another aspect of the continual quest to maintain an orderly society was the control of the civic elite over their own behaviour. Prominent citizens had the ability to destabilise the working of civic politics through their acquisition of land and property, and by courting outside authority. They were the most literate group of men and women and were therefore understandably more interested and engaged with national political debate and religious change. Consequently, much of the real threat of chaos in urban society came from the privileged elite which comprised the citizens and aldermen.

While Tittler has focused on the development of urban oligarchies via the elite's ability to obtain control of land, resources and the apparatus of civic government and display, this study has suggested other parallel developments.[1] Treating the civic body as a set of individuals, rather than an amorphous group, has shown that some men were able to take advantage of urban identities to increase their wealth and status, while at the same time challenging urban values. Much in the same way that other methods of holding power were being developed in early modern England in a challenge to older forms of obligation and feudal control, the examination of Thomas Gregory and his family within this study shows that men were able to rise in civic society by their ability to hold urban administrative positions.[2] The rise of confident and wealthy individuals, who were developing their own landed interests, belies the notion that an entirely cohesive form of collective rule in the early modern towns was ever possible. These men could also draw in outside interests, such as gentry, in the surrounding countryside. They were eager to participate in urban affairs and

[1] Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns*, pp. 103-39, 210-47.
[2] Mervyn James 'Two Tudor Funerals' in Mervyn James (ed.) *Society Politics and Culture* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 176-87.

in some cases, such as that of the Warwickshire gentleman, Thomas Lucy, they also sought to promote their own religious agenda. In the sixteenth century, urban individuals increasingly looked for means, other than the corporate government of the city, through which to articulate their own wealth and power. New forms of expressing this power in the urban context provided a challenge to the existing values of the city. However, it was a challenge that was met by determined resistance.

As a result of this need for the regulation of individuals within the urban hierarchy, great efforts were made to retain a common system of actions and beliefs amongst the civic elite, which controlled their behaviour and engagement with civic life and politics. As we have seen, behaviour which threatened the unity of the civic elite was dealt with by official and unofficial sanctions which often involved restricting economic privileges and shunning the offender within the urban community. Official methods included the fines and sanction of the Leet court and the mayor's council. Yet, more often than not, it was the myriad of unofficial rules which helped to keep peace in the city and defined an unwritten moral and political code. As this thesis has shown, these methods were often very effective in separating unruly and divisive elements from the mainstream of urban political life. Of course there were numerous ways of achieving civic unity. Members of the civic elite obviously had shared interests and a similar degree of wealth. This led to a common material culture, based upon trading in large commercial centres such as London, with fine goods that were both owned and traded. They also had common intellectual backgrounds, which through their access to schooling, gave them the ability to understand and consume the increasing number of works published and printed in England during the sixteenth century. Older bulwarks against religious change and division included the rules and customs of the craft companies, which were preserved throughout this time of uncertainty and increasingly relied on providing an image of themselves that was ancient and immutable. Many historians have described ceremonies and institutions linked to traditional religious beliefs, such as the corpus christi pageants and the religious guilds, as entirely essential to the functioning of the urban body politic. Therefore, we get the impression of inexorable change affecting politics in the English towns around the beginning of

the sixteenth century, primarily because of the effects of the English Reformation and the decline in urban prosperity in the late medieval period.[3] However, this thesis shows that there was considerably more continuity.

Traditions, like the attendance of the crafts at a burial of one of their members, were an active way of maintaining traditional civic hierarchies and the political structure. Harmonious relations were attained by the preservation of these official forms of political interactions and even during times of religious contention between members of elite groups in the city, the parishes were still important outlets for civic pride and corporate display. Moreover, through efforts to control civic land, to define the boundaries of the city and to support the corporate heart of civic government, the aldermen not only strengthened their own hold on power but also gained the ability to control and regulate members of the wider ruling elite. The civic elite were also affected by less formal means of control such as kinship, and friendship between individuals. This mass of formal and informal connections was the method by which personal relations between the aldermen helped to form a nexus of authority in the city. Yet, even these forms of interaction relied on a traditional understanding of civic politics and government which stretched back into the fifteenth century.

McClendon's work on Norwich suggests that townsmen deliberately created a society in which religious divisions could be ignored; however, this was not so in Coventry.[4] Religious dividing lines were important, but they were constantly intermeshed with other factors. As Shagan has pointed out, religious priorities overlaid all parts of social and political life.[5] Townsfolk did not just have religious identities, but also civic and familial ones which competed with each other to prevent any one overriding issue, such as partisan religious motives, causing division in the city. Moreover, this thesis shows that traditional forms of moral behaviour controlled political

[3] Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City,* pp. 44-5; Mervyn James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town', *Past and Present* (1983), 98:1, pp. 3-29; Gervaise Rosser, *Early Modern Westminster* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 281-5; J.J Skarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 34-9.
[4] McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation,* pp. 32-3, 246-7.
[5] Shagan, *Popular Politics,* pp. 20-5.

interactions in the sixteenth century to an extent that is underappreciated. There was not a straight line to be drawn, as Slack has sometimes seemed to suggest, between an orthodox puritan elite and a set of oligarchic rulers of the city.[6] There is no evidence of any family or official being expunged from civic office or civic memory, even though that memory might bring troubling incongruities connected to religion. If the elite wanted to retain their power, it was more necessary to abide by the traditional moral codes of civic and elite life than to hold a certain set of religious beliefs, as some of Coventry's citizens found out. Consequently, religious motives did not entirely control attitudes towards the regulation of behaviour and charitable social projects. Although the city's stance towards social problems did change, the civic elite were still influenced by traditional moral codes, as well as the practices of London and other cities towards their poor.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the city did eventually begin to adopt a broader protestant identity, but this was not without its difficulties. There was always a tension between the more puritan elements and traditionally minded members of the civic elite, who wished to preserve parochial religion and some of the more important religious landmarks such as the cross, next to the market place. Consequently, there was never a point at which religious belief stopped being a cause of tensions and never a moment at which a puritan oligarchy could truly be said to have taken control. For some, the Reformation remained substantially incomplete, while others seemed to accept the religious settlement; however, all aldermen could agree that providing pastoral care for a city that had been denuded of such provisions by economic factors was of crucial importance. Therefore, common moral and political values, outside purely partisan religious belief, remained important. Furthermore, these values had a wider significance.

The great historians of the nineteenth century tended to focus on towns and their route to administrative independence, rather than these values. This was reasonable given that many sought to trace the industrial and commercial power of England in that century to a set of urban roots

[6] Slack, 'Poverty and Politics in Salisbury' pp. 164-203; Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 36-53.

based on order and government.[7] Modern historians have become more interested in the evolution of social and cultural ideas and the effects of these ideas on historical movement. Urban moral values and ideas of civil behaviour and language, influenced by humanist ideas, had an increasing effect on English society as it became more widely urbanised in the following centuries. These ideas not only helped Coventry to weather the religious and social changes of the Reformation, but they helped to define urban life and existence in the sixteenth century and beyond.

[7] F.W. Maitland, *Township and Borough* (Cambridge, 1898); C. Gross, *The Gild Merchant* (Oxford, 1890).

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Browne 1549, Thomas Bedull 1550, John Bonde 1550, John Bonde 1550, Thomas Burden 1542, William Bellesby 1545, Roger Bromych 1545, Sir Charles Bruche 1543, Thomas Bowker 1546, Thomas Bustard 1546, John Brayelsford 1550, Richard Bromwych 1550, Joan Bydll 1557, Christopher Bromly 1553, Joan Bruar 1555, Owen Blakemore 1557, Roger Bowkley 1557, Henry Bowether 1558, Thomas Bate 1558, William Balkemeyre 1558, Katherine Blakmer 1558, William Bydell 1560, Thomas Bowater 1558, Richard Ballens 1560, John Byrd 1556, Randal Bloar 1558, Thomas Baker 1557, John Ballard 1558, Henry Balderstone 1558, Thomas Barfote 1565, John Bowlat 1558, Gilbert Bradley 1569, John Catryn 1534, Agnes Colman 1535, Thomas Clybery 1537, Robert Cocks 1539, Robart Clayton 1537, Margaret Cok 1542, Henry Collyns 1528, Ralph Carver 1530, Roger Capp 1546, William Colman 1544, John Crampe 1543, John Clerke 1544, John Cassone 1551, William Cley 1542, Robert Cokson 1545, John Chambers 1551, Thomas Corbeyn 1551, John Castell 1553, Robert Clawthon 1555, William Churchman 1557, Thomasine Castell 1558, Richard Coke 1554, Thomas Collens 1553, Joan Clowis 1555, William Coakes 1557, Richard Coley 1555, Lancelott Calcotte 1557, William Clerke 1558, Margery Cokes 1557, William Cowper 1558, Thomas Clerke 1559, Thomas Clerke 1563, John Cartwright 1564, Lettice Colbarn 1564, John Cox 1567, Stephen Cordre 1568, John Coksone 1560, Humphrey Clowes 1564, Ellen Dey 1535, Harry Dyke 1547, John Dedyche 1549, Thomas Dekyns 1549, Joan Dudley 1544, Joan Dayds 1557, William Dayll 1558, John Davie 1560, Robert Dudley 1563, Christopher Dale 1559, Henry Devys 1566, John Elys 1568, John Edys 1539, Elizabeth Eburne 1541, Thomas Enderby 1545, William Edye 1550, William Elett 1554, Richard Edmundes 1551, John Esex 1560, John Fercylde 1536, Thomas Forman 1536, Richard Fyschar 1537, Thoams Fyld 1538, Robert Furbar 1541,Thomas Fyshar 1540, John Foxall 1539, Ellen Fentam 1538, Oliver Forrest 1547, Gilbert Fowler 1537, John Foster 1546, William Foster 1547, Alice Fan 1552, Thomas Forman 1557, Richard Fulgeam 1558, John Fychare 1558, Agnes Foydon 1558, John Fytheesberte 1558, Thomas Grene 1534, Thomas Gelly 1537, Hugh Gregory 1537, William Gynkson 1537, Alice Grene 1538, John Grene 1538, John Gryffyn 1554, John Geatt 1542, Alice Gregory 1539, William Gold 1541, Gylbert Morres 1546, Joan Grephyn 1548, James Gilbard 1548, Anthony Gemmes 1551, Philip Gardine 1551, William Godfrey 1551, Thomas Greffyn 1551, Henry Goodall 1554, Thomas Gardiner 1557, Joan Graskane 1552, Edmund Goodryche 1557, Richard Goldryne 1557, John Gryffen 1557, John Gynard 1557, William Grene 1559, John Gardener 1559, Margaret Grinsill 1569, Hugh Griffin 1541, John Hethe 1533, John Harryce 1535, Thomas Herryng 1537, Edmund Hardye 1539, Agnes Hye 1541, Geoffrey Haslock 1542, Richard Herring 1544, Alice Hauten 1550, Robert Hauten 1549, John Halyday 1551, William Hutton 1551, John Hall 1553, Elizabeth Hanvye 1552, Ralph Hopkens 1553, John Hovertune 1550, Richard Helyman 1542, Joan Hopkens 1554, Harry Hynd 1551, John Hunt 1554, Sybil Hyndman 1558, William Hyndman 1558, John Hammond 1558, Thomas Homes 1559, John Harys 1560, John Hyndman 1564, John Hyll 1563, Thomas Hyll 1564, Richard Hurte 1561, William Hygford 1564, William Hely 1569, Hugo Harvye 1574, William Ithel 1570, John Johnson 1557, Thomas Kebull 1538, Grace Kyllyngworth 1542, William Kyllyngworth 1538, William Kynght 1550, Richard Kendall 1550, Alice Knyght 1556, Agnes Kyrvyn 1558, Hugh Lawton 1541, William Lawton 1543, Margert Locok 1543, William Lee 1557, John Leche 1551, Joan Lunt 1551, Henry Lyngham 1553, Nicholas Launt 1547, Bridget Lanken 1549, John Lawton 1546, Thomas Lyttler 1558, Thomas Leake 1562, William Linsey 1558, Thomas Letherbarrow 1556, John Layne 1557, Waleter Lech 1563, Christopher Lankton 1565, Thomas Lynman 1567, Elizabeth Myddleton 1533, Robert More 1551, Thomas Morres 1551, Morres Sence 1554, Henry Maxfelt 1556, Richard Maxfelt 1544, George Mathewe 1545, Richard Margere 1557, Richard Meryman 1558, Robert Moore 1558, Hugh Moore 1565, John Marchall 1566, John Moray 1569, Thomas Napton 1542, William Nevinson 1544, Alice Napton 1545, William Norwood 1537, John Nores 1537, William Neydam 1537, Robert Nicolls 1537, Rose Neeshe 1551, Margery Nethermyll 1552, Richard Northeowpe 1556, Richard Nyklyn 1558, Maud Owrys 1540, Thomas Owrys 1539, Baldwyn Pratty 1537, Richard Peete 1537, William Parker 1538, John Power 1540, Henry Putter 1544, Roger Palmer 1544, Simon Parker 1551, Robert Pente 1541, Thomas Philips 1547, Elizabeth Pyt 1553, Robert Prochler 1552, Ethelewe Price 1552, John Petit 1550, Richard Pacwood 1556, Roger Parker 1554, John Phillips 1553, Agnes Poulen 1553, John Pruston 1558, Thomas Preston 1565, Thomas Preyst 1568, John Proctor 1559, Thomas Priest 1557, Richard Price 1558, John Palmer 1558, Henry Rawthe 1538, Richard

Rysley 1537, Thomas Rasche 1535, William Rose 1534, Martin Rydell 1547, Thomas Raynscrafte 1547, Nicholas Randall 1540, John Rotton 1539, John Ruydyng 1558, Humphrey Reinolde 1553, Elizabeth Raynesford 1551, Thomas Roo 1560, Nicholas Risscon 1559, Thomas Ratton 1559, Elixabeth Roo 1563, Joan Richardson 1563, Clemence Rytton 1558, John Rawton 1561, Edward Remynton 1566, Hugh Smyth 1535, Thomas Smyth 1540, John Snape 1540, John Stafforde 1540, John Smyth 1543, Richard Schewell 1542, Simon Smyth 1540, Agnes Swynscoo 1543, Agnes Smyth 1546, Robert Smyth 1545, Agnes Seyll 1545, Thomas Shewall 1546, Agnes Shaw 1547, William Shaw 1547, Thomas Spencer 1551, Philip Sherrarde 1550, John Strong 1550, Isobel Senny 1548, Richard Shewell 1556, Ellen Somerfeld 1556, John Smethe 1553, John Somerfield 1552, Thomas Saunders 1558, Richard Sewell 1558, Richard Showell 1558, Richard Shelton 1558, John Saunders 1558, Thomas Starky 1558, William Simson 1558, Agnes Sewell 1560, John Sevans 1560, John Slye 1564, Edward Stone 1563, Robert Stokes 1562, John Smyth 1569, Richard Shawe 1569, Alice Saunders 1568, Clement Tempull 1547, John Tynuruntur 1545, Richard Townsend 1544, Nicholas Tayler 1545, Henry Tatenhall 1557, William Turnar 1553, John Threshare 1549, John Threche 1556, Richard Tully 1558, William Turnor 1564, John Tyling 1542, Annes Tofte 1538, Margery Tache 1538, Walter Taylor 1542, William Whytman 1542, Ciely Wall 1541, Roger Walles 1542, William Whytte 1539, Thomas Warde 1537, Harry Wall 1534, William Wall 1533, John Waitte 1535, Robert Wylcokes 1535, John West 1549, William Wyett 1545, John Werret 1545, Margery Wodscaw 1542, Robert Whytney 1553, Humfrey Walker 1553, Ralph Walton 1551, John Woode 1550, Richard Waryn 1556, John Warde 1557, Robert Walker 1556, Richard Wyghtman 1556, Nicholas Woodshaw 1558, John Whyet 1558, William Westlye 1558, Richard Warren 1558, Nicholas Wise 1557, Richard Woode 1559, Elisabeth Walland 1566, Alexander Wryght 1559, Thomas Wryght 1559, Lucy Woodsahwe 1558, John Yardley 1557).

LRO B/C/13.	Lichfield Court Book

Nottingham University Library

NUL MM Mi C 11/2.	Letter from Henry Dorssett to Sir John Willoughby
NUL MM Mi Ac 123-7.	Coal accounts for Warwickshire
NUL MM Mi X 3/4.	Coal accounts for Foleshill
NUL MM Mi X6.	Correspondence of Sir Francis Willoughby

Oxford Records Office

ORO BOR 2/XVII/i/1.	Banbury Town Book

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

SBTRO DR10/401, 405, 416-7.	Coventry deeds and papers
SBTRO DR10/761, 772, 779, 788, 806, 1205.	Stivichall deeds
SBTRO DR10/1408, 1409.	Cartularies of Thomas Gregory
SBTRO DR10/1612, 1785, 1815.	Legal Cases and Documents relating to the Gregory family

SBTRO DR10/1849.	Common Land in Coventry, Act of Leet, c. 1557
SBTRO DR10/1859.	Coventry Corporation Account Book, c. 1556
SBTRO DR10/1869.	Trinity Guild Rental, 1532
SBTRO DR10/1870.	A book of the accounts of Ford's Hospital 1542-7 and the accounts of Thomas and Arthur Gregory 1551-1581
SBTRO DR10/1926.	Letter
SBTRO DR10/2066.	Marriage licence for Thomas Gregory
SBTRO DR18/1/60.	Stoneleigh Grange
SBTRO DR18/3/47/5.	
SBTRO DR37/2/123/7.	Antiquarian copies of Coventry Annals compiled by Sir Simon Archer: John Hales's annals and 'Butlers Roll'

The National Archives

TNA PRO C 1, 4, 47.	Court of Chancery
TNA PRO C 142.	Inquisitions Post Mortem
TNA PRO E 134.	Exchequer: Depositions taken by commission
TNA PRO E 178.	Exchequer: Special commissions of enquiry
TNA PRO E 179.	Records of lay taxation
TNA PRO E 301.	Court of Augmentations: Certificates of Colleges, Chantries and Foundations
TNA PRO E 310.	Court of Augmentations: Crown leases
TNA PRO E 315.	Court of Augmentations: Miscellaneous
TNA PRO E 334.	First Fruits and Tenths
TNA PRO KB 9/625.	King's Bench: Crown Side, 12 Eliz
TNA PRO KB 9/129.	King's Bench: Oyer and terminer files

TNA PRO PROB 11/12-58 PCO Wills (William Hopkynne[s]1501, Richard Stanwardyn 1501, Richard Howes 1501, John Smyth 1501, Thomas Grene 1502, Thomas Byckeley 1505, Thomas Padlande 1505, John Lee 1505, John Bixton 1506, William Rowley 1506, Thomas Clerk 1506, James Preston 1507, Thomas Bonde 1507, Richard Cook 1507, William Forth 1508, Thomas Wardlowe 1508, Harry Marler 1509, John Sherman 1509, John Norton 1510, Richard Lee 1510, Richard Jackson 1510, Thomas Turnor 1510, Elyn Sawnders 1511, Thomas Sawnders 1511, Richard Thekuys 1511, John Hogges 1511, Edmond Hadley 1512, Robert Swyfte 1512, Joanne Padlande 1514, Richard Foxale 1514, William Shukborowe 1514, Thomas Lonesdale, 1514, Roger Sutton 1514, Alice Lonesdale 1514, John Padlond 1516, Thomas Lee 1516, Humfrey Grene 1516, Thomas Turnor 1518, Henry Rogers 1518, Thomas Forde 1519, John Barube 1519, John Gaddoy [Haddon] 1519, Johane Chamber 1519, William Pysforde 1519, Nicholas Burwey 1520, John Hardwey 1520, Thomas Hill 1521, John Hopkyns 1521, Thomas Bemyche 1522 , Hugh Dawys 1522, Robert Grewe 1524, John Stonge 1524, John Clerk 1524, Richard Boreway 1524, Henry Pysford 1525, Joane Grene 1527, Richard Marler 1527, William Dawson 1530,Thomas Waryn 1530, Henry Kylbye 1530, William Dawson 1530, Thomas Waryn 1530, Henry Kylbye 1530, Willyam Bamwell 1531, John Humfrey 1532, William Wyram 1533, William Smyth 1536, Cristopher Wayd 1539, Thomas Dodde 1540, Julian Nethermyll 1540, Isabell Warde 1541, Thomas Banwell 1543, Rowlaunde Basshopp 1544, Robert Kyrvyn 1544, Thomas Dyglen 1545, Richarde Dodde 1546, Johane Banwell 1546, Arthure Goodrige 1546, William Coton 1547, Thomas Clarke 1550, Thomas Smyth 1550, Edward Hopley 1551, William Starkye 1555, Thomas Bonde 1557,Cuthbert Geyner [Joiner] 1557, William Porter 1557, Robert Pulton 1557, Alyce Wyeth 1557, William Porter 1557,Robert Pulton 1557, Alyce Wyeth 1557, James Rogers 1558, Richard Gyllare 1558, James Rogers 1558, Richard Gyllare 1558, Elizabeth Stooke 1559, John Blakesley 1559, Richard Stanfeilde 1559, William Bayle 1559, Roger Adnett 1559, William Judde 1559, Richard Stanfeilde 1559, William Bayle 1559, Roger Adnett 1559, Sibyl Hyndman 1559, William Judde 1559, Sibille Hyndman 1560, John Netheramyll 1560, Willyam Hyndman 1561, Edward Waltropp 1564, Nicholas Hopkyus [Hopkins] 1566, Henry Waver 1567, Thomas Wheatley 1567, John Tallance [Tallants] 1567, John Hamon 1567, Thomas Newman 1568, Richard Foxall 1568, William Smalwood 1568,William Moore 1569, John Hall 1569, William Hopkyns 1570, Thomas Kerven 1572, John Bowthe 1572, Roger Broughton 1574, Stephen Hales 1574, William Thompson 1575, Humphrey Bylly 1577, Richard Potter 1579, George Jenyns 1580, Thomas Duddeley 1581, William Senye 1582, Raffe Kynge 1582, Raffe Millington 1585, Thomas Nicholls 1585).

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WRO DR0801.

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