

Common Profit and Civic Governance in
Ricardian London, *c.* 1376 - *c.* 1391

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the political turbulence that unfolded in late fourteenth-century London, interrogating the nature of authority and power of London's civic elites, with particular focus on John of Northampton and Nicholas Brembre, both mayors of London. It does so through an investigation of the use of the ideology of common profit – the idea that a community should work for the profit, or good, of the whole. The scope of this thesis extends from *c.* 1376 to *c.* 1391, a period in which there was a conscious move towards establishing the common good within London, yet a period which also saw constant tumult in the form of a large scale rebellion, disputes between rival guilds in the City, and the execution of Nicholas Brembre following the Merciless Parliament of 1388. This was not a period of peace but one in which the prosperity of the City was challenged and on the brink of destruction. These events were preserved primarily within the records of London's Guildhall, which provide detailed narratives of the experiences, mentalities and motivations of those involved in these quarrels.

By examining urban administrative documents through the lens of the discourse of common profit, we can question the extent to which this ideology was used as a negotiating tool to legitimise the authority of leading civic figures. This thesis considers the multiple contexts in which common profit rhetoric could be used by those involved in civic life. The context for the production of these texts is especially important, giving an insight into both the reasons for their creation and circulation, and into the institutions they represented. London, the capital city, was thus envisioned by contemporaries as serving as an example of good civic governance for the rest of the realm, despite, in reality, being a place that experienced intense corruption. This dual identity for the capital city is represented in these sources in the way in which, through the use of political language, political players interacted with ideas of governance, the concept of the body politic, and the relationship between rulers and ruled. Language is thus considered in this thesis as a

reflection of social practice and circumstance. From this, this investigation exposes how common profit principles shaped these documents and was used by London officials to consolidate their authority in a period when factional conflict saw this undermined.

Contents

Abstract	1
Contents	3
Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	8
Author's Note	11
Introduction	12
Chapter 1. Civic Responsibility and City Interests: The Jubilee Book and Common Profit.....	53
Chapter 2. Condemnation in the Court Room: Negotiating Civic Power in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls	115
Chapter 3. Proclaiming Authority in Letter Book H: Speech and Social Misbehaviour in 1380s London.....	181
Chapter 4. Petitionary Culture and Political Strife: The 1388 Guild Petitions and the Merciless Parliament.....	257
Conclusion	309
Bibliography	316

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'Sometimes I think my papa is an accordion. When he looks at me and smiles and breathes,

I hear the notes'

- Marcus Zusak, The Book Thief

To my father, Dorian Gonzalez

Abbreviations

<i>ABoLE</i>	<i>A Book of London English, 1384-1425</i> ed. R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931)
<i>AND</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Dictionary</i>
<i>Anonimalle</i>	<i>The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333-1381</i> ed. by V. H. Galbraith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927)
“Appeal”	Usk, Thomas, “Appeal of Thomas Usk against John Northampton” in <i>A Book of London English, 1384-1425</i> ed. R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931)
<i>Chronica Maiora</i>	<i>The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham (1376-1422)</i> ed. James G. Clark and trans. David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005)
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i>
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>
<i>CPMR, 1381-1412</i>	<i>Calendar of Select Pleas and Memoranda Roll of the City of London: Vol 3, 1381-1412</i> ed. A. H. Thomas (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1932)
<i>CPMR, 1413-1437</i>	<i>Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls, preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London and the</i>

- Guildhall A.D. 1413-1437* ed. A. H. Thomas
(Cambridge: CUP, 1943)
- CUP Cambridge University Press
- CEMCR* *Calendar of Early Mayor's Court Rolls: 1298-1307* ed. and trans. A. H. Thomas
(London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1924)
- KC* *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed. and trans. G. H. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)
- LBA* *Letter Book A*
- LBD* *Letter Book D*
- LBH* *Letter Book H*
- Liber Albus* *Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London* ed. and trans. H T. Riley (1861)
- LMA London Metropolitan Archives
- Major Latin Works of John Gower* *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying and The Tripartite Chronicle, An Annotated Translation into English With an Introductory Essay on the Author's Non-English Works* ed. and trans. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962)
- MED* *Middle English Dictionary*
- Memorials* *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth and XVth Centuries* ed. H. T.

Riley (London: Longmans, Green & Co.,
1868)

ODNB

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

OUP

Oxford University Press

PROME

Parliament Rolls of Medieval England

Stat.

*The Statutes at Large of England and Great
Britain* 20 vols. ed. Thomas Edlyne Tomlins
(London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan,
1811)

TCC

Trinity College Cambridge

TNA

The National Archives, Kew

WC

The Westminster Chronicle, 1381-1394 ed. L.
C. Hector and Barbara Harvey (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1966)

Author's Note

All quotations from manuscript sources have retained original spelling and contractions and abbreviations have been expanded silently but in the case of edited works their conventions have been kept. Place names, forenames and surnames have not been modernised. I have consulted Robert Ellis, 'Verba Vana: Empty Words in Ricardian London', Volume II (Unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary, University of London, 2014) for translations in chapter three, and both transcriptions and translations for chapter four, unless otherwise indicated. Where Ellis uses '&', I have used 'et' for both Latin and French transcriptions.

Introduction

In 1384, Thomas Usk venomously accused his former ally John of Northampton of speaking ‘vnder colour of wordes of comun profit’.¹ During Northampton’s mayoralty of 1381 to 1383, the two men had been close associates but, by the time Usk – the under-sheriff of Middlesex, scrivener, and factionalist – wrote his *Appeal*, he had switched loyalties to Northampton’s rival Nicholas Brembre, mayor from 1383 to 1386.² In using common profit rhetoric, Northampton, according to Usk, ‘[charg]ed the people fro day in to other to be redy to stonde be hem in that euel purposed matirs’.³ Usk’s narrative was demonstrative of the influence of ideas of common profit within the London populace and the centrality of politically charged language when attempting to garner support in 1380s London. This accusation against Northampton established the power of words in political conflict, particularly the potential and sway that common profit rhetoric had to legitimise authority.

Penned in August 1384, Usk produced the *Appeal* as a way of condemning Northampton.⁴ Usk himself was a first-hand witness to the events that led to Northampton’s expulsion from London and, later, the problems that Brembre would face up to his execution in February 1388, explaining to his reader that he ‘knowleched thes wordes & wroten hem with myn own [honde]’.⁵ He was even present at Northampton’s trial in Reading in 1384, using the *Appeal* as a personal testimony against his former employer.⁶ Usk himself was fully immersed in how politics could play out in late fourteenth-century London, experiencing changing fortunes himself and was ‘an inconstant

¹ *LBH*, pp. 316-17, 38; “Appeal”, p. 29. See Sheila Lindenbaum, ‘London Texts and Literate Practices’ in *The Cambridge History of English Medieval Literature* ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p. 288 for a commentary on this quotation and Northampton’s ‘self-serving pronouncements’.

² For Usk’s pardon see *CPR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 467.

³ “Appeal”, p. 29.

⁴ Ronald Waldron, ‘Usk, Thomas (c. 1354-1388)’, *ODNB*; Clementine Oliver, ‘A Political Pamphleteer in Late Medieval England: Thomas Fovent, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Usk and the Merciless Parliament’, *New Medieval Literatures*, 6 (2003), 184.

⁵ “Appeal”, p. 22.

⁶ Usk’s role in Northampton’s trial at Reading is explored in more detail in chapter 2, p. 116.

factionalist ... for Usk's political affiliations were determined by nothing more than a shifting set of circumstances'.⁷ Despite being implicated and imprisoned as a result of Northampton's misdemeanours, Usk rose again under Brembre. This return to favour was only temporary and he was hung and then beheaded at Tyburn in 1388, as a result of being implicated during the proceedings of the Merciless Parliament of 1388.⁸ An individual like Usk, and others like him, would have familiarised himself with and been aware of the kind of rhetoric that could be employed by the dominant party to establish legitimacy and power.

Usk's *Appeal* thus provides an insight not only into the factional rivalries that characterised 1380s London but, also, the kind of rhetoric and ideas that were propagated as a way of achieving political goals. The quotation which opened this chapter indicates how the discourse of common profit had the potential to shape and mould the political turbulence that unfurled in this period. Moreover, as a born and bred Londoner, Usk reminded readers in the *Testament of Love* of how well acquainted he was with London, recalling that 'the cytie of London, that is to me so dere and swete, in whiche I was forthe growen' (I.6.86-88). Whilst largely a fictitious text, the *Testament*, like the *Appeal*, revealed something of Usk's political experiences, and his familiarity with the ebb and flow of London life, especially the City's political culture.⁹ In his efforts to convict Northampton and save himself, Usk demonstrated the way that political languages and

⁷ Oliver, 'A Political Pamphleteer in Late Medieval England', 184; Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 40-41; Paul Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer' in *Literary Practice and Social Change* ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 112.

⁸ *CPR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, pp. 470, 500; *CCR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 476 PROME, 'Attainder', III, 240; *WC*, p. 315; Thomas Favent, 'History or Narration Concerning the Manner and Form of the Miraculous Parliament at Westminster in the Year 1386, in the Tenth Year of the Reign of King Richard the Second after the Conquest, Declared Thomas Favent, Clerk' trans. Andrew Galloway in *Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England* ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 248; Oliver, 'A Political Pamphleteer in Late Medieval England', 184; Waldron, 'Usk', *ODNB*.

⁹ All quotations from *Testament of Love* are cited from *Testament of Love* ed. Gary W. Shawver (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2002). See Paul Strohm, 'The Textual Vicissitudes of Usk's "Appeal"' in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 145-160; Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s', p. 84; Marion Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', *New Medieval Literatures*, Vol. 9 (2008), 144, 157, 171.

ideas related to medieval political theory were a staple part of political conduct in London. Usk's writings show how common profit ideology was perceived and could be utilised by his contemporaries to meet political ends and safeguard civic authority.

Within the historiography, Northampton has been viewed as a man of the people, bolstering the interests of the City's lesser guilds and implementing a 'morality campaign' to cleanse the City of deviance.¹⁰ Whilst Northampton may have been seen as effectively manipulating both the Crown and the London populace to achieve his own ends by his own contemporaries – including 'the city oligarchs, their supporters, and conservative chroniclers' –, Paul Strohm has advocated that 'some of his initiatives nevertheless suggest an attempted use of the mayoralty to alleviate the daily problems of less prosperous Londoners, and of people resident or working in London who did not enjoy rights of full citizenship'.¹¹ Brembre, in stark contrast, was conceived of as being 'greedy and imperious'.¹² He was part of a powerful network of individuals who held the monopoly on wool in London, and was focused on profiteering from this. Having a leading hand in wool export, Brembre extended his power and immersed himself in influencing political conduct in London.¹³ As Strohm has summarised, Brembre was '[a] brilliant spectator, a ruthless political factionalist, an unswerving partisan of the king's London interests, [he] was at the center of every major controversy arising in the city for a period of twenty years'.¹⁴ These two characters are also of importance when considering the rivalry between Richard II and his uncle, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, whose power had been increasing in the final years of Edward III's reign; Brembre spearheaded the King's party and Northampton supported Gaunt.¹⁵ Their contemporaries considered them to be 'sowers of discord', whose

¹⁰ David Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community in Late Medieval London: The Common Profit, Charity and Commemoration* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), p. 2; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, pp. 141-156.

¹¹ Paul Strohm, 'Northampton, [Comberton], John (d. 1398)', *ODNB*.

¹² Paul Strohm, *The Poet's Tale: Chaucer and the Year that made The Canterbury Tales* (London: Profile Books, 2015), p. 130.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 110-113.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 110.

¹⁵ *LBH*, p. i. The significance of these rivalries is explored further in chapter two.

rivalry ‘[disturbed] the peace of London for over a decade’ and caused great turbulence in the way that the City was governed.¹⁶ Both were at the forefront of London political culture and their rivalry thus gives us a detailed insight into the way in which London governance was structured, defined and fractured by political opponents and crises. Northampton, especially, has been described as ‘one of the catalysts of constitutional change’ following the Good Parliament of 1376.¹⁷ His career in London politics harked back to the 1360s when we see he made alliances with the drapers, particularly John More, one of his staunchest political allies during the troubles of the 1380s.¹⁸

Northampton and Brembre were each other’s chief political opponents with the reasons for this enmity being rooted in differing opinions on how the city of London should be reformed. The way they chose to govern London is particularly important when considering the formation and election of London’s Common Council. Following the constitutional crisis that followed the Good Parliament of 1376, which is explained much more detail in chapter one, Northampton – amongst other reformers who occupied city offices (and which did not include individuals like Brembre or his close associates William Walworth or John Philipot) – established political reforms. This programme set out that ‘aldermen should be limited to one year terms, that the Common Council should be elected from the crafts rather than the wards, that no victualler should hold judicial office, and that victuallers from outside London could sell freely within the city’.¹⁹ In reorganising the Common Council, the reformers – led by Northampton – were engaging with a contentious issue. In light of the political crisis that had taken place, there had been debate over whether the Common Council should be elected by the wards or the misteries of the City. In a charter granted to them in 1341, Edward III allowed London citizens to choose the manner of this election without the assent of Parliament. Effectively, this allowed civic

¹⁶ Strohm, ‘Northampton, John’; Andrew Prescott, ‘Brembre, Sir Nicholas (d. 1388)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁷ Pamela Nightingale, ‘Capitalists, Crafts and Constitutional Change in Late Fourteenth-Century London’, *Past & Present*, Vol. 124, Iss. 1, (Aug, 1989), 5

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Strohm, ‘Northampton, John’; Strohm, ‘Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer’, p. 85.

officers, principally the Mayor and Aldermen, to change their customs as they wished.

We see that in 1351 and 1352 the Common Council had been elected by the London guilds yet in 1354 power reverted back to the wards. It thereafter remained in their hands until 1376 when Northampton's reforming party had altered the power balance and placed it back in the hands of the City's misteries.²⁰ This decision, however, was challenged by Walworth when he was mayor in 1380 and, subsequently, in 1384 the authority to elect members to the Common Council was transferred back to the wards of the City during Brembre's mayoralty. Nevertheless, the rule 'that the Mayor for the time being should not accept more than eight of those elected by the Wards who were members of one Mistery' was implemented.²¹ This was due to the fear that a particular mistery or individuals would hold too much influence over the Common Council, particularly in light of the disturbances caused by the rivalry between victuallers and non-victuallers in the City.²² From this, we can begin to see how Northampton and Brembre's decisions over the formation of the Common Council were indicative of the way their politics and attitudes towards civic governance differed institutionally.

These different approaches extended beyond the Common Council. Their legislation in regards to trading monopolies contrasted greatly and the rivalries between victuallers and non-victuallers in London is an important point of discussion, especially as this has caused debate within literature focusing on the conflict between Northampton and Brembre. George Unwin's interpretation of this split was black and white; on one side stood the oligarch merchant capitalists headed by Brembre and on the other the craftsmen, led by Northampton, who were more interested in lower purchase prices.²³ Ruth Bird challenged Unwin's conclusions, arguing instead that the dispute between these opposing sides was characterised by mistrust of the merchant oligarchy and the politics of John of Gaunt, taking into consideration the links between the two parties to the King and

²⁰ *LBH*, p. i-ii.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. iii.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ George Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London: Cass, 4th den., 1963).

parliament. Bird saw the competition between Northampton and Brembre ‘was one between the small and the middling – that is, the artisans and small traders – and the great – that is, the wealthy wholesale traders’.²⁴

The intricacies of this enmity are not so simple and ran much deeper. As seen from Pamela Nightingale’s 1989 article, ‘Capitalists, Crafts and Constitutional Change in fourteenth-century London’, there is much evidence to support collaboration and cooperation between artisanal and victualing guilds in late fourteenth-century London.²⁵ There is truth in the fact that Northampton curbed the power of the victuallers and merchant capitalists, but this should be contextualised amongst his broader policies of reform. Whilst his contemporaries considered Northampton’s programme of reform controversial, these particular measures were aimed at ‘[alleviating] financial pressures on Londoners of all ranks and conditions’.²⁶ Northampton, in particular, did so by limiting the powers of victuallers in the City, restricting them in a statute issued in 1382 of taking office if they continued their trade.²⁷ His most interventionist measures, however, were against London’s fishmongers whose monopoly crippled after Northampton ‘[opened] markets to non-resident tradesmen and forbidding wholesale purchase of fish for profitable resale’.²⁸ Other measures were also implemented at prohibiting the resale of goods such as ale, wine, poultry and bread. Furthermore, Northampton took measures against eliminating

²⁴ Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 75. For a detailed analysis of Bird’s scholarship on this conflict see Frank Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London* trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 131-132.

²⁵ Nightingale, ‘Capitalists, Crafts and Constitutional Change’, esp. 19-20 which explains the reasons for the alliance between the grocers and Northampton during the late 1370s.

²⁶ Strohm, ‘Northampton, John’.

²⁷ This statute can be found in the 1388 Guild Petitions. The statute read: ‘Item ordinatum est et statutum quod nec in ciuitate Londoniorum nec in alys Ciuitatibus Burgis villis vel portibus maris par totum regnum predictum, aliquis vitallar officium iudiciale decetero habeat exerceat neque occupet quouismodo nisi in villis vbi alia persona sufficiens ad huius statum habendum repperiri non poterit dum tamen idem iudex pro tempore quo in officio illo steterit, ab exercicio vitallarii sub pena forisfacture victualium suorum sic venditorum penitus cesset et se absteineat pro se et suis omnino ab eodem etc’. Translated this read: ‘Also it is ordained and established that neither in the city of London nor in other cities, boroughs, villages or ports of the sea, throughout all the aforesaid kingdom, may any victualler henceforth hold, practice, or occupy judicial office in any way, except in villages where some qualified person to hold this position cannot be found, provided that the same judge, for the time that he remains in that office, utterly ceases from the practice of a victualler upon the penalty of forfeiture of their victuals sold in such a way, and that he abstains, for him and all his, from the same’. See Robert Ellis, ‘Verba Vana: Empty Words in Ricardian London’, Volume II (Unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary, University of London, 2014), pp. 418, 422.

²⁸ Strohm, ‘Northampton, John’.

false contracts and usury.²⁹ Brembre reversed some of these measures when he was elected mayor in 1383.³⁰ For example, on 26th November 1383 Brembre acquired a charter that restored the rights of victuallers in the City, overturning Northampton's parliamentary statute of 1382, which had been an act detrimental to the grocers – Brembre's own victualling company.³¹ Their dispute thus had much wider implications on the way that London governance, trade, economy and politics was managed and adhered to, particularly when it came down to the manner in which craft guilds and food sellers organised their trade and exercised their rights. As chapter 4 argues, craft governance and London governance were closely merged.³²

This current investigation revisits this rivalry but focuses instead on the way in which political language was used as a persuasive tool which legitimated the standpoint of those in seats of power. It does so by considering the application of common profit ideology, an idea that promoted the common good and the mutual benefit of the polity, and the vocabulary used to express this concept in administrative records created in London between c. 1376 and c. 1391. Working towards the good of the polity was a deeply rooted idea across the medieval world, and, as will be seen later in this introduction, was rhetoric frequently employed by urban administration. Understanding this political language better helps to expose the motives and agendas of urban political players.³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ He did not, however, restore the fishmongers' monopoly to the reselling of fish in order to ease the fear of London's lesser craft guilds.

³¹ Prescott, 'Brembre, Nicholas'.

³² See Christopher Cannon, 'Chaucer and the Language of London' in *Chaucer and the City* ed. Ardis Butterfield (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 79-94 for the importance of craft guilds and their influence on London governance in the 1370s and 1380s. For more work carried out on how guilds participated in London's governmental history see Matthew Davies, 'Crown, city and guild in late medieval London' in *London and beyond. Essays in honour of Derek Keene* ed. Matthew Davies and James A. Galloway (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2012), pp. 247-68 and Matthew Davies, 'Artisans, Guilds and Government in London' in *Daily Life in the Middle Ages* ed. R. H. Britnell (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1998), pp. 125-150.

³³ Mark Ormrod takes a similar approach, exploring how 'we can understand better how political language both expressed and limited political agendas and public debates'. Ormrod focuses on the way in which the term 'common profit', as well as the phrase 'for the profit of king and kingdom' was expressed in parliamentary sources'. See W. Mark Ormrod, "'Common Profit' and 'The Profit of King and Kingdom': Parliament and the Development of Political Language in England, 1250-1450', *Viator*, 46 No. 2 (2015), 219-252. I have quoted from 221 and 219.

Common Profit, Communitarian Values and Medieval Political Theory

Common profit was rooted deeply in the Ciceronian notion of *res publica*, or ‘a society that acted in the interest of the “things” (*res*), or shared interests, “of the people” (*publica*)’.³⁴ Ciceronian political theory imagined a body of people based on the Roman Republic, a society in which James E. G. Zetzel has viewed ‘individual morality [to be] contingent on the values of civic life and public life’.³⁵ Conversely, ‘civic life and public life’ were also dependent on ‘individual morality’ in order to have a fully functioning, harmonious society.³⁶ These ideas were inherited and adapted by medieval societies.³⁷ The intrinsic relationship between the ‘individual good’ and the ‘good of the whole’, however, has been hotly debated and proved problematic when defining ‘what exactly constituted a *medieval* theory of community’.³⁸ This has been a problem for both medieval scholastic political thinkers and modern day commentators alike.

M. S. Kempshall has tackled this concern, stating that ‘[t]oo absolute an antithesis between community and individual presents the common good with too sharp a set of alternatives – either it is the same as individual good or it is superior’.³⁹ Those writing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,

had a notion of a collective aim for the community, a common good to which the individual was subordinate. They did try to mix the two conceptions, a principle of identity with a principle of superiority, the observation that the

³⁴ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 4.

³⁵ James E. G. Zetzel, *Cicero: On the Commonwealth and on the Laws* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p. xvii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Janet Coleman, ‘Urban experiences: some critical observations on contemporary scholarship concerning the relation between medieval political theories and practices’ in *Historische Anstöße: Festschrift Für Wolfgang Reinhard Zum 65* ed. Peter Burschel, Mark Häberlein, Volker Reinhardt, E. L. Wolfgang Weber, Reinhard Wendt (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2002), p. 297.

³⁸ M. S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

individual good is the same as the common good with the statement that the common good is better than the individual good.⁴⁰

Whilst there are clearly divergent views over the prioritisation of the individual or society, what we will see in this thesis is an awareness within civic communities that the individual good was subsidiary to the good of the wider community. It shows the political dimension of how the common good could be used, providing further evidence for Kempshall's observation that conceptualisations of the common good drifted from the theological into the political realm.

Common profit had a place in political society and this was especially noted by Sylvia L. Thrupp who wrote that 'it was a convention to frame public policies in the name of general principles, such as the nurturing of love, the common profit, the profit of the realm, the honor of the city, justice, or reasons'.⁴¹ Despite this, Thrupp argued that in later medieval London 'in thinking out their governmental problems the Londoners had no clear body of political theory to guide them' and, instead, turned to these general principles mentioned above instead.⁴² Her approach is somewhat contradictory. She goes on to state that '[t]o advance a special interest, it was almost a necessity to declare that it coincided with the public interest, a claim that might or might not be taken at face value'.⁴³ Whilst I agree that whether the claim to act with the communal good in mind was or was not taken at face value should be questioned, the research presented in this thesis challenges the claim that an abstract idea, like common profit, was not consciously used to structure civic programmes or attempts to maintain authority and legitimacy. In doing so, it builds on foundations laid by others. Both Sheila Lindenbaum and Strohm have helped in

⁴⁰ Ibid. For more on the subordination of the individual to the communal good see Antony Black, 'The individual and society' in *The Cambridge history of medieval political thought c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), p. 596.

⁴¹ Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 98.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 97-98.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 98.

recognising that ideas of common profit were a prominent feature in political debates and actions against warring factions in late fourteenth-century London.⁴⁴ Strohm especially has noted the use of this ideology by Brembre and Northampton who ‘[struggled] for possession of the idea of “common profit”, with Brembre the temporary and Northampton the longer-term winner’.⁴⁵

Moreover, the more recent work of Brantley L. Bryant has shown how ‘the language of common profit [which supplied] the rhetorical foundation for many texts’ was created in the period under discussion.⁴⁶ The profound impact that common profit ideology had on texts created in Richard II’s London has been furthered by Russell A. Peck, who showed how common profit was fundamental to ‘Gower’s encyclopedic moral philosophy’.⁴⁷ Kellie Robertson’s discussion on common profit rhetoric and labour following the Black Death in England has been especially useful in contradicting Thrupp’s reductive view. For Robertson, common profit was not an ‘empty tag phrase’ but rather ‘a potent symbolic construct that had material effects’ in regulating both heresy and labour in late medieval England.⁴⁸ The insinuation made by these scholars is that common profit rhetoric was a useful tool in negotiating challenging circumstances that individuals found themselves within – whether economic, political, cultural, theological or social.

This is not surprising given that common profit, or reference to the common good, focused on ‘the promotion of common interests’.⁴⁹ It is also important to note that various terminologies could be used to evoke ideas of common profit and common good. The origins of the common profit and common good stem from the Latin terms: ‘*bonum commune*, *bonum publicum*, *utilitas publica*, and *utilitas communis*’ which were translated

⁴⁴ Lindenbaum, ‘London Texts and Literate Practice’, pp. 288, 290; Paul Strohm, ‘Introduction: False Fables and Historical Truth’ in *Hochon’s Arrow*, pp. 3-9.

⁴⁵ Strohm, ‘Introduction’, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Brantley L. Bryant, ‘Common Profit: Economic Morality in English Public Political Discourse, c. 1340-1406’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2007), p. 257.

⁴⁷ Russell A. Peck, *Kingship & Common Profit in Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. xxi.

⁴⁸ Kellie Robertson, *The Laborer’s Two Bodies: Literary and Legal Productions in Britain, 1350-1500* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 87.

⁴⁹ Black, ‘The individual and society’, p. 596.

into the Anglo-Norman *commune profit* and Middle English *comune profyt* within later medieval English vernacular culture.⁵⁰ There was, however, a distinction between *bonum commune*, which indicated moral virtue, and *utilitas communis*, which promoted ideas regarding the kind of benefit that could be amassed from such virtues. Ormrod has shown that in general, English politics upheld this distinction, with the Anglo-Norman term *commune profit* equating to the *utilitas communis*.⁵¹ This, however, was not always the case and we see that the phrases common good and common profit were often applied interchangeably and were flexible in their use, resulting in the term common profit carrying moral connotations.⁵²

Ormrod has highlighted that ‘[t]here is ... a growing appreciation of the dynamic contribution that general ideas of the common good made to public life in the later Middle Ages’.⁵³ Ormrod’s analysis is useful in understanding how common profit rhetoric could be used as a ‘pragmatic [device]’ that had the capacity ‘to disguise ... sectional interests and to indulge in the fantasy of political holism’.⁵⁴ Ormrod’s study, however, focuses on the development of this political language within the context of the English parliament during the long fourteenth century. The present study shows that the same type of political

⁵⁰ Ormrod, “Common Profit” and “Profit of King and Kingdom”, 224; Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250–1450* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 24–28; John Watts, *The Making of Politics: Europe 1300–1500* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 76–79; David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of People: Popular Politics and England’s Long Social Revolution 1066–1649* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p.100.

⁵¹ Ormrod, “Common Profit” and “Profit of King and Kingdom”, 224.

⁵² Eberhard Isenmann, ‘The Notion of the Common Good, the Concept of Politics, and Practical Policies in Late Medieval and Early Modern German Cities’ in *De bono communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Common Good in the European City (13th-16th c.): Discours et pratique Du Bien Commun dans les villes d’Europe (XIII^e au XVI^e siècle)* ed. Èlodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 109–112; John Watts, “Common weal’ and ‘Commonwealth’: England’s Monarchical Republic in the Making, c. 1450–1530’ in *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14th-17th Centuries* ed. Andrew Gamberini, Jean-Philippe Genet and Andrew Zorzi (Rome: Viella, 2011), p. 153; Ormrod, “Common Profit” and “Profit of King and Kingdom”, 224–225; James Davis, ‘Common good and common profit in the trade regulations of medieval English towns’ in *Los Grupos Populares en la Ciudad Medieval Europea* ed. Jesús Ángel Solórzano Telechea, Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu and Jelle Haemers (Logrono: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2014), p. 135. I maintain the use of ‘common profit’ and ‘common good’ in order to minimize the use of terms and to maintain clarity in my meaning.

⁵³ Ormrod, “Common Profit” and “The Profit of King and Kingdom”, 226.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 252.

language could be used in the civic context of London – a community which was only a short distance from Parliament’s seat in the district suburb of Westminster.⁵⁵

Jan Dumolyn, especially, has argued that the common good was a ‘central signifier’ that was also an ‘empty signifier’; since this ideology had multiple meanings it could have no meaning at all. Nevertheless, he argues for a widespread engagement with this ideology from across several estates.⁵⁶ Ideas of common profit could thus be invoked by varying social groups. That a particular ideology could be pliable and have multiple uses has been highlighted by Jelle Haemers in his study of how the common good was interpreted in late fifteenth-century Flemish cities. Haemers posited that as a result of turbulent circumstances, including attempts to garner political power, ‘parties argued that they were defending ‘the common good’ of all inhabitants of the county ... But all of them interpreted this notion differently ... All these interpretations of the ‘common good’ idea show every political player tried to convince the others that his own interests were the common interests of everyone in the county’.⁵⁷ The idea of common profit or common good could therefore serve competing interests, demonstrating its potential to be used as a powerful tool of persuasion that masked the singular interests of these groups. Ideology based on the benefit of the community was also employed by Flemish aldermen, who Haemers determined utilised this discourse as a way of portraying themselves as acting for the interests of those they represented.⁵⁸

The key role of common profit in discussing issues of governance was also explored by Ormrod who demonstrated that this ideology was a ‘framing device’ which was used to discuss good royal governance, especially when debating the material wealth

⁵⁵ For urban uses of the ideology of common profit see Davis, ‘common good and common profit’, p. 135. For Westminster as a suburb of London see Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster* (Oxford: OUP, 1997); Gervase Rosser, ‘London and Westminster. The Suburb in the Urban Economy in the Later Middle Ages’ in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth-Century* ed. J. A. F. Thomson (Gloucester: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1988), pp. 45-61

⁵⁶ Jan Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders. Towards an Analytical Framework’ in *The Languages of Political Society*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Jelle Haemers, *For the Common Good: State Power and Urban Revolts in the Reign of Mary of Burgundy (1477-1482)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), p. 263.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of the Kingdom. Accordingly, other studies based on fourteenth-century England have realised the benefits of using this concept to discuss economic concerns. The use of common profit rhetoric in the national economic discussions of late medieval England has been demonstrated by the work of Bryant, Bert Lambert and Milan Pajic. Bryant viewed common profit in terms of how the English Parliament used this ideology to justify their economic arrangements, whilst Lambert and Pajic demonstrated how the English Crown ignored the protests of London's native cloth weavers against Flemish cloth workers on the basis of concern for the common profit of the Kingdom as a whole.⁵⁹

What these works have in common with Ormrod's work is the prominence given to common profit as a 'signature rhetorical phrase' that shaped the decisions of those working within national governance.⁶⁰ Christopher Fletcher's work on common profit in English petitions, in particular, complements Ormrod's study in seeing the idea of common profit used as a rhetorical tool. Nevertheless, concepts of common profit were also used on a more local scale and economic context, especially, as James Davis has explored, in the trade regulations of medieval English towns.⁶¹ He has shown that whilst formulaic, there was a pragmatic use of the term common profit in civic ordinances and urban trade regulations.⁶² In contrast to Ormrod's, Bryant's, Lambert's, Pajic's and Fletcher's work, in

⁵⁹ Bryant, 'Common Profit: Economic Morality in English Public Political Discourse, c. 1340-1406', pp. 225-285; Bart Lambert and Milan Pajic, 'Immigration and the Common Profit: Native Cloth Workers, Flemish Exiles, and Royal Policy in Fourteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 55 (2016), 633-657.

⁶⁰ I borrow the phrase 'signature rhetorical phrase' from Bryant, 'Common Profit: Economic Morality in English Public Political Discourse, c. 1340-1406', p. 227.

⁶¹ Davis, 'Common good and common profit', pp. 133-149. For studies on the interaction between the common good and economic, as well as mercantile, considerations in medieval England see Richard H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000-1500* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 79-101; Gwen Seabourne, *Royal Regulation of Loans and Sales in Medieval England: "Monkish Superstition and Civil Tyranny"* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), pp. 160-167; James Davis, 'Baking for the Common Good: A Reassessment of the Assize of Bread in Medieval England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 57 (2004), 465-502; James Davis, 'Market Regulation in Fifteenth-Century England' in *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard H. Britnell*, ed. Ben Dodds and Christian D. Liddy (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), pp. 81-105; Kellie Robertson, 'Common Language and Common Profit' in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 209-228. For a European perspective see Jan Dumolyn, "'Our land is only founded on trade and industry": Economic Discourses in Fifteenth-Century Bruges', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), 374-389.

⁶² Davis has shown how '[t]he terms [common good and common profit] had a sustained value for urban inhabitants and the rhetoric was instrumental in the construction of a civic ideology'. See Davis, 'Common good and common profit', p. 149.

this instance ideals of ‘moral norms and justice permeated the way that the medieval market was regulated and administered ... [influencing] the way people acted, even if they did not always conform to these norms’.⁶³ For Davis, the idea of common profit or the common good ‘drew upon numerous assumptions about order, charity, welfare, justice, morality and community’ and were usefully employed by urban officials wishing to control day-to-day market practices.⁶⁴ David Harry, more recently, has made a similar observation in the way that London’s aldermen in the fifteenth century used common profit rhetoric. Common profit for these men was shaped by Christian charity and ideals of late medieval piety, ‘[serving] a distinctive ideological function [which] helped to celebrate and entrench the status of government office at a time of social and political readjustment’.⁶⁵ Davis’s and Harry’s work thus provides a basis from which we can begin to understand how civic officers could employ this rhetoric and use it to permeate aspects of civic life during the tumultuous 1380s.

Importantly, common profit, or the common good, could be employed as a way of constructing a sense of community; it was the perfect tool to use in order to be perceived as working with communal interests in mind.⁶⁶ The conjunction of the common good with community, *communitas*, in relations to the idea of commonweal or commonwealth has been well studied for fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England. This was mainly as a result of the emergence of the term ‘commonweal’ during Cade’s Rebellion in 1451, which was used by the rebels and, later, appropriated by Yorkist nobles immersed in the Yorkist-Lancastrian civil wars that dominated the second half of the fifteenth century.⁶⁷ It was

⁶³ Ibid, p. 148.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd ed. 1997).

⁶⁷ See John Watts ‘Polemical and Politics in the 1450s’ in *The Politics of 15th-Century England: John Vale’s Book* ed. M. L. Kekewich et al (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995), pp. 3–42; John Watts, ‘The Pressure of the Public’ in *The Fifteenth Century IV: Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain* ed. Linda Clark and Christine Carpenter (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), pp. 159–160; Watts, “‘Common weal’ and ‘Commonwealth’”, pp. 147–163; Christopher Fletcher, ‘De la communauté du royaume au common weal: les requêtes anglaises et leurs stratégies au XIVE siècle’, *Revue Française d’Histoire des Idées Politiques*, Vol. 32 (2010), 359-72. For a useful alternative approach, see David Grummitt, ‘Deconstructing Cade’s

David Starkey in particular who located the emergence of this term amidst this political conflict.⁶⁸ Translated into the vernacular from the Latin, *bonum commune* or *bonum publica*, “commonweal” was an essential idea in communal life. Phil Withington, in particular, stressed that ‘[f]rom the mid fifteenth century “commonweal” became the term to designate the intersections between different kinds of *communitas* and the “common good” its representatives were supposed to protect and represent’.⁶⁹ It created a sense of the sorts of shared resources that people in various types of communities could have, invoking the communal welfare of these groups and a general consensus that all were to benefit from these shared resources.

The work done on the link between commonweal and community life in the early modern period causes the medievalist studying common profit to pause and consider the parallels between commonweal/th and its predecessor. Whilst establishing a direct connection between the fading use of common profit and the rise of commonweal has not yet been investigated in any great detail, Withington’s treatment of commonweal and how this idea related to communities is useful for this current study.⁷⁰ Withington considered that ‘the term did not detail specifics or policies so much as provide an overarching paradigm that shaped the way politics was conducted’.⁷¹ Janet Coleman, however, has shown that medievalists have claimed that ‘there were no vocabularies for inserting local communities into their [theorists in monarchies] arguments’.⁷² Coleman has rebuked scholars focused on monarchical theories for ignoring the role which local communities held in medieval political ideologies. This study extends this observation on to London’s

Rebellion: Discourse and Insurgency in the Late Middle Ages’ in *The Fifteenth Century VI: Identity and Insurgency in the Late Middle Ages* ed. Linda Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), pp. 107–122; Phil Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 139–141.

⁶⁸ David Starkey, ‘Which Age of Reform?’ in *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration* ed. David Starkey and C. Coleman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 18–19.

⁶⁹ Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, p. 140.

⁷⁰ For an attempt to make a connection between these terms see Ormrod, ““Common Profit” and “Profit of King and Kingdom”, 249–251.

⁷¹ Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, p. 141.

⁷² Janet Coleman, ‘Urban experiences’, pp. 298, 300.

civic leaders and those immersed in the political tumult of the 1380s, demonstrating that these individuals too were aware of how important appealing to local communities and communitarian values was. It also suggests an understanding of medieval political theory and the employment of notions related to these ideas in an urban setting. For Claire Hawes, the idea of ‘community’ was a ‘powerful construct’ and one which, parallel to late medieval Scotland, was adopted by political players in late medieval London as an ideological tool.⁷³

Key to medieval communities in maintaining common profit principles was concord, order and a sense of hierarchy.⁷⁴ Studies on the history of medieval political theory and urban history, like that of Susan Reynolds, have shown how ‘[t]he ideal was harmony: ruler and ruled, rich and poor, all had their parts to play. Each had his place, not equal but related, not in unison but in harmony’ – a feature that was continually stressed in discussions of ‘the organic analogy and common good argument’.⁷⁵ Reynolds’ work has been especially important in assessing how contemporary ideology was key in the context of late medieval civic rule and complements Stephen H. Rigby’s suggestion that medieval society was increasingly oligarchic, with urban government resisting the pressures of those who were politically disenfranchised.⁷⁶ Society was thus divided into three estates – the Clergy, the Nobility and the Labourers. Whilst this rigid structure does not reflect the

⁷³ Claire Hawes, ‘The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland: language, law and political practice’, *Urban History*, Vol. 44, 3 (2017), 380. For earlier work on how the idea of ‘community’ could be put to political use see Black, ‘The individual and society’, p. 588.

⁷⁴ Bryant has shown, for example, that ‘[c]ommon profit assumes that the combined action of individuals or groups within a realm can and should be aligned in such a way that the realm will attain not only prosperity but also an unquantifiable moral harmony; reductively put, common profit conceives that the whole of a properly organized national economic life is greater than the sum of its parts’. Bryant, ‘Common Profit: Economic Morality in English Public Political Discourse, c. 1340-1406’, p. 225.

⁷⁵ Susan Reynolds, ‘Medieval urban history and the history of political thought’, *Urban History Yearbook*, Vol. 9 (1982), 16; Black, ‘The individual and society’, p. 596.

⁷⁶ Reynolds, ‘Medieval urban history’, 14-23; Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, pp. 198-204; Stephen H. Rigby, ‘“Urban Oligarchy” in Late-Medieval England’ in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* ed. J. A. F. Thomson (Sutton Publishing: Gloucester, 1988), pp. 62-86.

actual reality and fluidity of the medieval world, what it does reflect is that people were classified as having certain duties and a place within medieval society.⁷⁷

The Digby-Poet, author of the group of early fifteenth-century poems copied into Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 102, certainly held this belief. The poem *The Descryuing of Mannes Membres* described this aspect of medieval political theory, asserting that ‘eche stat in his kynde be vsed’ (151) in order for the body politic to function efficiently.⁷⁸ The poem encapsulates what Antony Black has identified as ‘the “organic analogy” between society and the human body’.⁷⁹ Society was conceived of as a body and we see that a political community was understood as having multiple parts that supported its head – the ruler. This understanding was encapsulated in the Digby-Poet’s stanza on the King:

The heued, y likne to a kyng,
 For he is lord souereyn of al,
 Haþ foure to his gouernyng:
 Mouþ and nose, and eyen wiþ-al,
 Eryn fayre to his heryng,
 To serue þe brayn is pryncypal
 Chef of counseil ymagenyng,
 To caste before, er after fal (9-16).

The King was the link between all parts of the body politic, the vital concoction that ensured peace and stability in the realm. Whilst in these verses the Digby-Poet focused on

⁷⁷ Black, ‘The individual and society’, pp. 592-593; Keith D. Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450* (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 11-12.

⁷⁸ All citations made to *The Descryuing of Mannes Membres* are from *The Digby Poems: A New Edition of the Lyrics edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 102* ed. Helen Barr (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2009). For an earlier edition of the poem see *Twenty-six political songs and other poems (Including ‘Petty Job’) from the Oxford mss Digby 102 and Douce 322* ed. J. Kail (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, Ltd., 1904).

⁷⁹ Black, *Political Thought in Europe*, p. 14.

those who counselled the King to serve him competently, the Digby-Poet continued using imagery of ‘nekke’ (17), ‘mannys brest’ (25), ‘þe shuldres and þe bakebon’ (33), ‘Mannys rybbes’ (41), ‘Mannys leggis’ (57), ‘the toes of þe mennys feet’ (65), and ‘þe wombe’ (81) to express how he could ‘likne a kyngdom in good astate, / To stalworþe man, myȝty in hele. / While non of his lymes oper hate’ (121-123). The organic analogy, in the eyes of Black, was ‘a favourite rhetorical, literary and philosophical device ... [suggesting] that a society was a structure with a common interest, and perhaps a common motive, purpose and will’.⁸⁰ This is exactly what we view in *The Descryuing of Mannes Membres* in which the common goal of all members of the body politic was to work together under their ‘heued’, the King, to achieve a prosperous and stable polity.

The imagery used in the Digby poem stems from the medieval conception of the three estates, an ordered hierarchy which God was at the centre of and in which each member was to play their part if society was to function properly. Christine de Pizan’s observations in *The Book of the Body Politic*, written during the early fifteenth century, parallels this understanding of how the body politic was composed in the late medieval polity. De Pizan, writing for Louis of Guyenne, the heir to the French throne, described the people ‘as the belly, legs, and feet, so that the whole be formed and joined in one whole living body, perfect and healthy’.⁸¹ She stressed that ‘[f]or just as the human body is not whole, but defective and deformed when it lacks any of its members, so the body politic cannot be perfect, whole, nor healthy if all the estates of which we speak are not well joined and united together’.⁸²

Her conception of the body politic mirrored that of the Digby-Poet, explicitly stating that the responsibility of the political community was to work together for the good of the whole. She wrote that ‘they [members of the body politic] can help and aid each

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

⁸¹ Christine de Pizan, ‘The Book of the Body Politic: Book III’ trans. Kate Forhan in *Medieval Political Theory – A Reader: The quest for the body politic, 1100-1400* ed. Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon-Forhan (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 231.

⁸² Ibid.

other, each exercising the office which it must, which diverse offices ought to serve only for the conservation of the whole community, just as the members of a human body aid to guide and nourish the whole body'.⁸³ For de Pizan, each member of the body was accountable for their failure to their constituent parts and shows that notions of the body politic formed an integral part of everyday life in the later Middle Ages.⁸⁴ Her political thought reflected that of John of Salisbury, who wrote that 'all are as members mutually of one another'.⁸⁵

A shared characteristic in these works was the emphasis on society working as a collective; the model understood by the Digby-Poet and de Pizan demonstrated 'that the individual did not confront society' and its aims.⁸⁶ What this presents then is a highly stratified society but one which needed to work together to preserve notions related to common profit – a disorderly realm could not achieve the mutual benefit of all its inhabitants. A critical element in this strand of medieval political thinking was the role of governors and their duty to those they ruled over. This element of medieval political theory has been picked up by Reynolds who contended that to the medieval mind '[e]veryone should be content with his lot, living and working harmoniously with his superiors and inferiors, and doing justice to each in his station. Government is the right and duty of those at the top, given that they represent the best interests of those below'.⁸⁷ Like those over whom they ruled, governors of a town or city were responsible for working collaboratively and ensuring that the common profit of those they were answerable to was preserved –

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ For more on Christine de Pizan's social and political thought see Stephen H. Rigby, 'The Body Politic in the Social and Political Thought of Christine de Pizan (Abridged Version). Part I: Reciprocity, Hierarchy and Political Authority', *Cahiers de Recherche Médiévales et Humanistes*, 24 (2012), 461-483; Cary J. Nederman, 'Body Politics: the Diversification of Organic Metaphors in the Later Middle Ages', *Pensiero Politico Medievale*, 2 (2004), 59-87; Cary J. Nederman, 'The Living Body Politic: the Diversification of Organic Metaphors in Nicole Oresme and Christine de Pizan' in *Healing the Body Politic: the Political Thought of Christine de Pizan* ed. Karen Green and C. J. Mears (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 19-35; C. J. Nederman, 'The Expanding Body Politic: Christine de Pizan and the Medieval Roots of the Political Economy' in *Au champs des scriptures: Ille colloque international sur Christine de Pizan, Lausanne 18-22 Juillet* ed. E. Hicks, Diego Gonzales and Philippe Simon (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), pp. 383-397.

⁸⁵ 'Ut singula sint quasi aliorum ad invicem membra': John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, vi.20, vol. 11 ed. Webb (1909), pp. 58-59 as cited in Black, 'The individual and society', p. 593.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 593.

⁸⁷ Reynolds, 'Medieval urban history', 21.

their duty to the people was couched in communitarian values and formed the perfect image of what a good body politic looked like in the medieval world. Medieval political theorists understood town government as being sustained by three key pillars: ‘justice, reverence and love’.⁸⁸ A good governor was a person who would lead his people ‘according to right, reason, and justice’.⁸⁹

Political Language

A vital way in which we can examine how rulers employed common profit rhetoric is through an analysis of political language and discourse. The results that can be gained from such a study has been demonstrated from work carried out by early modernists, led by Mark Knights, who focused on the term ‘commonwealth’ as an early modern keyword and the various contexts in which the term appeared.⁹⁰ Withington, especially, made the important point that the term ‘commonwealth was an intrinsically political term’ that was used to express concerns pertaining to local and national governance.⁹¹ In the same vein, the concept or term common profit could be used to express the same concerns regarding governance in the medieval polity. The recent work of Fletcher in particular has demonstrated the importance of studying political language when trying to understand late medieval political culture.⁹² This interest in the relationship between words, their meanings and their cultural, historical, social and political contexts stems back to the work of Raymond Williams, who demonstrated how keywords were formed and transformed over time, as well as how they could bind ‘together certain ways of seeing culture and

⁸⁸ Ibid, 22.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ M. Knights *et. al.*, ‘Towards a Social and Cultural History of Keywords and Concepts by the Early Modern Research Group’, *History of Political Thought*, 31 (2010), 427-48; G. Burgess and M. Knights, ‘Commonwealth: The Social, Cultural, and Conceptual Contexts of an Early Modern Keyword’, *The Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), 659-87. Similarly, Withington recognised the importance of ‘commonwealth’ as an early modern keyword, which contributed to ‘providing an appropriate and overarching framework for understanding English early modernity’, see Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, p. 137.

⁹¹ Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, pp. 133-137.

⁹² Christopher Fletcher, ‘What makes a political language? Key terms, profit and damage in the common petition of the English parliament, 1343-1422’ in *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe: Communication and Popular Politics* ed. J. Dumolyn, J. Haemers, H. R. Oliva Herrer and V. Challet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 91-106.

society'.⁹³ Williams, especially, showed how doing so would improve our ability to conceptualise 'historical and contemporary substance'.⁹⁴

Whilst these studies are useful in showing the different contexts in which a particular idiom can be used, focus on one single term ignores a larger vocabulary which can be linked to the concept or term under discussion. In the same way that Jenni Nuttall has shown that '[w]hile Richard [II] was not explicitly called a tyrant in the official Lancastrian depositional narrative', nevertheless, Richard's rule was understood as tyrannous.⁹⁵ Similarly, the current study demonstrates that the term 'common profit' did not have to appear in order to understand that ideas of community, good rule and shared interests were key issues under discussion. The repeated emphasis on what constituted good governance and made the ideal body politic in the texts analysed in this study is indicative of a wider understanding of what language and ideas could be employed in late medieval London to demonstrate an awareness of what common profit stood for.

It is clear then that a larger lexical body needs to be considered when studying a particular concept. In studying language, we can give special attention 'to the power of words and elements of rhetoric'.⁹⁶ We effectively have a 'language game ... a set of words signifying agreed concepts, with rules for their use and meaning'.⁹⁷ This is especially the case when exploring political language in which there has been a widespread understanding that politics is the use of language.⁹⁸ The Cambridge School of historians of political thought, J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner in particular, have argued for the utility of studying political language to further understand the central principles of groups

⁹³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), p. 15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁵ Jenni Nuttall, *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship: Literature, Language and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 11.

⁹⁶ Antony Black, 'Political Languages in Later Medieval Europe' in *The Church and Sovereignty c.590-1918: Essays in Honour of Michael Wills* ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 317.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁹⁸ Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 14; Fletcher, 'What Makes a Political Language?', p. 91.

across society.⁹⁹ Keeping the intrinsic link between them in mind is thus vital if we are to understand the shape that political action itself took amongst different political players. In later medieval Europe there were five types of political language that could be applied to a variety of circumstances and for multiple purposes. These have been identified by Black as: (1) Roman law, (2) feudal or customary law, (3) ‘theological’ language, (4) Aristotelian, scholastic language and (5) Ciceronian, language of the humanists.¹⁰⁰ Whilst there could be overlap in the way which these types of political language could be used, Black commented that ‘it was easier to say certain things in some languages than it was in others’.¹⁰¹ Various languages were available for medieval communities and in this thesis it is made clear that the records I have utilised made use of the second type of political language that Black identified. This study extends his observations and shows that within London’s administrative records a moral language, filled with Christian values, such as neighbourliness and good citizenship, was also employed as a way of negotiating political circumstances.

Medievalists have certainly caught on to this idea with John Watts stating that ‘[p]olitical ideas, political language or rhetoric, and political behaviour were consequently interwoven with many other kinds of ideas, language and behaviour’ in medieval polities.¹⁰² Strohm is another who has taken up this mantle, arguing that ‘language is ideological’ and ‘is itself the goal of the text’s largest strategic designs’.¹⁰³ This approach thus allows us to obtain a better idea of the contexts from which political language was generated and the idioms, rhetoric and vocabulary that was used to express notions linked

⁹⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Languages and their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought’ in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971 repr. 1989), pp. 3–41; J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 3–19; Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas’ in *Visions of Politics, Vol. I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 57–89.

¹⁰⁰ Black, ‘Political Languages in Later Medieval Europe’, pp. 317–318.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

¹⁰² Watts, *The Making of Politics*, p. 130. Jenni Nuttall, furthermore, has shown the benefits of adapting Pocock’s approach and what it can tell scholars about late medieval political discourse and political literature, Nuttall, *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship*, esp. p. 3.

¹⁰³ Paul Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 11.

to medieval political theory, particularly when examining ‘the languages of ruling groups’.¹⁰⁴ Chapters one, two and three focus on texts that were fashioned to expound the views of the civic elite yet chapter four, in contrast, looks to texts created by London’s artisanal guilds who were ruled by and, at least from their perspective, oppressed by the urban oligarchy. These texts were formed using a particular vocabulary that invoked certain ideas all related to common profit rhetoric. London’s political participants are what Skinner would have classified as ‘a group or society [that] has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept’ in which ‘a corresponding vocabulary ... developed, a vocabulary which [could] then be used to pick out and discuss the concept [in this case common profit] with consistency’.¹⁰⁵

It is worth applying this to 1380s London, where those using the concept of common profit adopted and adapted aspects of the ideology to consistently discuss issues pertaining to matters of civic governance. The dominant party and their opposition adapted this idea in a way in which they could negotiate the political field and establish who had authority. As we learn from Pierre Bourdieu, ‘one must not forget that the relations of communication *par excellence* – linguistic exchanges – are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers of their respective groups are actualized’.¹⁰⁶ This was exactly the case in 1380s London; language was utilised in a way that allowed different parties and individuals to establish through exchanges who had the power.¹⁰⁷

This thesis therefore follows historians of political thought and language in ‘[supposing] a field of study made up of acts of speech, whether oral, scribal or

¹⁰⁴ Pocock, ‘The concept of a language and the *métier d’historien*’, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Quentin Skinner, ‘Language and Social Change’ in *The State of Language* ed. L. Michales and C. Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 564; Quentin Skinner, ‘The idea of a cultural lexicon’ in *Visions of Politics*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power* ed. John B. Thompson and trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Malden and Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ My analysis in chapter two of letters exchanged between John of Gaunt, the Common Council, the Aldermen and Brembre is a good example of this. See chapter two, pp. 160-177.

typographical, and of the conditions or contexts in which these acts were performed'.¹⁰⁸

Considering political language as a set of speech acts is particularly helpful as in doing so, as J. L. Austin has shown, we see that in the process of using political language for the purpose of communication, those communicating were completing an action as well as transmitting a particular meaning.¹⁰⁹ In this study, the speech acts studied are predominantly those written into urban texts. Given the complexities of the porous boundary between written and oral culture, chapter three considers the oral contexts of the language used to express common profit rhetoric through a closer study of proclamations.

The contexts in which these texts were made is also considered, adhering to Pocock's assertion that "speech acts" should be studied within their respective contexts and the conditions that shaped them.¹¹⁰ Norman Fairclough maintained a similar approach, affirming that language is both 'socially constitutive and socially determined'.¹¹¹ We should also not forget the importance of 'agency, usage and ... intentionality'.¹¹² It is for this reason that Austin's work on speech acts is so important – in determining that certain words were performed with what Austin has dubbed 'illocutionary force', we can begin to reconstruct what the speaker, or the writer of a text, meant in doing it.¹¹³

Linked to this, is the way that a study of political language allows for scholars to understand texts and political language as reflections of events and the society in which they were created. To see texts as products of social events was central to Fairclough's study on discourse analysis, in which he argued that '[o]ne way in which people can act and interact in the course of social events is to speak or to write'.¹¹⁴ Whilst he admits that

¹⁰⁸ Pocock, 'The concept of a language and the *métier d'historien*', p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ See J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

¹¹⁰ Pocock, 'The concept of a language and the *métier d'historien*', pp. 19-25; Quentin Skinner, 'Interpretation and the understanding of speech acts' in *Visions of Politics*, pp. 103-127.

¹¹¹ I have quoted from Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders', p. 70.

¹¹² Quentin Skinner 'Introduction: Seeing things their way' in *Visions of Politics*, p. 3.

¹¹³ Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, pp. 94-107. For a discussion on Austin's theory on speech acts and 'illocutionary force' see P. Strawson, 'Intention and Convention in Speech Acts', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (1964), 439-460 and Quentin Skinner, 'Conventions and Understanding of Speech Acts', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, (1950-), Vol. 20, No. 79 (1970), 118-38.

¹¹⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for social research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 21.

not all social events ‘have a highly textual character’ his conclusions are especially pertinent to late fourteenth-century London which, as made evident further in this introduction, experienced an explosion of texts that dealt with the political matters of this time period.¹¹⁵ For Helen Barr, in both a written and oral context, language ‘[was] a material form of social practice’ and could be used effectively to create an interpretation or narrative of current social climates.¹¹⁶ This approach to a study of language compliments Dumolyn’s remark that ‘urban political languages developed according to the rhythm of social and political change’.¹¹⁷ The study of language is important in relation to urban communities as we gain an insight into how these individuals borrowed from medieval political languages to suit their own circumstances and identities, as well as construct their own ideologies.¹¹⁸ Urban life thus replicated patterns and ideals that were an ubiquitous part of medieval political theory.¹¹⁹

The significance of tropes and distinct vocabulary used to denote social practices that would have been recognised by medieval audiences was also a key part of Barr’s study. The implication was that the language utilised would have resounded with a much broader group who would have recognised the social commentary being made. This does not mean, however, that all communities used the same language and terms in a way that expressed shared values. Indeed, as studies discussing the term common profit between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries have shown, there are challenges to be faced when debating whether repeated use of the term implied that it was being used in the same way

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Helen Barr, *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 1; Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), p. 22; Roger Fowler, *Literature as Social Discourse* (London: Batsford Ltd, 1981), p. 21; Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Language as Ideology* (London Routledge, 1979), pp. 1-14. Robert Stein made a similar observation commenting that ‘[h]umanity is enmeshed in the webs of significance made from a world constantly spoken about, written about and argued about in language ... language can follow after [experience] in order to give a more or less truthful account’. See Robert Stein, ‘Literary criticism and the evidence for history’ in *Writing Medieval History* ed. Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 68.

¹¹⁷ Dumolyn has argued that ‘[t]his history of “political languages” or “ideologies” belongs as much to the realm of socio-political history as it does to the history of ideas. The development of commonly understandable political discourses was essential to the construction of medieval political communities, whether the polities were on the urban or “national” level’. See Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders’, pp. 71, 77.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 76.

¹¹⁹ Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450*, p. 252.

by contemporary individuals.¹²⁰ Similar conclusions have been sketched by Dumolyn and Harry, whose work shows that whilst language is symbolic in nature, communities would employ language that suited their set of interests, contexts or identities and from that construct ideologies that best represented their arguments.¹²¹ It is through doing so that power relations could be restructured and redefined.¹²²

Adopting this latter approach is particularly important when navigating texts produced throughout Northampton and Brembre's dispute. We see during this time that the use of common profit ideology became a discursive and political part of this ordeal, which was accordingly adapted by those in positions of power and their opposition.¹²³ Their varying use of this political language and ideology forms part of a phenomenon that Mikhail Bakhtin has called 'heteroglossia', in which '[b]y appropriating and altering elements of the dominant ideology, subaltern discourses may parody it or express it ironically'.¹²⁴ It is important to recognise that, depending on the individual or group, there may be radical differences in the way that ideologies were expressed. Language, therefore, was indicative of changes and circumstances that particular communities or individuals experienced yet the way it was used, or its intended meaning, was not always uniform in nature. What is demonstrated in this thesis is the appropriation of the idea of common profit to suit those who wished to implement and re-establish civic authority and legitimacy.

¹²⁰ Knights and Burgess 'Commonwealth: The Social, Cultural, and Conceptual Contexts of an Early Modern Keyword', 659-87; Watts, "'Commonweal'" and "'Commonwealth'": England's Monarchical Republic in the Making', pp. 147-64; Ormrod, "'Common Profit'" and "'The Profit of the King and Kingdom'", 219-52.

¹²¹ Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders', p. 70; Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 7.

¹²² Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders', p. 70.

¹²³ Jan Dumolyn has made the point that '[a]s urban communities struggled for corporate autonomy, the signs *justitia*, *pax*, and *bonum commune* became sites of struggle in themselves, struggles which were at the same time political and discursive. In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, this phenomenon "heteroglossia" or 'another's speech in another's language'. By appropriating and altering elements of the dominant ideology, subaltern discourses may parody it or express it ironically'. See Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders', p. 77.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

London as the ‘New Troy’

Scholars studying urban contexts are thus able to gain an insight into how medieval people, especially civic leaders, conceptualised the environment in which they lived. Nevertheless, whilst rule by an urban elite was considered ‘natural’, those ruling knew that ‘the legitimacy of their rule depended on an ostensible adherence to the rhetoric of communal government and principles of justice, consensus and harmony’.¹²⁵ Keith D. Lilley especially has identified the close link between medieval urbanism and the people who lived in these locations, arguing that this relationship was ‘highly intimate and complex’ and ‘closely bound together’.¹²⁶ For Lilley, ‘medieval urban landscapes determined the ways that people negotiated their lives, and how, in the process and at the same time, people played their own roles in determining what sort of urban landscape took shape’.¹²⁷ Furthermore, sources produced by urban communities expose ‘the political power of the spoken and written word’ within urban locations, as well as what the spoken and written word can tell us about the relationship between language and power.¹²⁸

Studies on medieval urban communities have also noted the vital place that the common good had in defining urban ideology.¹²⁹ Hawes, for example, explored how this idea filtered into the urban world through her discussion of guild politics.¹³⁰ Moreover, the centrality of the common good in late medieval urbanity has been a ubiquitous theme in studies on urban communities across medieval Western Europe.¹³¹ Several studies have taken note of how the common good or common profit was an intrinsic part of urban

¹²⁵ James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 164.

¹²⁶ Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450*, p. 253.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹²⁸ Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders’, p. 76; Skinner, ‘Introduction: Seeing things their way’, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders’, pp. 84-89; Hawes, ‘The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland’, 376.

¹³⁰ Hawes, ‘The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland’, 376.

¹³¹ *De Bono Communi*, ed. Lecuppre-Desjardin and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene.

governance and working towards the public good.¹³² Furthermore, ideas of the common good were also a vital component of medieval political languages.¹³³ Dumolyn, however, has questioned the feasibility of locating a specific ‘urban ideology’, as these were naturally linked to ‘the political languages of the Church and of seigniorial power and its institutions, whether princely or noble, since these ideologies were the dominant ones in medieval society’.¹³⁴ His solution to this challenge was to consider how older political languages and newer political languages interacted with concerns that were specific to the context of urban life. He has shown, in particular, how the older language related to the *bonum commune*, the Latin term for the common good,

had “trickled down” in what could be called a “practical theory of political action”, broadly inspired by ideas on kingship, justice, law and the divine nature of the social order. And certainly feudal conceptions of contractual power were omnipresent in the representation of urban politics.¹³⁵

The notion of the common good was a universal idea that had roots in other factors of urban life yet could be applied more widely to other contexts. Moreover, Dumolyn has reminded historians to take care when studying urban ideologies and to avoid the trap of seeing ‘urban ideological production as a homogeneous semantic universe’, echoing the points discussed above when thinking about political language and social practice.¹³⁶

Although not always standardised, community values thus formed a vital part of urban life and understanding. This has been summarised by Janet Coleman, who highlighted that ‘urban communities of all kinds were bonded together in all kinds of ways

¹³² Ibid; Christopher Beck, ‘Common good and private justice: letters of marque and the *utilitas publica* in fourteenth-century Marseilles’, *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2015), 88-106; Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, esp. ch. five, pp. 128-164; Haemers, *For the Common Good*.

¹³³ Dumolyn, ‘Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders’, p. 75.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 73.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 75

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 78.

which made them more than simply a product of individual identities summed to create a whole'.¹³⁷ This sense of mutual obligation in medieval communities, which was expressed in my discussion of the *Descryuing of Mannes Membres*, was thus a central facet of medieval town life. Urban communities were echoing the Ciceronian and Aristotelian language which offered instruction on how to achieve the common good. Unity and collective action, rather than individual good, was a concept that was at the core of urban communities.

As Lilley reminds scholars, these ideas, including conceptualising a city as akin to a 'body, were not just a vital part of philosophical tracts of the medieval period but demonstrates how medieval urban societies wrote about their cities and the way in which medieval governance should be administered'.¹³⁸ This model of urban governance helps scholars understand how towns and cities were organised and how people were ruled over. The idea of an 'embodied city' provided a basis from which urban governance could be modelled; whilst the metaphor also connected the body politic to the cosmic body that was ruled by God's divine laws.¹³⁹ As we shall see, evidence that city inhabitants viewed themselves as part of an 'urban body' is plentiful in late fourteenth-century London.¹⁴⁰

These studies give us a starting point from which we can begin to understand how urban values could be mapped onto and associated with the governance of London, particularly if those values were expressed in terms of community ideology of which common profit rhetoric was a part. Yet the capital was more than simply one city. London, as described in a proclamation of 1326, was a "mirror to all the realm", setting a good example to the rest of the Kingdom of what constituted public order and good

¹³⁷ Coleman, 'Urban experiences', p. 305.

¹³⁸ Keith D. Lilley, *City and Cosmos: The Medieval World in Urban Form* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), p. 131.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

governance.¹⁴¹ This understanding of London as a point of reference for the rest of the nation was expressed in the late fourteenth-century alliterative poem *St Erkenwald*:

Now þat London is neuenyd hat þe New Troie;
 þe metropol & þe mayster-ton hit euermore has bene (25-26)¹⁴²

St. Erkenwald's recognition of London as the New Troy, a concept borrowed from the ubiquitous Galfridian *Brut* chronicle tradition, is significant, with Sylvia Federico arguing that 'the *Erkenwald*-Poet [claimed] the city's present identification with Troy as evidence of its continuously glorious history (that is, *now* that London is the new Troy, it evermore *has been* a praiseworthy place) ... a mark of the capital's civic progress'.¹⁴³ This myth was used imaginatively by the *Erkenwald*-Poet to create an identity for London as the leading city of England.

The distinctiveness of the City as a place of virtue was not an innovation of the *Erkenwald*-Poet and there are earlier works which formed the same depiction of London. William Fitz Stephen, for example, writing in the later twelfth century explained that '[a]mong the noble and celebrated cities of the world, that of London, the capital of the kingdom of the English, is one which extends its glory farther than all the others'.¹⁴⁴ He continued, writing that,

The city, like Rome, is divided into wards; it has annual sheriffs instead of consuls; it has its senatorial order and its lower magistracies; it has drains and

¹⁴¹ Thrupp, *Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 75.

¹⁴² All quotations from *St. Erkenwald* are cited from *St. Erkenwald (Bishop of London 675-693) an alliterative poem* ed. Sir Israel Gollancz (London: Amen Corner, E. C., 1922).

¹⁴³ The Brutus myth was used by writers such as Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth, as well as the author of the *Brut*. See Stephen Kelly, 'Brutus' in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* Vol. I ed. S. Echard and R. Rouse (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), pp. 358-361 and Stephen Kelly, 'Brut Tradition' in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* Vol. I ed. S. Echard and R. Rouse (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), pp. 350-358; Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ *English Historical Documents, 1140-1189* ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 956-959 as cited in Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450*, p. 27.

aqueducts in the streets; it has its appointed places for the hearing of cases deliberative, demonstrative, and judicial; it has several courts, and its separate assemblies on appointed days.¹⁴⁵

Fitz Stephen's opinion of London was clear; the City was a place that was of a higher calibre than the rest of the realm.¹⁴⁶ Even in the early sixteenth century, London retained its status as a great city, being described in the poem 'London, thou art of townes *A per se*', usually attributed to the Scotsman William Dunbar, as 'the flour of Cities all', suggesting that for those not native to the City, London was viewed as the principal city of England.¹⁴⁷

These people had a very specific place in mind when describing 'the City'; those writing about London were referring specifically to the area within the medieval walls. In defining these boundaries, descriptions of the City were excluding suburbs such as Southwark and Westminster, the King's capital, which fell outside the jurisdiction of London's civic leaders.¹⁴⁸ London's identity in the later Middle Ages may have been socially constructed, but it was imagined as a cohesive unit, at least in the eyes of the *Erkenwald*-Poet and, as will be evident throughout this thesis, those who participated in the factional conflicts of the 1380s. Throughout the sources examined in this thesis, London is always described as 'the City', a place in which governance, and the proper administration of governance, fell to London's leaders.

Late fourteenth-century London, nevertheless, was a place where we can locate deviant behaviour and intense corruption. An understanding of London's mythical association as the New Troy was also invoked by John Gower in his *Vox Clamantis* and Richard Maidstone in his *Concordia facter inter regem Riccardum II et civitatem*

¹⁴⁵ Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Citation from William Dunbar's poem is taken from *The Oxford Book of English Verse* ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (London: OUP, 1919), no. 19 as cited in Ralph Hanna, 'Images of London in medieval English literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of London* ed. Lawrence Manley (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Hanna, 'Images of London in medieval English literature', p. 19. For literature on the suburbs of London see Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996) on Southwark and Rosser, *Medieval Westminster, 1200-1540* on Westminster.

Londonie, who responded to crises in the City, the 1381 Peasants' Revolt and 1392 loss of London's liberties respectively.¹⁴⁹ Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, like his earlier text *Mirour de l'omme*, was a criticism of the immoral state of England and Gower certainly did not miss his opportunity to criticise London's rulers in his text. He compared these individuals to the leading men who were responsible for the loss of Troy – they were responsible for the destruction of their own city. 1380s London was, in the words of Marion Turner, an 'extraordinary political maelstrom', mirroring the 'urban betrayal and conflict' which occurred in Troy.¹⁵⁰ It was a place rife with factional fighting and intense disputes between civic and royal officials – even the King's uncle, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, became embroiled in squabbles that resulted from the rivalry between Northampton and Brembre.¹⁵¹ London, then, was also a place of treachery and deviance.¹⁵² As David Wallace has shown, the series of crises and cataclysmic internal strains in London meant that it was difficult to create a sense of the City as a 'single, unified site'.¹⁵³

What is important about these works is that they provided an all-encompassing narrative of British history, connecting this history with events in their own societies.¹⁵⁴ Gower's work, especially, carried particular political resonance and satirised the idea of London as the New Troy, particularly within the context of his contemporary, Brembre, who styled London as 'Little Troy' and fashioned himself as the 'duke of this [London] newly named city'.¹⁵⁵ Brembre's reasons for giving London the title of 'Little Troy' remains unclear, yet it seems that some of his contemporaries read his titular ambitions for London ironically. Troy ultimately fell, in part as a result of the bad governance of its leaders, and thus Brembre's identification of London as 'Little Troy', paradoxically,

¹⁴⁹ Federico, *New Troy*, pp. 3-7.

¹⁵⁰ Marion Turner, 'Politics and London Life' in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer* ed. Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 14, 28.

¹⁵¹ See chapter two pp. 161-166 for my discussion of John of Gaunt's involvement in the rivalry between Northampton and Brembre.

¹⁵² Turner, 'Politics and London Life', p. 26.

¹⁵³ David Wallace, 'Chaucer and the Absent City' in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context* ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 59.

¹⁵⁴ Kelly, 'Brut Tradition', pp. 350-358.

¹⁵⁵ Federico, *New Troy*, pp. 1-2; *Chronica Maiora*, p. 262.

carried unfortunate connotations. The satirical implication was that the City would become a place that would succumb to disaster. By invoking the Galfridian myth, some of the medieval contemporaries discussed above – the *Erkenwald*-Poet, Gower and Maidstone – may have been evoking a sense of progress in the City. They were tying the contemporary city to the memory of the greatest city of the world’s mythic past – London was seeded by refugees from Troy, and now the City had grown to emulate its extraordinary forbear. At the same time, however, there was also a feeling amongst others, like Gower, that the parallel between London and Troy identified the City as a place of ‘capital treason’.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps it is because of these turbulent social, cultural and political conditions, that London’s political players tried to appeal to the very image that the *Erkenwald*-Poet tried to create of London as the major city that set an example for the rest of the nation, a place where stability, order and the common profit thrived, in order to regain control and legitimise their standpoint. With this in mind, Ralph Hanna’s comment that ‘civic glory paradoxically contributes to the demise of anything like civic solidarity’ is interesting.¹⁵⁷ Political players in 1380s London certainly sought out ‘civic glory’ and very much employed common profit ideology within the texts they wrote, infusing them with communitarian ideals as a way of achieving power yet it failed on numerous counts – Northampton was exiled in 1384 and Brembre lost his head in 1388. Common profit in London could not survive in these conditions and it is for this reason that, despite attempting to portray the City as a unified body, civic leaders were unable to consolidate their personal glory and a unified body politic.

The history of medieval London has been well documented in medieval scholarship, with Caroline M. Barron’s ambitious study of London covering intrinsic details of the day-to-day running of civic governance between the early thirteenth and early

¹⁵⁶ Federico, *New Troy*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Hanna, ‘Images of London in medieval English literature’, p. 30.

sixteenth centuries.¹⁵⁸ She has also focused largely on the political culture of the City as well as the relationship between the King and London, focusing especially on Richard II.¹⁵⁹ Several works on London have also concentrated on literary/book production and reading communities in London, as well as the better-known poets of the era, John Gower, William Langland and, Geoffrey Chaucer, in addition to some later writers like Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate – their works contain several snapshots of London life.¹⁶⁰ In particular, studies on London literature in this period have examined the provenance of these works in the political, social, cultural, economic and theological climate of late fourteenth-century London. The engagement of these authors with London life and city discourses has been at the forefront of many studies that have focused on London texts. The attention given to such texts is not surprising given the proliferation of politicised writing in the period under discussion and what we can learn from them about the political climate of Richard II's London.¹⁶¹

C. D. Benson has recognised that London's administrative documents could tell 'entertaining stories' yet the focus in his study remains on the cross-over between these records and Chaucer's *Cook's Tale*, as well as 'deeper affinities with Chaucer's art here

¹⁵⁸ Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (Oxford: OUP, 2004); Caroline M. Barron, 'The Government of London: the formative phase, 1300-1500', *The London Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2001), 9-18.

¹⁵⁹ Caroline M. Barron, 'The Political Culture of Late Medieval London' in *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain* ed. Linda Clark and Christine Carpenter (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), pp. 111-134; Caroline M. Barron, 'Richard II and London' in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship* ed. James Gillespie and Anthony Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 129-154; Caroline M. Barron, 'The Government of London and its Relations with the Crown' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1969).

¹⁶⁰ Some examples include Julia Boffey, 'London Books and London Readers, c. 1475-1550' in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: OUP, 2010), pp. 420-37; Turner, 'Politics and London Life', pp. 13-33; Hanrahan, 'London', pp. 266-280; *Chaucer and the City* ed. Ardis Butterfield (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006); Wallace, 'Chaucer and the Absent City', pp. 59-90; Caroline M. Barron, 'William Langland: A London Poet' in *Chaucer's England*, pp. 91-109; Robert Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower's Urban Contexts' in *A Companion to Gower* ed. Sián Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 43-60; C. D. Benson, 'Some Poets' Tours of Medieval London: Varieties of Literary Urban Experience', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2007), 1-20; Lawrence Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes: London Textual Production, 1384-1432* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018).

¹⁶¹ From Gwilym Dodd we learn that the later fourteenth century witnessed 'a dramatic upsurge of political and politicised writing as a result of prolonged and, on occasion, profound failures of kingship'. See Gwilym Dodd, 'Kingship, Parliament and the Court: the Emergence of 'High Style' in Petitions to the English Crown, c.1350-1405', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 129, No. 538 (2014), 515.

and elsewhere in the *Canterbury Tales*'.¹⁶² Craig E. Bertolet postulated that '[p]oetry [was] the preferred vehicle in this period for literary narrative'.¹⁶³ His statement, however, devalues the capability of London's archival records to fulfil the same function. Many studies on London, then, have lacked an analysis of the language and ideas, as well as the motivations and intentions of London's civic leaders, which are preserved in the City's administrative records. Thus far, then, studies of London civic governance have explored the way that London administration worked on an everyday basis, as well as through the prism of fictional works by the City's greatest poets. To date, the two approaches have remained quite distinct. This thesis, by contrast, builds on a combination of both these approaches by considering the political language employed and the discourses invoked in urban administrative records to negotiate factional politics. It is vital to understand the motivations behind these texts and the mentalities of those who shaped these materials. In addition to offering a new perspective on London governance, this thesis also adds to the literature on common profit by showing how this was understood outside the world of political treatises. The time has come, therefore, to return to these records and give these 'entertaining stories' the attention they deserve as serious expressions of urban political thought.

Urban Administrative Records and Documentary Culture

This study on political language follows a model that Pocock would deem 'highly institutional' and is one which studies 'languages employed by specific communities in their professional discourse, as articulating their activities and the institutional practices in which they were engaged'.¹⁶⁴ Those writing within such institutions constructed a language they considered to be 'the official language of a political unit', something

¹⁶² C. D. Benson, 'Literary Contests and London Records in the *Canterbury Tales*' in *Chaucer and the City*, p. 137.

¹⁶³ Craig E. Bertolet, *Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve and the Commercial Practices of Late Fourteenth-Century London* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ Pocock, 'The concept of a language and the *métier d'historien*', p. 23.

Bourdieu recognised as '[imposing] itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language ... Produced by who [had] the authority to write'.¹⁶⁵ As such, 'official language [was] bound up with the state, both in its genesis and its social uses'.¹⁶⁶ Whilst this thesis focuses on a medieval city rather than the state, this approach is applicable and what we get from institutional records is the official language and ideas that those in positions of power deemed acceptable. It is possible then that the language of London's civic records can tell us not only how urban governance and the body politic was imagined but also how those seeking to control the City wished to enforce an official narrative in the populace by using political language.

A focus on language allows for an examination of how common profit rhetoric was used as a tool by those at the pinnacle of power and, paradoxically, those challenging this power. The work of Bryant has been especially useful in highlighting the influence of common profit rhetoric in London texts. Focusing on how the City defended its right to civic franchises, liberties, and trading relations, Bryant argued that not all in London held the same opinion. As a result, '[a]ppeals to common profit, specifically the profit that is "common" to both the city, the realm, its king and his subjects, [allowed] these London documents to present the city as an orderly and altruistic society of merchants, a source of support for the realm'.¹⁶⁷ This meant that London's interests could be merged with the rest of the realm. Moreover, Davis has noted how sources like petitions, regulations and statutes had a dual function; they were drawn up in the name of common profit yet were used as a means of allaying worries regarding sectional interests and, simultaneously, indicated an awareness that those creating these materials had of serving the common good through good governance.¹⁶⁸ These observations, combined with that of Lilley, show that in this period writing by, or ordered by, civic officials can reveal a 'civic consciousness'

¹⁶⁵ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, p. 45.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Bryant, 'Common Profit: Economic Morality in English Public Political Discourse, c. 1340-1406', p. 262.

¹⁶⁸ Davis, 'Common good and common profit', p. 136.

and are an important point of departure for understanding the sources employed in this thesis.¹⁶⁹ Civic business recorded and revealed how governing bodies perceived themselves and their role in everyday civic life.¹⁷⁰ This study reconceptualises then how common profit ideology was invoked as a means of shaping everyday political actions and the type of behaviour that was expected of not only London's governing body but also those whom they ruled over.

When dealing with medieval political languages, medievalists must realise that what we are dealing with 'were usually parole, or oral utterances, speech performances as socio-political actions vital to urban political systems'.¹⁷¹ There certainly seems to have been awareness amongst London's political players of the utility of language and words in achieving their aims. This avenue of thought has been explored by Rob Ellis, who highlighted that despite following a formula or protocol, the voice of urban officials and their authority was established in civic records.¹⁷² It has been shown that Brembre, in particular, was a figure who utilised civic records to his advantage as a way of asserting his authority, demonstrating he was clearly 'aware of the power of words and the importance of controlling documentary discourses'.¹⁷³ By projecting an ideology that resonated with communitarian ideals and values, his views and arguments could be legitimised and his authority secured. A wider exploration of these civic records shows that Brembre was far from alone in his appreciation of their potential to exert authority.

Records detailing the everyday administration of the City were therefore important in understanding how civic governance and the political climate interacted and were influenced by each other. Civic governance and documentary culture have a shared history, with Gwyn A. Williams showing that the development of governance in medieval London occurred alongside the proliferation of administrative records within London's Guildhall in

¹⁶⁹ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 133.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁷² Robert Ellis, 'Verba Vana: Empty Words in Ricardian London', Volume I, (Unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary, University of London, 2014), p. 54.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 55.

the later thirteenth century.¹⁷⁴ Late fourteenth-century London, especially, experienced the development of what Barron has identified as an expert ‘civil service’ who created records reflecting the City’s history and which assisted in the legitimization of the power of civic leaders.¹⁷⁵ These developments built on a gradual increase in the number of written records evident from, as M. T. Clanchy has shown, the Norman Conquest.¹⁷⁶ By the fourteenth century, the three stages of a document’s life identified by Clanchy, creation, being kept, and being referred to, were an important facet of civic practice in London.¹⁷⁷

These concerns surrounding the making, retaining and use of records are particularly pertinent considering the political climate of late fourteenth-century London, which Ruth Evans has shown ‘was a nodal point for the production and dissemination of numerous texts that [were] beginning to create a public discourse about political events’.¹⁷⁸ Michael Hanrahan, additionally, demonstrated that ‘[t]he factional strife of the period not only affected the real lives of individuals and writers, like Chaucer or Usk, but also produced a wide range of texts that variously represented and reproduced the struggles’.¹⁷⁹ Hanrahan’s analysis, however, focused on Chaucer’s works, notably the *Cook’s Prologue and Tale*, the *Canon Yeoman’s Prologue and Tale*, and the *Clerk’s Tale*, as well as Usk’s *Testament of Love*. In these works we can locate elements and mutually informing contexts of civic governance, as well as reflections upon the discourses in the ambit of Richard II’s court. These literary works offer helpful commentary on not only the factional struggle, but, also,

¹⁷⁴ Gwyn. A. Williams, *Medieval London: From Commune to Capital* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), p. 78; Andrew Prescott, ‘Administrative Records and the Scribal Achievement of Medieval England’ in *English Manuscripts before 1400* ed. A. S. G. Edwards and Orietta da Rold, *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* 17 (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2012), p. 190; Linne R. Mooney, ‘Locating Scribal Activity in Late-Medieval London’ in *Design and Distribution of Later Medieval Manuscripts in England* ed. M. Connolly and L. R. Mooney (York: York Medieval Press, 2008), pp. 183-204; Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature 1375-1425* (York: York Medieval Press, 2013), pp. 1, 7-16.

¹⁷⁵ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 196.

¹⁷⁶ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1979).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125; Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, 'Introduction' in *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I* ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ruth Evans, ‘The Production of Space in Chaucer’s London’ in *Chaucer and the City*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ Hanrahan, ‘London’, p. 268.

the civic records that are at the heart of this thesis which were produced as actual interventions in that factional conflict.

Harry's recent study on common profit, charity and commemoration in medieval London supports this very idea; the sources produced by Guildhall clerks 'provide invaluable textual evidence for the values and objectives espoused by London's governing elite'.¹⁸⁰ They are an insight into the world of London's rulers, their motivations and mentalities. Studying the records produced by those in positions of civic authority is also an excellent way into broadening our knowledge of the political languages utilised in an urban context.¹⁸¹ As Harry states, '[t]he documentary evidence for late medieval London becomes a conversation about the nature of power and its application'.¹⁸² London's political players clearly had an awareness of how documentary culture could be used to their advantage in a way that legitimated their point of view and actions. As we learn from Turner, 'high-stakes politics were played out in textual culture' and urban administrative texts were very much a part of this; they epitomised the political atmosphere of 1380s London.¹⁸³

The fact that administrative texts carried as many political implications as did literary works has already been established in a wider European context. Hannes Lowagie has highlighted this particular characteristic of urban records in his study on urban archival documents in late medieval Flemish cities. Focusing on the *Diary of Ghent*, Lowagie argued that 'texts of urban historiography [were] political instruments rather than ... merely cultural products'.¹⁸⁴ He continued by detailing that such historiographical texts in urban records served three interconnected purposes, namely, the communication of a

¹⁸⁰ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 10.

¹⁸¹ Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders', pp. 79-80.

¹⁸² Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 10.

¹⁸³ Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 20.

¹⁸⁴ Hannes Lowagie, 'The Political Implications of Urban Archival Documents in Late Medieval Flemish Cities: The Example of the *Diary of Ghent*' in *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I* ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), p. 213.

political message, promotion of a group, and providing a tool for political negotiation.¹⁸⁵

In doing so, urban administrators/scribes created a certain version of events that represented particular viewpoints. As we learn from Lowagie, '[t]hese attempts to impose one side's version of the facts on the population played an important role in the political conflict. With proper control of the past, you could conceivably convince people what should happen in the present'.¹⁸⁶ Although unlike the *Diary of Ghent*, the records studied in this thesis are not historical in content, they shared with the *Diary of Ghent* a similar intent. They too could be used to control a narrative of what had happened previously and present an alternative narrative to convince people of how London was to be governed.

Texts like administrative records, therefore, are not to be treated as just records but, to borrow from Strohm, are also 'interpretations of events, inevitably reliant to one degree or another upon invention, upon fictional devices'.¹⁸⁷ Each of the texts incorporated in this thesis has a story of its own to tell, all of them shaped by a certain viewpoint from which they were issued, recorded or copied. His ideas raise further 'epitomological quandaries', questioning not only why varieties of text are a valued source when studying history as a discipline but also inquiring into what sort of history these materials actually tell those studying them. The crux of his argument is that documentary evidence does not only 'contribute materially to our factual basis' but rather these sources also 'offer crucial testimony on other, though no less historical, matters: on contemporary perception, ideology, belief and – above all – on the imaginative structures within which fourteenth-century participants acted and assumed that their actions would be understood'.¹⁸⁸ Each text had the potential to construct its own narrative to possess its own version of the 'truth'. For Strohm, whether or not a particular narrative was 'true', it was of use to the historian because it '[embodied] a full historical grasp of the factional alignments, their members, their points of friction, the occasions at which they come into conflict, their lexicon of

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 214.

¹⁸⁷ Strohm, 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

insult, and the possibility that violence might or might not ensue'.¹⁸⁹ This study adopts Strohm's methodology, considering the historicity of these texts and their insight into how those who participated in the factional conflicts and turbulence of late fourteenth-century London imagined the world around them, using common profit rhetoric to construct an identity in which they were saviours of the body politic and community interests, shaped their viewpoints and legitimise and reinstate their authority.

Thesis Structure

A vast wealth of material survives for the study of medieval London yet this thesis focuses on the sources which best illustrate the influence of the discourse of common profit in the political struggles that played out between *c.* 1376 and *c.* 1391, in addition to the language used to reflect this.¹⁹⁰ As noted earlier in this introduction, whilst written from the point of view of the dominant power, civic documentation still allows for scholars of medieval London to understand urban life and the everyday quirks of medieval society, including disputes and rivalries between those leading government.¹⁹¹ To best explore these rich records, this thesis is divided into four chapters, each dedicated to a particular type of urban administrative record. Chapter one examines the Jubilee Book, a quire book containing civic oaths and customs, of which the original copy was burnt in 1387, to explore how good governance was conceived of within London in the aftermath of the Good Parliament of 1376. The chapter evaluates how common profit was conceptualised by civic reformers, the importance for civic officers to maintain urban relationships not only with the common people and the King but, also, amongst themselves. This facilitated the creation of common knowledge and how the passing on, as well as control, of this knowledge was used to enforce order. Oaths within the Jubilee Book thus provided a template for civic behaviour and emphasis was placed on safeguarding communitarian

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 212.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

values. The creators of the Jubilee Book utilised a sophisticated range of language and ideas to create a vision of civic governance in which civic officers could be held accountable for their actions if they did act with community interests in mind.

The minds behind the Jubilee Book envisioned a London bereft of political turbulence in which the agenda of the civic elite aligned with that of the people whom they ruled over. However, Northampton and Brembre's rivalry did not allow for this and, instead, threw the City into a period of discord and discontent. Chapters two and three, then, focus on the instability caused by these opposing figures from the perspective of Brembre who replaced Northampton as mayor in 1383, and served further terms as mayor of London between 1384 and 1386. Chapter two explores the rhetoric implemented in records preserved in the Plea and Memoranda Roll for 1384-1386, focusing especially on entries castigating Northampton and his associate John More, the response to artisanal guildsmen who participated in the October 1384 Guildhall 'affray' and a set of letters exchanged between John of Gaunt, London's Aldermen and Common Council, and Brembre. The materials examined here give an insight into the type of behaviour that Brembre perceived as a threat to his authority and the sort of vocabulary used, as well as appropriated, to highlight what did and did not benefit good governance, and thus the common profit, of the city of London. This was a discourse that Brembre could thus exploit as a means of legitimating authoritarian measures.

Despite the enforcement of his authority through his status as mayor and the power of the Mayor's Court, Brembre took further actions to legitimise his position, policies and rank as the leading civic authority in London. Disturbances to civic governance, nevertheless, continued despite Brembre's eventual demise in February 1388 and worsened once Northampton returned to the city of London. Chapter three, therefore, examines proclamations issued between the early stages of Brembre's mayoralty in October 1383 up to the mayoralty of Adam Bamme, between 1390 and 1391. The dissemination of proclamations by civic leaders during this period reveals as much about anxieties about

their authority as they do about the political climate of 1380s London. Examining the language and ideas disseminated into the public domain thus allows us to examine how political language played a part in their strategies of legitimation and the perceived influence that concerns related to the common profit of the City had on safeguarding civic authority. In the face of such extreme political circumstances, we see how political language, imbued with common profit ideals, was circulated to, paradoxically, protect the interests of those at the head of civic governance.

Chapter four takes an alternative perspective on civic rule under Brembre and does so by examining the 1388 Guild Petitions which were submitted by nineteen of London's artisanal guilds, including more prominent and lesser guilds of the City, following a meeting with the Lords Appellant who instigated the actions that resulted in the Merciless Parliament of 1388. The chapter considers the production of these petitions within respective artisanal guild halls, locating these sites as active political spaces which were deeply involved with and concerned with political activity and civic rule. The 1388 Guild Petitions show that understandings of medieval political theory, especially the utility of common profit rhetoric, existed outside the walls of the Guildhall and were understood on a broader scale. Guild culture and ethos is also considered and the chapter explores how these values influenced the language used to present their arguments. Parallel to the sources examined in chapters one, two and three, the 1388 Guild Petitions were also concerned with city governance and good leadership yet the perspective came from the ruled rather than the rulers. Memory is particularly important in these records, and the guilds utilised their experience of Brembre's time as mayor, as well as Nicholas Exton's, to recount how they had inhibited good governance and caused the detriment of these guilds and the wider polity. Several of these petitions also made reference to the Jubilee Book, stressing that Brembre had been responsible for the destruction of a text whose aims had been perfectly aligned with matters of good governance – unlike themselves, Brembre was not a true liege of London and, instead, was the destroyer of ideals of common profit.

By studying these four distinct, but related, types of texts, this thesis shows how London's civic records were saturated with common profit rhetoric, making a direct link with how common profit ideology was tied to ideals of civic governance. From these sources we see how different parties could use political language and ideals of common profit to justify their point of view and portray themselves as acting for the good of the body politic whilst, simultaneously, upholding their authority. It demonstrates how the discourse of common profit was a crucial tool in negotiating the political landscape of Richard II's London, adding to a growing understanding of and utility of studying language and ideologies in late medieval urban records.

Chapter 1. Civic Responsibility and City Interests: The Jubilee Book and Common Profit

On 12th March 1387, Nicholas Exton, the Mayor, summoned members of London's Common Council to gather at the Guildhall.¹ The reason behind this meeting was a concern surrounding 'certain new oaths of the officers of the said city, and certain new ordinances, repugnant to the old and approved customs of the same, which were written down in a certain quire, or book, called "Jubilee"'.² It was agreed by those present that the text had caused 'great controversies, dissensions, and disputes' amongst London's populace and was to be burnt immediately to avoid further discord.³ No moment was spared and the text known as the Jubilee Book was 'burnt on that same day in the place without the Guildhall [the Guildhall courtyard]'.⁴ This was the culmination of a lengthy process since we learn from *Letter Book H* that 'it had oftentimes been asked in divers Common Councils of the said city that the said quire or book should be burnt'.⁵ Whilst this description does not give specific dates when the text was discussed it does show that the contentious nature of the Jubilee Book was a longstanding issue. The content and ideas written into this text were evidently of immediate interest to its contemporaries.

Moreover, the desire to eradicate this text extended beyond the walls of the Guildhall. In the *Coram Rege* Roll for 1381, for example, the first extant mention of the

¹ Barron has argued that this dating is incorrect and places the date, instead, to Saturday 16th March 1387. See Caroline M. Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book' (unpublished essay).

² *Memorials*, pp. 494-95.

³ *Ibid*; *LBH*, p. 303; Caroline M. Barron, 'Negotiating the Political: the view from London' in *Negotiating the Political in Northern European Urban Society, c. 1400-1600* ed. Sheila Sweetinburgh MRTS 434 (Tempe: ACMRS, 2013). Although Exton was mayor when the Jubilee Book was burnt we can assume that he was working alongside Brembre, his close ally and who he had excelled under. For Brembre's complicity in the burning of the Jubilee Book see Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 21 and the 1388 Guild Petitions which are discussed in chapter four, pp. 257-308. For reasons for the burning of the Jubilee Book see Barron, 'The Political Culture of Medieval London', p. 128; Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice', p. 288; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility: Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), p. 53.

⁴ *Memorials*, p. 494.

⁵ *Ibid*.

Jubilee Book was made in an indictment against Walter atte Keye, a brewer who took part in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.⁶ The indictment stated that

Item, the jurors state that Walter atte Keye, brewer of Wood Street, was one of the principal malefactors in that, together with many other rebels unknown to the jurors, he came to the London Guild Hall (in the parish of St Laurence, Old Jewry) on the Friday after Corpus Christi [14 June]. Walter criminally and treasonably brought fire with him in order to burn the Guild Hall and a certain book called 'le Jubyle'.⁷

Keye's, and his accomplices, intent was clear – as well as burning the Guildhall, it was paramount that the Jubilee Book, in particular, be destroyed. His fervour and commitment to destroying the text is made more apparent in the lengths that Keye went to by going,

to the king's Compter in Milk Street on Friday after Corpus Christi [14 June]. While there, Walter was one of the chief malefactors in breaking into and despoiling the Compter and the chests therein: he was looking for a book concerning the constitutions of the city of London (called 'le Jubyle') in order to burn it if he could find it.⁸

Foiled in his first attempt to uncover the Jubilee Book, this second extract reveals the extent of Keye's desperation and feverish attempt to eradicate this text. From the indictment we learn that the text contained constitutions relating to the city of London and, therefore, concerned the structures and protocols of civic governance – Keye must have

⁶ R. B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1970), pp. 227-228; Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

⁷ Dobson, *Peasants' Revolt*, pp. 227-228.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 228.

taken issue with some form of civic governance and its structures.⁹ Confirmation of the contents of the text is to be found in eight of the fifteen petitions presented to the Merciless Parliament of 1388, which outlined that the Jubilee Book was compiled by long and ancient experience, and touched on the good governance of the City.¹⁰

The sources so far discussed do not reveal much about the detailed content of the Jubilee Book, other than whatever it was caused dissension and disagreement in London, yet the description of the Jubilee Book found in the *Mercers' Petition*, the only English language text amongst the 1388 Guild Petitions that will be discussed in chapter four, is curious and goes one step further than its French language counterparts. In describing the compilation of the Jubilee Book, the Mercers stated that the text contained 'the moost profitable poyntes of trewe gouernaunce of the Citee'.¹¹ The *Mercers' Petition* was a partisan record (indeed as we have seen earlier, those who wanted the Jubilee Book burnt believed it symbolised the very antithesis of good governance) and was, moreover, very much the production of the turbulent political environment of 1380s London, but in describing the 'poyntes of trewe gouernaunce' in the Jubilee Book as 'profitable' we can start to see that the text, like other customals, such Andrew Horn's *Liber Custumarum* and *Liber Horn* and John Carpenter's *Liber Albus*, of late medieval London, focused on proper civic governance and how to administer a city.¹² Moreover, in stating that the content of the book was 'profitable', the *Mercers' Petition* suggested that its subject matter was beneficial and helpful. Within late fourteenth-century London, interpretations of the text thus varied. For Keye the text represented a threat whilst for the Mercers it was a text that epitomised the meaning of true and proper governance. For R. B. Dobson, writing in the twentieth century, 'the exact nature of this controversial volume remains a mystery' yet it is clear from this discussion that the question of good governance was involved.¹³ By

⁹ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰ For more on the 1388 guild petitions and the Jubilee Book see chapter four, pp. 299-306.

¹¹ TNA, SC 8/8/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*).

¹² 'profitable (adj.)', *MED*.

¹³ Dobson, *Peasants' Revolt*, p. 227.

examining how the Jubilee Book was concerned with the good governance of the City, this chapter argues that the text was structured according to the tenets of medieval political theory, and, specifically, that the ideology of common profit influenced the language and ideas present within the Jubilee Book.

Before doing so, it needs to be clarified how the actual content of the Jubilee Book can be studied as the text was burnt in 1387. Barron has offered a compelling argument that a copy of the Jubilee Book is preserved within MS O 3 11, a manuscript held at Trinity College Cambridge. The manuscript, produced in the later fifteenth century and written primarily in English, contains *miscellanea* concerning London, such as Nicholas of Oresme's *de Moneta* and records related to the city of London. There are also items linked to Thomas Cook, mayor of London between 1462 and 1463, such as writs and materials connected to the wardmote during his time as alderman of Broad Street. As Barron suggests, '[t]he volume would have proved of considerable utility in the household of a late [fifteenth-century] London alderman'.¹⁴ Her thesis draws upon what we know about scribal practice in medieval London – multiple copies of the same texts were produced. It is therefore more than likely that more than one copy of the Jubilee Book was in circulation, even though the official copy was burnt in 1387.¹⁵

Barron has divided this manuscript into two sections; folios 1-122, followed by 10 blank folios, and then folios 133-157; it is the latter, which she believes, is a copy of the Jubilee Book.¹⁶ Barron provided several convincing reasons that contributed to her conclusions, one being the opening of the text. The preamble to the text outlined that 'in the newe booke of thanncient cutomes and vsages in the Citee of London compiled and affermed bi the mare Aldermen and Communes of the same Citee the yeer of kyng Richard the second the first year'.¹⁷ This extract places the origins of the Jubilee Book to sometime between 1377 and 1378, towards the end of Edward III's reign and the first year of Richard

¹⁴ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid; TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 133r.

II's, a short time after the Good Parliament and following reforms discussed at a meeting held on 1st August 1376 during which eight men were selected to review the City's ordinances.¹⁸ Moreover, several meetings took place between 1376 and 1384, starting with the revising committee selected in the summer of 1376 and ending with a meeting organised by Nicholas Brembre in June 1384, which discussed issues that overlapped with the Jubilee Book's content. These included, but were not limited to, the election of members of the Common Council, the re-election of aldermen and how the franchise of the City was to be exercised – all present within MS O 3 11.¹⁹ The link made between William Cheyne's complaint to the revising committee in 1377, which regarded an ordinance that 'had been introduced prohibiting the City's Recorder from taking fees or robes from any other lord', which limited his income, is particularly compelling evidence for the identification of MS O 3 11 with the Jubilee Book – the Recorder's oath in the manuscript, as outlined by Barron, corresponds with Cheyne's complaint, detailing that '[n]e no fees ne robes of any foreign lord ne of money ye shal nat bere, wear ne take during your office'.²⁰

The timing of the Jubilee Book's creation following the Good Parliament of 1376 is significant. The Good Parliament has been described 'as a defining moment in English constitutional history ... [setting] new precedents ... [and] became celebrated as a moment when the polity made outspoken criticism of Edward III's government and forced through a great purge of the courtiers and financiers who were seen to have hobbled the regime of a once great and now feeble king'.²¹ This Parliament saw the removal of prominent figures

¹⁸ *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History* ed. C. R. Cheney and rev. Michael Jones (Cambridge: CUP, repr. 2004), p. 35; W. Mark Ormrod, "'Fifty Glorious Years": Edward III and the First English Royal Jubilee', *Medieval History*, new series, I (2002), 13-20. The text's name itself gives researchers clues about its origins. As Barron has pointed out, the text was named the Jubilee Book 'because it was initiated in August 1376 in the Jubilee, or fiftieth year, of the reign of Edward III', Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book', Barron, 'Negotiating the Political: the view from London', p. 213 and Barron, 'Political Culture of Medieval London', p. 127.

¹⁹ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

²⁰ *Ibid*; TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 142v.

²¹ W. Mark Ormrod, 'The Good Parliament of 1376: Commons, *Communes*, and "Common Profit" in Fourteenth-Century English Politics' in *Comparative Perspectives on History and Historians: Essays in Memory of Bryce Lyon (1920-2007)* ed. D. Nicholas, B. S. Bachrach and J. M. Murray (Kalamazoo, MI:

at court, like Alice Perrers, the King's mistress, William Latimer, the King's chamberlain, and Lord Neville, the King's steward.²² Amongst them was the London financier and Alderman Richard Lyons, who was a close associate of Latimer and who, alongside the Aldermen of London John Pecche and Adam Bury, was impeached for financial fraud and extortion.²³ Lyons and Latimer, were accused of having acted 'to their own great profit and to the great damage and loss of the king'; their actions were taken with their own self-interest in mind rather than that of their sovereign – their allegiance and loyalty were perceived as being to their own pockets.²⁴

The conduct of London's civic leaders, in this instance, was just as questionable and was deeply interwoven into the fabric of the Good Parliament's proceedings.²⁵ The involvement of and accusations made against Lyons, Pecche, Bury and John Pyel evidence the unsavoury links that men of high status in London had with individuals at court.²⁶ The decisions made during the Good Parliament may have been overturned following the Bad Parliament in 1377 but what we see following this event is not only a 'comprehensive reform of government' decided by the Commons but a programme of reform in London also, one which Barron has characterised as moving 'towards the developing concern for the common good'.²⁷ As will be made clear in this chapter, at the centre of the reforms

medieval institute publications, 2012), p. 169. Also see Gwilym Dodd, 'A parliament full of rats? *Piers Plowman* and the Good Parliament of 1376', *Historical Research*, Vol. 79, No. 203 (2006), 22 and Christopher Fletcher, 'Virtue and the Common Good: Moral, Discourse and Political Practice in the Good Parliament, 1376' in *Charisma and Religious Authority: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Preaching, 1200-1500* ed. Katherine L. Jansen and Miri Rubin (Turnout: Brepols, 2011), p. 197.

²² W. Mark Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society 1327-1377* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 36.

²³ *CPR, Edward III: 1374-77*, pp. 439, 448-449, 450.

²⁴ 'Appendix III: Translation of the *Anonimalle Chronicle's* Account of the Good Parliament' in *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century* ed. John Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 307-310. Lyons, alongside John Pyel, a mercer, had taken advantage of the failings of central government, particularly after the 1340s when Edward III's government faced financial dealings following the ruin of the Italian banking house of Bardi and the Crown, as a result, relied on loans from English merchants, especially London merchants. As Barron wrote, 'Lyons and Pyel, and men like them, used London as a base for their mercantile operations but neither their hearts nor their energies were deeply committed to the well-being of the city', Caroline M. Barron, *Revolt in London: 11th to 15th June 1381* (London: Museum of London, 1981), p. 12.

²⁵ Barron, *Revolt in London 11th to 15th June 1381*, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Dodd, 'A parliament full of rats?', 25; Ormrod, *Edward III*, p. 36; Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

which the Jubilee Book contained, we see that, like in the Good Parliament, ‘morality ... took centre stage’.²⁸ In order to fully appreciate the context from which the Jubilee Book emerged it is also important to note that the Good Parliament also marked a major development for documentary culture in London. This link between the Good Parliament and documentary culture was established by Sheila Lindenbaum, who demonstrated that ‘London was at the centre of the maelstrom when institutions of documentary culture came under attack after the Good Parliament of 1376’.²⁹ This, along with the attack on documentary culture during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, identified that ‘local officeholders ...[misused]... documentary forms’ to their own advantage, ‘[implying] a widespread conviction among Londoners that official forms of writing had been abused by privileged interests’.³⁰

Ironically, it is from this context that the rich corpus of civic writing we have for late fourteenth-century London emerges and I would like to suggest that the Jubilee Book came from not only a need to work towards the common good but also to show that documentary culture – which was under scrutiny – could be for the public interest. Moreover, the Jubilee Book was part of a broader trend in the way that urban texts were being assembled; officials in later medieval English towns and cities ‘compiled self-conscious records which codified their liberties and reflected on how they should be governed’.³¹ As we saw in the introduction, urban records give an insight into how civic administrations worked and within the Jubilee Book we certainly acquire a view of the ‘self-perception of municipal bodies whose governing ruled the everyday activities of its individual members’.³² The 1370s and 1380s saw conflict over forms of documentary

²⁸ I have quoted from Fletcher, ‘Virtue and the Common Good’, pp. 197-198. Fletcher argued that ‘[t]hroughout proceedings [of the Good Parliament] the morality of the court took centre stage, serving to organise and legitimise political actions’. He argues this in contrast to George Holmes who (see George Holmes, *The Good Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)) who ‘[has] tended to discard the morality of the court as of at best peripheral interest’, Fletcher, ‘Virtue and the Common Good’, p. 199. We see this paralleled in the actions that London’s civic officers and initial committee of revisers of city policy took.

²⁹ Lindenbaum, ‘London Texts and Literate Practices’, p. 286.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Janet Coleman, ‘Urban experiences’, p. 303.

³² Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 133.

culture arise between Nicholas Brembre and John of Northampton, who both attempted to control the political narrative in London, so much so that the Jubilee Book, as we have seen, was burnt. Parties needed ‘to validate their documentary utterances’ and the Jubilee Book was surely an attempt to ‘ensure that their [civic officers] writing seemed to belong to the public at large rather than to special interests’, showing the polity that they were ready to rid themselves of the corruption which sparked the Good Parliament.³³

This study of the Jubilee Book is conducted with this context in mind. The partisan nature of the Jubilee Book is also considered and it is on this particular point that the present author parts with Barron, who, in stark contrast, argued that ‘[i]t is emphatically not a collection of partisan ordinances, whether anti-victuallers or pro-anyone else’.³⁴ She based her argument on who made up the revising committees, concluding that,

Clearly, [the text was] not partisan in the sense of dividing along the victualler/non-victualler line. In short, those who were involved in the creation of the Jubilee Book were not partisan. It may have owed its creation to the “reforming” zeal of John of Northampton and his supporters in the late 1370s but it was not a “Drapers” book.³⁵

Even so, the text curtailed certain practices which benefitted certain groups over others. The radical nature of the text was seen, for example, in the indepth description of the changes made to how the Common Council was elected – citizens in wards were no longer responsible for this and, instead, craft guilds were allowed to select those who made up this institution. This was a serious point of contention and was later reversed by Brembre during his mayoralty.³⁶ The Jubilee Book, then, was the victim of the economic rivalries

³³ Ibid, pp. 187-188.

³⁴ Barron, ‘The burning of the Jubilee Book’.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ These were measures that formed part of Northampton’s programme of reform. See ‘Introduction’, pp. 14-18.

and partisan politics in 1380s London. Barron's work is presently the only comprehensive study that has been carried out on the Jubilee Book and, whilst she noted that the text aimed to make civic officials accountable for their actions and was 'a piece of constitution-drafting: an attempt to provide the citizens with something they had not had before, namely an account of how the city was to be governed' she focused more on the circumstances surrounding the text's creation, authorship and destruction and only briefly drew material directly from the extant copy to show how '[t]he Jubilee Book was their [civic leaders] blue-print for this new style of government'.³⁷

The text was designed in a way that '[attempted] to clarify city government and to make it accessible and intelligible'.³⁸ As will be made clear throughout this chapter, the characteristics of the oaths in the Jubilee Book overlap with many oaths across medieval Europe but what was unique were the set of circumstances from which it arose. In contrast to Carpenter's *Liber Albus*, a fifteenth-century London customal, which was written in Latin, for example, the Jubilee Book was written in English suggesting that the text was to be understood by ordinary citizens, the *subditi* (as labelled by Carpenter), giving them some conception of how civic governance was carried out.³⁹ Moreover, 'writing in English was a conscious choice', particularly, as it inevitably invited a wider audience and made literature [or in the case of this text, the duties of civic officers] available to a more socially diverse group of people'.⁴⁰ The *Liber Albus* contained oaths with very similar characteristics to those found within the Jubilee Book yet the point about language and accessibility makes the Jubilee Book distinct.⁴¹ It is also noteworthy that the Jubilee Book contained the earliest existing versions of London oaths in English.⁴²

³⁷ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid; Barron, 'Political Culture in Late Medieval London', pp. 126, 128; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 168.

⁴⁰ Turner, 'Politics and London Life', p. 22.

⁴¹ For the oaths in Carpenter's text see *Liber Albus*, pp. 265-276.

⁴² I am grateful to Professor Caroline M. Barron for sharing this particular information about the Jubilee Book with me.

There was also a noticeable difference between the Mayor and Recorder's oaths in the Jubilee Book and those written into Carpenter's custumal. This disparity was noted by Barron, who argued that '[w]hen John Carpenter inserted the mayor's oath into the *Liber Albus* it was the earlier version that he included not the more dirigiste version of the Jubilee book. In a similar manner, the Recorder's oath has been extended'.⁴³ There was also a noticeable difference between the Common Sergeant's oath copied into the Jubilee Book and the fifteenth-century copies included in both *Letter Book D* and the *Liber Albus*. In the Jubilee Book, the final clause of the Common Sergeant's oath ends with: 'and the commune needis of the citee at al tymes that yee shalbe required bi the Communes in al places wher neede shalbe trewly yee shal shewe and tel and ententrefly pursue for the commune profite of the citee', in comparison to the fifteenth-century version which concludes with: '[a]nd attendaunt ye shal be on the mair aldermen and comyns for the causes and nedis of this Cite at alle tyme that ye shall be requirid and chargid'.⁴⁴ In comparison to the fifteenth-century oath, the oath preserved in the Jubilee Book focused instead on the 'comune needis' and 'comune profite' of the City, the very things which we will see the commonalty of London had raised in the summer of 1376.⁴⁵ These disparities between the Jubilee Book and later fifteenth-century oaths suggest an element of revision as well as preservation of city values, traditions and conduct that were vital in achieving good governance. It supports the case that the Jubilee Book was an attempt to reform as well as revive the city of London's morals and good repute. This chapter goes one step further by asking how this was done, considering the understanding that those who contributed to discussions of reform and compiled this text had about what 'common profit' meant in a city that needed reform and in what context they used it, to whom and what they were to remain loyal to, and what personal attributes and virtues were assigned

⁴³ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

⁴⁴ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r; *LBD*, pp. 196-197; *Liber Albus*, ii, p. 122 as quoted in Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

⁴⁵ This is discussed in more detail further in this chapter.

to office holders. This examination does this by analysing the language and ideologies employed in civic oaths preserved within this existing copy of the Jubilee Book.⁴⁶

The value of studying the language of reform within civic administration following the Good Parliament has been recognised by Frank Rexroth and this chapter adds to our understanding of how rhetoric was used by civic officers to redefine their political landscape.⁴⁷ In doing so, this chapter explores the values civic officers were expected to embody in London, the modes of behaviour expected of them and the way in which common profit ideology was inherently tied up in London governance, setting up the main themes and ideas that will be considered further in chapters two, three and four in which we see how London's civic leaders negotiated the political arena of the 1380s by drawing on common profit rhetoric. Medieval 'society was a structure with a common interest, and perhaps a common motive, purpose and will' and the Jubilee Book was an attempt by London's civic leaders to promulgate these exact ideas.⁴⁸

The Accountability of Civic Officers and Oath-Taking: Composing the Jubilee Book

The Jubilee Book, then, was produced at a time when the role of civic governors came under close scrutiny. During the proceedings of the Good Parliament, London aldermen, notably Lyons, Pecche and Bury, were identified by the Commons as having contributed to the corruption of the realm. This grievance, however, was not confined to Parliament and was also expressed by London's commonalty.⁴⁹ Through Ralph Strode, the Common Sergeant who acted as the common voice of London's citizens, the commonalty of London in the summer of 1376:

⁴⁶ Esther Liberman Cuenca has argued that '[m]ost of the civic oaths that officials recorded in custumals dealt with those officers who wielded authority and power in vital roles dealing with the town's finances, court, and administration'. See Esther Liberman Cuenca, 'The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Fordham University, 2019), p. 192.

⁴⁷ Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London*, p. 304. For a more detailed explanation of Rexroth's approach see Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250-1450*, p. 15.

⁴⁹ For further evidence and explanation of public opinion on what occurred during the Good Parliament see Dodd, 'A parliament full of rats?'

made grievous complaint ... of a great slander having been raised against the City at the last Parliament held at Westminster in the quinzaine of Easter last, touching certain misdoings of which some persons had been convicted in full Parliament and others still were under great suspicion; and whereas the Commonalty have further complained that for many years past they have been badly treated by reason of divers Mayors and Aldermen, disregarding their oath and the needs of the people, having made ordinances for their own private advantage, and granted public lands and tenements under the Common Seal to divers individuals without consulting the Commonalty.⁵⁰

This entry in *Letter Book H* continues to inform readers that Lyons, Pecche, and Bury were removed from their positions as Aldermen and were replaced by John Orgon, as Alderman of the Ward of Bradstret, Hervey Begge, as Alderman of the Ward of Walbroke, and Adam St. Yve, as Alderman of the Ward of Langebourne'.⁵¹ The removal of Lyons, Pecche and Bury is especially significant given the reforms that followed in the wake of their removal. The accusations made in the Good Parliament, as well as the accusations made by London's commonalty, may not have affected their wealth, and in the case of Lyons their activity in trade and public life, but 'their exodus from the court of aldermen could clear the way for other men with other ideas to play a part in city government'.⁵² It especially sparked the reforming zeal of individuals like Northampton, 'ring-leader of the radical party', which came to the fore following the Good Parliament, an event which 'provoked discussion and dissension'.⁵³ Even a letter sent by Edward III, urging London's mayor and aldermen not to alter or implement any urgent changes in city governance, did not stop these individuals and only encouraged them further.⁵⁴ These men met on 1st August 1376

⁵⁰ *LBH*, p. 38; Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

⁵¹ *LBH*, p. 38.

⁵² Barron, *Revolt in London 11th to 15th June 1381*, p. 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

to ‘[move] on from revenge to reconstruction’.⁵⁵ It was from this that changes preserved in the Jubilee Book began to be discussed and took formation.

The involvement of the commonalty in city matters was also addressed, with the current Mayor, the grocer John Ward, agreeing that he would act with ‘common assent’ and ‘that approved Commoners ought to be present at the making of every ordinance touching the City in common and that nothing ought to be done in secret’.⁵⁶ At its core, the commonalty’s complaint revolved around the negligence of civic duty, not just by Lyons, Pecche and Bury, but prominent civic leaders more generally and highlighted the need for civic reform. These were longstanding complaints to which Ward responded.⁵⁷ Civic officers had acted contrary to the oaths they took when entering office and in doing so disregarded the people they were responsible for by acting with their own self-interest in mind. By doing this, these civic officers had ruptured the City’s foundations and besmirched its principles. This awareness of civic duty and leadership suggests that the commonalty not only had an understanding of the responsibility of the civic officers but also held them to account for their misconduct; this was bad behaviour that needed to change.

The integral place of oaths within English, and European society more broadly, has been well documented and their vital role in urban administrations recognised.⁵⁸ Oaths

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

⁵⁶ *LBH*, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Barron, *Revolt in London 11th to 15th June 1381*, p. 14; Harry, *Constructing a Civic*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ For the legal value of oaths see J. G. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Richard Green Firth, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 92-99, 112-120; Gregory L. Laing, ‘Bound by Words: Oath-Taking and Oath-Breaking in Medieval Iceland and Anglo-Saxon England’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Western Michigan University, 2014). For the use of oaths in late medieval Europe see Jacoba van Leeuwen, ‘Municipal oaths, political virtues and the centralized state: the adaptation of oaths of office in fifteenth-century Flanders’, *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2005), 185-210. On the extensive use of oaths in urban administration see David Martin Jones, *Conscience and Allegiances in Seventeenth-Century England: The Political Significance of Oaths and Engagements* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1999); James Lee, ‘“Ye shall disturbe noe mans right”: oath-taking and oath-breaking in late medieval and early modern Bristol’, *Urban History*, No. 34, Vol. 1 (2007), 27-38. For examples of primary material that reflect the proliferation of oaths in late medieval urban administrations see Robert Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar* ed. L. Toulmin Smith (London: The Camden Society, 1872); *The Oath or Red Parchment Book of Colchester* ed. W. G. Benham (Colchester: “Essex County Standard” Office, 1907); *The Little Red Book of Bristol* ed. F. B. Blickley 2 Vols. (Bristol and London: W. Crofton Hemmons, Henry Sotheran & Co., 1900).

cemented ‘contractual practices and contractarian values’.⁵⁹ In an urban setting, taking an oath meant that town officers were expected “‘to do right to every person or persons, as well as to poor as to rich, having no reward of any manner of person’”; they promised to maintain good custom [and] avoid evil custom’; as urban leaders they were expected to maintain unity and concord.⁶⁰ On taking an oath, those who entered civic office formed a binding contract with the populace in which they promised to rule peaceably, fulfilling expectations incumbent upon them as civic governors.⁶¹ In essence, an oath was ‘a job description, which outlined [a civic officer’s] obligations and thus constituted an official mandate’.⁶² It was a command to do right by their people, acting with the common profit of the whole in mind rather than their own. As we learn from James Lee, ‘[o]aths of office ... represented a set of standards and values which it was expected the subscriber would uphold and adhere to’.⁶³ Oaths, therefore, were influential devices which assisted with maintaining order and gave civic officers the power in which to do this.⁶⁴ Oaths were ‘ideological statements about civic rule’ and this chapter shows how common profit rhetoric was inherently linked to the way in which good governance should be exercised within the oaths of the Jubilee Book.⁶⁵

Oaths were also political devices that vested in the individual the power to lead an efficient and morally sound city. They were a valuable political tool implemented by those in positions of power. Jacoba van Leeuwen’s study on municipal oaths in fifteenth-century Flanders and the influence of Burgundian state formation demonstrates this, arguing that Flemish rulers, like dukes, and town rulers utilised oaths to assert their authority and ‘bind

⁵⁹ Christian D. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship, 1250-1530* (Oxford: OUP, 2017), p. 118; Christian D. Liddy, ‘Political Contract in Late Medieval English Towns’ in *Avant le contrat social: Le Contrat politique dans L’Occident medieval XIIIe-XVe siècle* ed. F. Foronda (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011), pp. 397-416; Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Stephen H. Rigby and Elizabeth Ewan, ‘Government, power and authority 1300-1540’ in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* ed. D. M. Palliser (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 304; Lee, “‘Ye shall disturbe noe mans right’”, 29; Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 6.

⁶¹ Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, pp. 166, 184.

⁶² Lee, “‘Ye shall disturbe noe mans right’”, 28; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 113.

⁶³ Lee, ‘Ye shall disturbe noe mans right’, 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 32, 37.

⁶⁵ Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, p. 199.

the municipality to an established balance of power ... In short: whoever gained the most political influence left his mark on these solemn promises'.⁶⁶ J. Michel Gray has also viewed oaths as important tools in his study on their role in assisting with Henry VIII's Reformation. The emphasis he places, however, is slightly different. Rather than view them as tools of coercion, Gray views them as mechanisms that allowed for negotiation, going as far as to argue that '[o]aths were a primary language of the Henrician Reformation, an important medium through which the Henrician regime negotiated key aspects of its religious policy with the English populace'.⁶⁷ Oaths were able to unite the body politic during the Reformation 'not only because they communicated the Reformation but also because they constituted the Reformation'.⁶⁸ Ideas of political unity are certainly a significant factor when considering the utility and influence of oaths. In this chapter, however, rather than focus on how rulers, like dukes or a king, used oaths as political devices to unite their polity I explore how the oaths in the Jubilee Book were used as a political tool by the very people who took the oaths to bind themselves, as well as their colleagues and future generations of civic officers, to the common people and the city of London.

The Jubilee Book shared elements which were characteristic of written constitutions across medieval Europe, as the text 'materialized from an intense, fractious world of urban politics ... they aimed to forge a workable consensus of ideas and practices, where there was none'.⁶⁹ Similar to European written constitutions, it was a 'foundational [text]' constructed by a select group of men who sought to re-establish the duties of civic officers and made sure that their oaths encapsulated the contractual nature of the relationship between civic officer, the City and the common people that lived in London.⁷⁰ The Jubilee Book had two functions. It was designed to help work towards the common profit after an

⁶⁶ Leeuwen, 'Municipal oaths, political virtues and the centralised state', 200.

⁶⁷ J. Michael Gray, *Oaths and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), p. 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 170.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

intense period of political corruption and instability. Secondly, it was also about asserting the right of civic officers to rule by using language which legitimised their authority.

The idea that the wider community exerted power over their governors and institutions of government has been well-established for the early modern period; the Jubilee Book shows such ideas were also evident in late medieval London.⁷¹ Their duty of care was clear yet it is crucial to remember that urban officials were responsible for not only implementing justice and order but, also, for acting with the wellbeing of their people in mind and maintaining healthy relations with the Crown. The responsibility, virtue and dedication of civic leaders to their office was widely understood in the medieval world and was of particular importance, for example, to Andrew Horn, chamberlain of the city of London between 1320 and 1328, and it is reflected by the items he bequeathed to London's Guildhall in his will:

Item. I leave to London Guildhall's chamber a great book [*magnum librum*] of English acts, in which are contained many useful things [*utilia*], and another book concerning old English matters, together with a book called *Britton* and a book called the *Mirror of Justices* and a further book composed by Henry of Huntingdon. Item. One other book of English statutes with many liberties and other things touching the city.⁷²

Britton and the *Mirror of Justices*, especially, were texts that focused heavily on the liability of a range of officials in England.⁷³ Horn also had a deep interest in Brunetto

⁷¹ Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People*, p. 2.

⁷² Corporation of London Records Office (CLRO), Hustings Roll 57, #16 cited from Jeremy I. Catto, 'Andrew Horn: Law and History in Fourteenth-Century England' in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern* ed. R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill with R. J. A. I. Catto and M. H. Keen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 370–1. Also see Jeremy I. Catto, 'Horn, Andrew (c.1275–1328)', *ODNB*; John Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability in Medieval England* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 1; Barron, 'Political Culture of Medieval London', p. 122.

⁷³ Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, p. 1.

Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor*, a mid-thirteenth-century treatise concerned with the governance of Florence. Horn was one of many literate Londoners who not only had an interest in records relating to city governance but also kept these records and 'made collections of documents relevant to the city's liberties and governance and expressed their theories of good governance'.⁷⁴ In the *Liber Custumarum*, Horn adapted Latini's ideas on *podestà*, a city magistrate, in the third section of the *Tresor*, which focused on the art of rhetoric and politics, to suit the office of mayor. He began his copy of Book Three of the *Tresor* with the second chapter of the *Tresor* which examined 'rule and foundation', followed by the third chapter on 'who should be chosen to rule and govern'.⁷⁵ Whilst Horn modified Latini, his interest in the text, and need to copy parts of it, suggests an emergent position of how urban polities were understood across late medieval Europe and how ideologies could be adapted to suit a particular context.

Horn, writing in the wake of renewed interest in city governance following the 1319 'Magna Carta of the London commonalty', '[conceived] of the mayor as the sovereign head of the body politic'.⁷⁶ For Horn, the Mayor needed to possess the 'cardinal virtues – of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance', maintaining a moral compass in order to quash tyranny and preserve social harmony.⁷⁷ He stood as an emblem for the common profit. It is of no surprise then that Horn adapted Latini's passages from the *Tresor* for the purposes of understanding the Mayor's role as leading ruler in London. This is most pronounced in Horn's adaptation of Latini's *Sire to meire*, to fit the context in which he was writing. Horn wrote of the mayor: 'the mayor or governor is also, as it were,

⁷⁴ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, pp. 53, 55; Malcolm Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing in Late Medieval London* (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd, 2011), pp. 74-80; Barron, 'Political Culture of Medieval London', pp. 123, 125-126; *Chronicles of London* ed. C. L. Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), pp. vi-viii.

⁷⁵ Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, p. 2; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp. 122-123, 167-168; David Napolitano, 'Brunetto Latini's *Politica*: A Political Rewriting of Giovanni da Viterbo's *De Regimine Civitatum*', *Reti Medievali Rivista*, 19, 1 (2018), 2; Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, pp. 55-56; Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 136. For the way that Horn altered and adapted material to link it to London governance see Catto, 'Andrew Horn', pp. 388-91 and Coleman, 'Urban experiences', p. 307.

⁷⁶ Williams, *Medieval London*, p. 283; Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, p. 4; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 167.

the head of the citizens, and all persons desire to have a sound head by reason that when the head is afflicted all the members are made ill thereby'.⁷⁸ The metaphor of body politic was ardently employed by Horn who embedded 'the political ideas of a Florentine statesman ... into a practical civic book compiled in London' and 'helped mobilize the idea of an embodied city in the municipal lexicon of late-medieval England's most important metropolitan city'.⁷⁹

Horn's *Liber Custumarum* was potentially one of the City's texts which was consulted when formulating policy in the Jubilee Book. After all, the Jubilee Book affirmed that those behind its creation considered 'many goode articlez touchyng the principal gouernaunce of the saide Citee and the goode customes and auncient vsages of the same to be in dyuers grete bookes of the same Citee comprised'.⁸⁰ As we saw earlier, Horn was a great compiler of civic texts recording the City's traditions, customs and laws. It is thus likely, if the creators of the Jubilee Book utilised Horn's text in their reaffirmation of civic governance, that his understanding and awareness of what made a good ruler was utilised, and potentially adapted further, to suit the context in which these civic figures found themselves following the circumstances of the Good Parliament. The virtues that Horn considered vital for the Mayor of the City could have been made more widely applicable to the broader group of London civic officers, who, like the Mayor, were to act for the benefit of those for whom they were responsible. After all, the government of London was a 'civic bureaucracy', made up of several civil servants in addition to the annually elected position of sheriffs and mayor.⁸¹

Horn, however, seems to have been more concerned with the responsibility of civic officers rather than their accountability.⁸² Horn was writing within the context of the 1319

⁷⁸ *Liber Custumarum* ed. and trans. H. T. Riley, p. 518 as quoted in Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 136.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 137.

⁸⁰ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 133v.

⁸¹ The phrase 'civic bureaucracy' has been taken from Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 173. Between 1376 and 1394, the City had had annual elections for aldermen, yet according to John Carpenter the election of an alderman was for life. *Liber Albus*, p. 36; Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 24.

⁸² Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability*, pp. 4-5.

charter that was given to London yet by the time that the Jubilee Book was formulated, the constitutional concerns of London's citizens had shifted. It is also arguable that the wording of the 1319 charter was ambiguous and it thus failed as a written constitution.⁸³ In contrast, the rhetoric used by London's civic leaders, and the very fact that the text was written in English, deployed a clear message about the nature of good governance that could be widely understood. By 1376 London's Commonalty seems to have had a much firmer stance towards holding civic officers accountable for not following their duties and breaking their oaths. In working towards reform, the Jubilee Book addressed exactly this, conceptualising 'how the city should be governed, how to make the city's officers accountable and how to make city government accessible and intelligible to the citizens at large'.⁸⁴ As seen in the introduction to this thesis, all parts of a corporate body needed to work together to maintain the well being of all estates, thereby maintaining the common profit. Reworking and re-establishing the oaths that civic officers took on being elected, which determined their obligations to the London populace, worked as a mechanism which assisted civic leaders in appearing to uphold ideals of common profit. The aim became to stop 'divers Mayors and Aldermen' acting for their own advantage, discounting the common people and acting in contempt of their oath.

As will be seen throughout this chapter, the architects behind the Jubilee Book repeatedly utilised the term common profit and notions pertaining to this discourse to champion their cause, implement new civic standards and empower themselves. A consideration of the language and ideas entrenched in the civic oaths copied into the Jubilee Book is therefore needed. It is important to remember, however, that oaths were formulaic and that those within the Jubilee Book, like medieval and early modern civic oaths, would have been structured according to a particular formula. These facets have been outlined by Esther Liberman Cuenca who showed that oaths included 'the initial promise that the candidate would serve in a specific office', the responsibilities that were

⁸³ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp. 191-195.

⁸⁴ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'; Barron, 'Political Culture of Medieval London', p. 132.

expected, the behaviours necessary and ‘closing statements that invoked God, the saints of the Bible upon which they were sworn’.⁸⁵ These general characteristics help us to, in turn, identify the content particular to a specific oath. By considering these elements we can gain a good insight into how medieval political theory was implemented when establishing the duties of civic officers and applied to urban practices.⁸⁶

Few studies have focused on the language of oaths and this present work adds to this knowledge by analysing the language and rhetoric employed in the civic oaths copied into the Jubilee Book.⁸⁷ Taking an oath was a form of official communication, ‘a physical manifestation of the corporate mentality of towns, in which town officers were to see themselves not as individuals but as representatives of the popular will’, and it was important that this message was conveyed to those to whom the oath was being sworn.⁸⁸ In the case of the mayor, he took his oath twice – first on 28th October at the London Guildhall before the aldermen and ‘numerous commoners, and second on 29th October before the barons of the Exchequer’.⁸⁹ The latter date, in particular, was ‘probably the most important in the civic year when the whole city was *en fête*’ and during which the Mayor participated in the pageantry on his journey to Westminster.⁹⁰ The ideological element at play here is evident and the idea to present this in a public atmosphere made sure that the promise the Mayor was making was well known to a wider selection of people, particularly at the Guildhall where we know there was a large audience on the Mayor’s oath-taking day and also at the Exchequer where even the King may have been present.⁹¹

Whilst the authority of the civic officer taking the oath was made clear, oath-taking days were also a reminder of where this legitimisation of an officer’s power came from. As

⁸⁵ Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, pp. 173-174.

⁸⁶ Lee, ‘Ye shall disturbe noe mans right’, 27.

⁸⁷ Geoffrey Hughes, *Swearing: A Social History of Foul Language, Oaths and Profanity in English* (London: Penguin UK, 1998); John Spurr, ‘A profane history of early modern oaths’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 11 (2000), 37-63; Lee, ‘Ye shall disturbe noe mans right’, 27-38.

⁸⁸ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 113.

⁸⁹ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 151-52; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 113; *Liber Albus*, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁰ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 152.

⁹¹ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 114.

we learn from Liddy, '[a] large, popular audience was both expected and required to validate the claim to rule in the interests of the wider community'.⁹² Oaths essentially functioned as speech acts,

oral promises that [derived] their legitimacy from the ritual context in which they were pronounced. To be valid this formal utterance had to follow a traditional procedure, take place in appropriate circumstances, be made by and to appropriate people and had to be enunciated in a proper frame of mind.⁹³

In the case of the Mayor, this legitimacy stemmed from those present in both places where he took his oath. It was a legally binding act and one designed to convince audiences that this figure would act for the common good. The oath had a life that extended beyond the page, yet it is the written oaths themselves which, inevitably, will be the focus of the rest of this chapter.

Conceptualising 'comune profite' in the Jubilee Book

Promising to act with the common profit in mind and being seen to do so was a necessary part of being a good ruler in the Middle Ages. These themes loom large in the historiography of medieval kingship.⁹⁴ If kings acted 'solely according to [their] own will

⁹² Ibid, p. 114.

⁹³ van Leeuwen, 'Municipal oaths, political virtues and the centralized state', 189.

⁹⁴ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, repr. 1997); G.L. Harriss, 'Introduction: The exemplar of kingship' in *Henry V: The practice of kingship* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), pp. 1-29; John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); Simon Walker, 'Richard II's views on Kingship' in *Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England: Essays presented to Gerald Harriss* ed. G. L. Harriss, Rowena E. Archer, Simon Walker (London and Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1995), pp. 49-64; W. Mark Ormrod, *Edward III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); *Richard II: The Art of Kingship* ed. Anthony Goodman and James Gillespie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). For examples of studies that focus on or mention kingship in Europe see Anne E. Duggan ed., *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe* (London: Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, King's College London, 1993); Roger Mason, *Kingship and Commonwealth: Political Thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press Ltd., 1998); Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders', p. 91. For a study on the common good and kingship see R. H. Jones, *The Royal Policy of Richard II: Absolutism in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968).

and desire' they were considered a tyrant.⁹⁵ Rhetoric regarding the nature of kings ruling for their own self-interest has been well established by John Watts, while Nuttall has drawn upon the articles of Richard II's deposition in 1399 to make a sharp distinction between singular and common profit and the importance for rulers to act for the common profit in order to be considered a good king.⁹⁶ The deposition articles portrayed Richard II as a wilful and impulsive king, the epitome of unscrupulous kingship, whose reign was characterised by tyranny. Whilst the deposition articles were a Lancastrian creation that led the narrative against Richard II, they were structured to mirror the way that works of political theory, like Giles of Rome's *De Regimine Principum*, translated in the late fourteenth century by John Trevisa into Middle English, analysed the difference between a good king and a tyrant. The *De Regimine Principum*, for instance, stated that key to ascertaining the difference between a good king and a tyrant was the understanding that 'a kyng takeþ heede to þe comyne profite and a tyrand to his owne profit'.⁹⁷ In taking this stance, medieval writers, like Giles of Rome, followed the ideas of classical theorists, notably Aristotle.

The alliterative poem *Richard the Redeless*, composed shortly after Richard's deposition, engaged with the political discourse crafted by the Lancastrian regime and provides a similar contrast between the political downfalls of acting for one's own singular profit rather than the common profit of the realm. The poet's engagement with this dialogue can be viewed in Passus I, where the poet wrote of Richard's 'knavis' (*RR*, I. 199) that '[a]ll that they moued or mynged in that mater/ Was to be sure of hem-self and siris to

⁹⁵ Nuttall, *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship*, p. 11.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, pp. 16-19; Nuttall, *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship*, p. 11. For more on the articles of Richard II's deposition see Caroline M. Barron, 'The Deposition of Richard II' in *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England* ed. John Taylor and Wendy Childs (Gloucester: Alan Brunswick, 1990), pp. 132-149; Christopher Fletcher, 'Narrative and Political Strategies at the Deposition of Richard II', *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 30, Iss. 4 (2004), 323-341. For literature that responded to the 1399 deposition and exemplified the Lancastrian image of Richard II as a tyrant see *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*. Both of these works are found in *The Piers Plowman Tradition: A Critical Edition of Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, Richard the Redeless, Mum and the Sothsegger and The Crowned King* ed. Helen Barr (London: J. M. Dent Ltd., 1993).

⁹⁷ *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa's Middle English Translation of the De Regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus* ed. David C. Fowler, Charles F. Briggs and Paul G. Remley (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997) as quoted in Nuttall, *Creation of Lancastrian Kingship*, p. 11.

ben y-callid' (*RR*, I. 190-191). This passage evoked the notion that Richard's councillors counselled the King 'for singular rather than common profit', yet the poet continues and, significantly, placed accountability on Richard for allowing this to happen: '[b]ut had ye do duly and as a duke oughte, / The frist that you formed to that fals dede, He shulde haue hadde hongynge on hie the forckis' (*RR*, I. 193-195).⁹⁸ The King's 'knavis' may have been acting with their own self-interest in mind rather than that of the wider polity but it was Richard's duty to prevent this behaviour from those involved in governing the Kingdom. In contrast to a tyrant, therefore, a good ruler was defined by acting with the common interest of his subjects in mind and thwarting any misdeeds that compromised this. Understandings of good leadership and what a ruler should be, however, were not limited to discussions in Parliament or literary texts that engaged with broader political issues. As discussed below, we will see that this awareness of what constituted good rule in medieval society was to be found in late medieval urban administrative records.⁹⁹

The phrase 'comune profite' is used nine times and 'comune wele' twice in the Jubilee Book. Usage of these phrases demonstrates that consideration for the common profit of the City, as well as an awareness of how essential it was for civic officers to protect this, was a vital component of the oaths preserved in this custumal. Although their appointment ceremonies lacked the public dimension of the annual elections for major civic officers, like mayors and sheriffs, civil servants like the Recorder, the Chamberlain and Common Clerk, took oaths. The common profit and the wellbeing of the City was still very much central to their promise.¹⁰⁰

Like the deposition articles of 1399 and *Richard the Redeless*, the Jubilee Book made it clear that a way of meeting these requirements and fulfilling the needs of their

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 25.

⁹⁹ Hawes, 'Community and Public Authority in Later Fifteenth-Century Scotland'; Hawes, 'The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland: language, law and political practice', 365-80; Eberhard Isenmann, 'Norms and Values in the European City, 1300-1800' in *Resistance, Representation, and Community* ed. Peter Blickle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 190; van Leeuwen, 'Municipal oaths, political virtues and the centralized state', 196.

¹⁰⁰ See Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 174 for the Recorder, p. 177 for the Chamberlain, and p. 186 for the Common Clerk.

people was maintaining the common profit and not governing for their own self-interest.

We see this notion propagated, for example, in the description ‘of theym that bien chosen for þe comunen counsaile’. A vital condition for membership of the Common Council was that individuals elected were ‘for no fauour to mayntein any singular profite agenst þe profite of the Citee’.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in the explanation provided in the Jubilee Book of the ‘daies of the Comune counsaile’ it was made explicit that ‘thei [which included the Mayor, Aldermen and Sheriffs] shuln be sworn before the Comunes for than to be trewe without fraude or malengyne to say ther best advise havynge Regard to no syngulier profite their frendis but al vttrily for the comune profite’.¹⁰² The individuals assembled at these meetings were ‘chosen for the comune wele and nede of the Towne’.¹⁰³ The defence of ideals of common profit over singular profit appears to have been a core part of the Common Council’s aims according to this text. This meant discarding any intention to act for one’s own self-interest or sponsor the ambitions of their ‘frendis’ and, instead, emphasis was placed on the welfare of the City and the common profit. Repeating the difference between ‘singulier profite’ and ‘comune profite’ seems to have been used as a reminder for those joining the Council, as well as potentially reading the text, of what was acceptable as a member of this important civic establishment.

In addition to making a distinction between ‘singulier profite’ and ‘comune profite’, the passage continued and described that the Mayor summoned individuals to meetings of the Common Council who he believed would be most helpful on ‘suche matiere touchyng the comune profite or necessite of the City’.¹⁰⁴ There is a strong understanding in this extract that civic business revolved around matters of London’s ‘comune profite’ and other essential requirements needed by the City. It is clear that by linking matters pertaining to London governance to notions of common profit, a concerted effort was being made to structure civic duty around this particular ideology. It implies that

¹⁰¹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 134r.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 135r.

those constructing and revising this text were careful when choosing their wording, ensuring that it was evident that the City's, and its population's, well-being was at the centre of any discussions that took place.

Acting for the common profit was thus made to seem a crucial part of urban governance and the stark contrast between common profit and singular profit was a key element in the Jubilee Book for those entering civic office. The oath of the Sheriff's Sergeant is a prime example of this. The oath read that:

for your owne profite yee shuln nat tarie and thordynaunces to whiche the comune counsaile of the saide Citee bien accorded for the pees of our lord the kyng and for the comune profite of the people to youre connyng and power yee shuln mayntene and kepe.¹⁰⁵

The difference between acting for one's self-interest and for the common profit of the people is evident. In taking his oath, the Sheriff's Sergeant was entering a contract in which his actions were to be carried out in a way that would benefit a larger group of people other than himself. The importance of acting against his own self-interest is highlighted by his legal and judicial obligation to ensure that there were no delays in legal matters, specifically inquests. He was to abide by the ordinances that had been agreed upon by the Common Council which had been formulated in a way that would ensure the peace of the King. All this was designed to fulfil his obligation to the common profit of the people of London.

The suggestion, then, is that acting for the good of the whole as opposed to one's self was a primary goal in the Jubilee Book. This makes sense in light of what the Aldermen, Lyons, Pecche and Bury had done, alongside the complaint of the Commonalty that various past mayors and Aldermen had acted for their own advantage. The primary

¹⁰⁵ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 149r.

goal was to act for the community and be seen as doing so. Similar themes emerge to those evident in Hawes's study on the urban community in late medieval Scotland, acting for and defending communal interests was a powerful social construct from which civic leaders could control certain circumstances – in the context of this chapter, they controlled how their promise to the City and its inhabitants was conceptualised within these oaths by employing common profit ideology.¹⁰⁶ This concept was tied up in common profit rhetoric and in reconfiguring how governance and political culture was to be played out in London, these oaths emphasised the obligation to act for the wider political community for who they were responsible.

This was made clear in the duties of civic servants to the city of London. In the oath of the Chamberlain, for example, the chamberlain was sworn to 'serve the Citee of london' which required for him to 'susteyne and the profitez of the Citee in asmoche as ye can after Reason to encreste ne the damages of the saide City ye shuln nat suffre'.¹⁰⁷ The emphasis was that the Chamberlain had power to both promote 'the profitez' of the City and act against any misdemeanours of which he was aware – this implies a certain level of accountability. Similarly, the oath of the Common Sergeant of Law required that he was to 'serve the Citee of london' and to do so he was to 'yeve to althynges towychyng the comune profite of the same Citee'.¹⁰⁸ This vow to serve the City could only be accomplished effectively if the security and welfare – the 'comune profite' – of London was at the centre of all things that this individual was doing. This line of thought is further surmised in the Common Sergeant of Law's oath, in which the oath stated that 'yee shalbe Required bi the Comunes in al placis wher need shalbe triewly yee shal shewe and tel and entrestly pursue for the comune profite of the Citee so yow god help and al seyntis'.¹⁰⁹ Central to urban civil administration was the fact that common profit was at the centre of the body politic they were accountable for.

¹⁰⁶ Hawes, 'The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland', 380.

¹⁰⁷ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 140v.

¹⁰⁸ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Prioritising the common profit of London was also an essential part of the Common Clerk's oath, in which he swore to fulfil his duties by entering and enrolling 'al the plees of hustynge' but also to be 'obeisaunt to the maires juges and counsail of the Citee and goode counsail after your connyng and power in althynges touchyng the gouernaunce of the Citee and the comune profite of the people yee shul yeeve'.¹¹⁰ Loyalty and working relationships between individuals involved in London governance will be discussed later in this chapter but in this instance the network between the Common Clerk, the Mayor's judges and the Common Council provides an example of how the Common Clerk's skills, notably his erudition and knowledge of London governance, were an advantage for the City and for the common profit of the people of London. The 'comune profite' was given a prominent place in guaranteeing that the Common Clerk's duty to his colleagues and the common people was conducted properly.

The Sergeant of the Mayor and of the Chamber also worked collaboratively and were 'charged bi the maire Aldermen and Chamberlayn' to deal with the processes of the Mayor's Court.¹¹¹ Part of this involved 'the comune profite of the cite in asmoche as yee mayntene yee shuln avaunce'.¹¹² Common profit rhetoric here served to clarify that part of this figure's legal duties involved the wellbeing of the City. It also indicates a level of proactivity in this role, in that, as a legal officer, advancing the common profit was a feature of his position and one which he had entered an obligation to keep. These oaths did not only work to craft an image of civic officers working for the common profit but what we also view is that, simultaneously, common profit served to bolster the Council's position. We can likewise see this in the oath of London's Aldermen. In the Aldermen's oath, for example, they were bound to 'al thordynaunces in this booke [the Jubilee Book] in al their articles triewly' and informed that 'yee shul sustene ne to any ordynaunces or iugement contrarie to thiese yee shal nat assente without the comune counsail of the

¹¹⁰ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141v.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Citee'.¹¹³ Parallel to the previous example, collaboration and the formation of a network between themselves and the Common Council was a specific feature of the Aldermen's civic duties. This is especially seen in the agreement that Aldermen were to give 'goode and lawful and triewe counsail ... to the thynges touchyng the comune profite in the same Citee'.¹¹⁴ Aldermen were conscientious in the counsel they offered in their efforts to govern the City. Again we see that the term 'comune profite' was specifically used to show that by working with each other, civic officers could achieve the good of people they ruled over. Rhetoric used here thus reinforced this message that in order to ensure that the common profit was upheld to benefit the urban body, civic figures must define their actions, decisions and behaviour through the lens of common profit ideology – only then would the polity prosper.

From what we have left of the Jubilee Book, it seems that both the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs took the same oath, giving us a further insight into how civic obligation across oaths was defined by the notion of common profit. The oath describes various administrative duties, like accurately enrolling and ensuring that judgements were not delayed without reasonable grounds, demonstrating how effective administration was an integral part of how these civil servants carried out urban governance. The oath dictated that '[a]nd also the fraunchice of the saide Citee yee kepe and mayntene to your power and ye shuln be obedient to the maire and to the juges of the same Citee and the comune profite of þe people'.¹¹⁵ In this particular example, the authority of civil servants is understood through the prism of how they protect the special privileges and freedom of the City, which was endowed to the City following the accession of the King. This charter was a characteristic feature of medieval London, as well as other medieval English towns, and gave the City certain rights and privileges from the Crown, in particular the right to govern

¹¹³ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 143v.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 148v.

its own affairs.¹¹⁶ This particular oath went one step further in that ‘comune profite’ defined their obedience to the ‘comune people’. We thus begin to create an image in which common profit rhetoric was used to demarcate the behaviour of civil servants. Moreover, the ‘comune people’ here were used as a rhetorical construct to justify political actions. Hawes made a case for this in her analysis of the different types of terms used for communities in late medieval Scotland and we see a similar pattern at work here.¹¹⁷ As in late medieval Scotland, those in power used the idea of the ‘comune people’ to legitimate political decisions and courses of action. Furthermore, we see that ‘[c]ommon to almost every variety of contemporary thought by this time was a sense of the political community’.¹¹⁸ The Jubilee Book asserted notions that were widespread during the later Middle Ages, being ‘that people lived in groups under some kind of government’ and ‘that it was good for them to do so’.¹¹⁹ Appealing to notions of community was thus a powerful tool in medieval political life.

These examples are demonstrative of how common profit ideology was tied up in urban administration and social expectations of civic administrators, mirroring the efforts of the Commons in Parliament who were intent on quashing political corruption and malfeasance that had hindered the health of the Kingdom on a national scale. From my discussion of understandings of common profit in the Jubilee Book, similarities can be seen between the conduct of the Commons in parliament and those who created and revised the Jubilee Book – this text legitimised the standpoint of the reformers through a powerful rhetoric. During the Good Parliament, the Commons appropriated ideals of common profit that ‘perhaps [emphasized] the scope and ambition of the wider reform

¹¹⁶ For more on the needs and rights of the city see Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 30-42. The rights and privileges of the city of London have a long history, dating from the reign of William the Conqueror and can be referred to in *The Historical Charters and Constitutional Documents of the City of London* ed. W. de Gray Birch (London: Whiting & Co., Ltd., rev edn. 1887), p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Hawes, ‘Community and Public Authority in Later Fifteenth-Century Scotland’, pp. 9, 50-58.

¹¹⁸ Watts, *The Making of Politics*, p. 132.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

project they espoused'.¹²⁰ The writer of the *Anonimale Chronicle* certainly believed this to be the case, making repeated reference to the fact that the Commons acted for the 'profit of the kingdom'.¹²¹ For example, Sir Peter de la Mare agreed to act as Speaker for 'his worthy colleagues [the Commons] and for the profit of the kingdom'.¹²² The efforts of the Commons during the Good Parliament were to remedy the 'many faults and grievous points' so that 'the profit of [their] Lord the King and of the kingdom' could be 'put right'.¹²³ This is most apparent in de la Mare's plea to those that had 'been commended by [their] Lord the King' to act 'for the profit of the kingdom'.¹²⁴ Attempts to secure the profit of the Kingdom needed to be unanimous and agreed upon by a large body of people. The idea here was that each member present at parliament would play their part in the wider body politic to ensure that corruption came to an end and concepts of common profit – notably a healthy and stable kingdom – prospered. The notion of common profit may have been a discourse used predominantly by the English Crown but Ormrod has shown that the Good Parliament was a watershed moment for the use of this concept by the Commons. In comparison to parliaments held in 1371, 1372 and 1373, where common profit was only used once within a common petition, the term appears at least thirteen times in the parliament roll for 1376. This has led Ormrod to conclude that 'the Commons and their clerical assistants conspired in 1376, in a new and self-conscious manner, to adopt a language of power and persuasion that added considerable moral force to their remedies for the better governance of the kingdom'.¹²⁵

In the same way that the Commons sought to improve governance and remedy misconduct, the minds behind the Jubilee Book also '[adopted] a language of power and persuasion' with the aim to ensure good governance and to hold civic officers accountable for breaking their obligations to the City and its citizens. Yet this was a complex dynamic

¹²⁰ Ormrod, 'The Good Parliament of 1376', p. 179.

¹²¹ Ibid, pp. 179-180.

¹²² 'Appendix III: Translation of the *Anonimale Chronicle's* Account of the Good Parliament', p. 304.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 305.

¹²⁴ Ibid, pp. 312-313.

¹²⁵ Ormrod, 'The Good Parliament of 1376', pp. 180-181. I have quoted from p. 181.

– whilst used to denote ideas of concord and unity, this rhetoric, conversely, had the potential to ‘denote partisan politics, factionalism, and anarchy’.¹²⁶ Upholding the ‘comune profite’ was, therefore, a fundamental obligation for individuals taking office; protecting and acting for the polity was made to appear as one of their primary goals. The utility of ‘the language of common profit [to serve] a distinctive ideological function and [help] to celebrate and entrench the status of government at a time of social and political readjustment’ has been recognised by Harry but it is clear that this ideology had the ability to do this prior to *c.* 1400-*c.* 1450, the timespan of Harry’s study.¹²⁷ In these oaths, ideas of ‘comune profite’ formulated the relationship that civic officers were expected to have with the wider body politic and gave their duties a particular legitimacy through the promise that they were acting for the mutual benefit of all after an intense period of political corruption.

Defining civic responsibility: Establishing urban relations in the body politic

We have seen that oaths in the Jubilee Book defined the relationship of prominent and lesser civic officers to the City, detailing that they were bound by words to maintain and prioritise the common profit of London. These oaths made it clear that civic leaders were loyal to the City and were to serve in their promise to uphold the good governance of London. This is reinforced by the opening of four oaths stating that ‘yee shall serve the Citee of london’.¹²⁸ The oaths in the Jubilee Book engaged with the discourse of common profit in order to frame expectations and reinforce this sense that ensuring good

¹²⁶ Emily Steiner, ‘Commonalty and Literary Form in the 1370s and 1380s’, *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003), 199-221; W. Mark Ormrod, ‘Murmur, Clamour and Noise: Voicing Complaint and Remedy in Petitions to the English Crown, *c.* 1300-*c.* 1460’ in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* ed. W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 135-55; Ormrod, ‘The Good Parliament of 1376’, p. 181.

¹²⁷ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 8.

¹²⁸ I have quoted from the oath of the Common Sergeant of Law (TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r). The other oaths which use this phrase, albeit with some variation, include: the oath of the Common Sergeant of Arms (TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r), the oath of the Common Clerk (TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 141r-141v) and the oath of the Chamberlain (TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 140v).

governance was the prerogative of London's civic leaders. We see this in the Aldermen's oath, who were instructed that the promise they were taking meant that,

yee shuln entreate and enfourme the people of the same warde of þinges that appenden hem to do for the garde and kepyng of the Citee and for the pees in the Citee to mayntene And that the lawes and vsages and fraunchices of þe saide Citee yee kepe and mayntene withyn the Citee.¹²⁹

Their responsibility for the people of their ward is first outlined, with phrases like 'garde' and 'kepyng' highlighting their accountability in what happened in areas under their leadership and jurisdiction. Their responsibility, however, was not restricted locally and extended onto the rest of the city of London, with emphasis placed on their role in observing and upholding customs and traditions particular to the City as a means of keeping London in good condition. If the 'pees' was maintained the City could prosper and a harmonious, united atmosphere could be fostered.

Regulation of street behaviour, morality and cleanliness were also key themes included within these oaths as a way of maintaining the good of the City and were a vital concern in the 'Scavageours' oath and 'Bedils' oath.¹³⁰ 'The oth of Scavageours' asserted that the person taking this office,

shuln over see diligently the pavymentz withyn yow warde being wele and Rightwisly Repaired and nat enhaused to nuisance of neighburghs and that the Themymes streatis and lanes bien cleene of Rubons syne and of al maner of

¹²⁹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 143r.

¹³⁰ Barron defined the 'Scavageour' (scavenger) as a '[a] ward officer ... particularly responsible for the repair of pavements, fire precautions and street cleaning'. See Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 125. For more on the role of a scavenger (and the bedil, who will be discussed in due course) in the wardmote see TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 144v-145r. Also see the oath of scavengers in the *Liber Albus*, p. 272; *LBD*, pp. 10, 192.

ordure for the honeste of the Citee And that al Chemynes fourmeys Ovenes and herthes bien of stone and sufficient defensable agenst the peril of faiyre.¹³¹

The extract shows the concern with the idea of an urban built environment within London and how intrinsic this was to the repute of London. The ‘Scavageours’ oath touches on issues that Sarah Rees Jones has shown became an increasingly important feature of medieval English administrative records.¹³² Medieval political theorists have also made this connection, establishing that there were close links between effectively guarding a community and maintaining ‘places, streets, roads, and everything that belongs to a community’.¹³³ Significantly, the oath touched upon the direct link between neighbourhood quarrels and the well being of medieval cities which has been well established by Rees Jones who posited that ‘public nuisances were those which were an affront to the “common good” of a neighbourhood and affected the common spaces of the town’ or, in this instance, the city of London.¹³⁴ This had the potential to impact on social issues which were mentioned in the oath, such as the state and repairs of pavements and the cleanliness of streets.¹³⁵ This was an environment which reflected the society that inhabited these areas; cleanliness was an outward manifestation of community ideals. This is further explored in the Bedil’s oath which made specific mention of his care of duty for the ward:

wele and honestly yee shul kepe the warde of whiche ye bien Bedils and þat yee suffer noman Reve one Robbe nor of evel Covigne or felawsip ne hukstrie

¹³¹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 137v.

¹³² Sarah Rees Jones, ‘The Regulation of ‘Nuisance’: Civic Government and the Built Environment in the Medieval City’ in *Evolução de Paisagem Urbana Sociedade e Economia* ed. A. Sousa Melo and M. do Carmo Ribeiro (Braga, Portugal: CITCEM – Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar, 2012), p. 284.

¹³³ Brunetto Latini, ‘The Book of Treasure: Book III’ trans. Kate Forhan in *Medieval Political Theory – A Reader: The quest for the body politic, 1100-1400* ed. Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon Forhan (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 89.

¹³⁴ Rees Jones, ‘The Regulation of ‘Nuisance’’, pp. 285-286.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 286.

of Ale ne woman that holdith bordel hause or other woman comuneest
 launders if evil fame and nuysaunt of lif to dwell or abide on the same
 warde.¹³⁶

The Bedils oath was more concerned with controlling the morality, virtue and actions of the City's inhabitants as a way of upholding the City's status as a place of eminence and honourable conduct. Each ward was a 'basic unit of civic government' where the wardmote, by the thirteenth century, 'had become an integral and essential element in city government'.¹³⁷ Its prominence as a component of government has been particularly recognised by Barron, who deemed that '[i]n the medieval period it was the ward, its wardmote and aldermen that provided the essential substructure of city government'.¹³⁸ In following their oaths, 'Scavageours' and Bedils were responsible for the maintenance of the urban environment, key in maintaining the day-to-day functions of city life that had an effect on the well-being of Londoners – this was, in essence, a declaration of how civic government worked in practice.¹³⁹ The urban landscape was under their jurisdiction and it was up to these civil servants to maintain the moral and physical well-being of its inhabitants.

The oaths of the Common Sergeant of Law, the Common Sergeant of Arms and the Common Clerk further stressed obligations to the London polity. The overlap across these oaths in their initial promises, in which they swore themselves to serve the City, is noteworthy. Each was a verbatim copy of the other with the name of office changed accordingly. The oaths read that,

¹³⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 137v-138r.

¹³⁷ *Liber Albus*, pp. 32-35; Barron, *London the Later Middle Ages*, p. 121. Also see Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 69 for more on the ward as 'the traditional unit of local governance'.

¹³⁸ Barron, *London in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 122.

¹³⁹ For more on the urban environment, city cleaning and regulations in London see Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, ch. 10, pp. 237-266.

Ye shul swere that wele and triewly yee shal serve the Citee of london in thoffice of comune seriaunt and the lawes vsages and ffraunchisez of the saide Citee ye shal kepe and defende withyn the Citee.¹⁴⁰

The City's welfare and health occupied a significant place in the opening of these particular oaths, and there is certainly significant overlap with the promise made by Aldermen. As prominent officers in the machinery of civic government, the Common Sergeant of Law, Common Sergeant of Arms and Common Clerk were intrinsic to the City's affairs and were well versed in the smooth running of an urban environment. The emphatic use of terms such as 'kepe' and 'defende' denoted that these figures were liable for the preservation and protection of fundamental rights pertaining to the City, being its 'lawes', 'vsages' and, perhaps most importantly, 'fraunchices'.¹⁴¹ These oaths stressed that the type of relationship these particular civic officers were to have with the City was to be protectors of the City's legal procedures and precedents, established customs and long-held traditions and the rights of citizens to have special privileges in day-to-day practices like trade. As will be addressed in chapter four, knowing how the City was to be governed is what made the Jubilee Book so important as it was one of the sources that could be consulted on these matters. These are just some examples, among many, which demonstrated that protecting the interests of the City was a dominant theme throughout the Jubilee Book oaths; whether environmental, social, political or moral they ensured that civic officers properly carried out urban administration to achieve the common good of the City. The ideal city was thus imagined in the Jubilee Book as a place whose civic officers were steadfast in their duty to the City's peace and upkeep.

From these oaths the relationship maintained between civic officials and the wider urban community was clear, but it is possible to further define the urban relationships that civic officials held with other bodies who were a part of the City's political culture and

¹⁴⁰ All three oaths are found on TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r.

¹⁴¹ 'kepen (v.)', *MED*; 'defenden (v.)', *MED*.

environment. In this section we will see how, in the Jubilee Book, relationships between civic officers and the wider body politic were understood and reinforced. We learn early on in the Jubilee Book that those in civic office understood themselves as being ‘the Sages and Rightwis governours of the Comune people’, making it apparent not only that they were the rulers of all London’s inhabitants but that they had the necessary virtues expected of any type of ruler.¹⁴² This next section focuses on this relationship as well as that of London’s civic officers and the King. Significantly, in the Jubilee Book the way that the relationship between civic officers and those who they were meant to protect, the City’s inhabitants, avoids any distinction or drawing any sort of traditional lines between citizens and non-citizens of London.¹⁴³ As we saw, civic officers governed the ‘Comune people’, a body of unspecified individuals who made up the entire populace of London.¹⁴⁴ The way in which civic officers collaborated with each other will also be examined to understand hierarchy and loyalty within this group of civic officials.

The introduction to this thesis made it clear that the concept of common profit could be applied to a variety of contexts and, as we have seen so far, was used as a way for the oaths copied into the Jubilee Book to show that civic officers were to dedicate themselves to its amelioration and promotion following the need for civic reform. Common profit rhetoric extended beyond this and we can understand this ideology in the way that urban relationships were maintained. Common profit ideology, as expressed within the Jubilee Book, was inclusive in the sense that as an idea it encapsulated all parts of a body politic, itself a common metaphor for political societies. This understanding of how society functioned was implemented in the construction of the oaths under review.

¹⁴² TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 133r.

¹⁴³ For more on the traditional divides between citizens and non-citizens in the city of London see Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁴ In late fourteenth-century London only a third of London’s adult population of males had citizenship in the City. By not specifically using the Middle English term ‘citisein’ to denote a freeman of the city of London, the Jubilee Book included the two thirds of London’s adult population that did not have citizenship, as well as women who inhabited the City. For this statistic see Barron, *Revolt in London 11th to 15th June 1381*, p. 12; ‘citisein (n.)’, *MED*.

In the opening to the Jubilee Book, we get an initial impression of how the revisers of the Jubilee Book thought about and expected the relationship between civic officers and the people of London to function. It explained that ‘the comune people be treftable and of oon accord and by deservyng loven they their gouernours and soueraignes’.¹⁴⁵ The crux of the passage, however, is to highlight the reciprocal relationship between rulers and ruled in medieval London. Whilst there may be a sense of social hierarchy in this passage, the message here was that different members of the body politic needed to work in conjunction in order for stability and unity to be possible within the City. There was a level of interdependence between rulers and ruled that rested on ‘the three pillars of urban governance ... justice, reverence and love’.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps, in this extract, love between these members of the body politic was the most important. We may even want to describe this as ‘a bond of affection’, a phrase used by Liddy to indicate ‘the basis of the commonality of interest and unity of purpose that were supposed to exist within the urban political community’.¹⁴⁷ The ‘comune people’ were to be united and receptive to rational and reasonable argument. It is also important to note that ‘comune people’ here did not denote any particular hierarchy or estate but was used in a way that was all encompassing; it referred to the general population, those who had access to the franchise of London and an ‘unenfranchised majority’.¹⁴⁸

This reciprocity is further imagined in the ‘oth of theyn that shalbe put in free plegge’. Those ‘put in free plegge’ were required to ‘swere that yee be triewe and fiethful to the kyng of Ingland and to his heires kynges and the pees of the kyng yee shuln kepe

¹⁴⁵ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 133r.

¹⁴⁶ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, pp. 136, 141. I have quoted from p. 141. Lilley has shown how city governance relied on these three pillars in order for mutual bonds between rulers and ruled to work properly. He makes the interesting point that this understanding of how a body politic worked was present in medieval political treatises, particularly Aquinas’s work and, perhaps more significantly in the context of this present discussion, Latini whose work we know influenced Horn’s earlier texts on the governance of London and which, I speculate, compilers of the Jubilee Book were familiar with.

¹⁴⁷ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁸ From Cuenca we learn that ‘[o]aths for office-holders made them responsible for an unenfranchised majority, whose labor, legal activities, and social mobility such administrators controlled, fined, and governed according to law and custom’. They were as much a part of the polity as those who had access to the City’s liberties. See Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, p. 193.

and to ministres of the Citee of london obeye'.¹⁴⁹ The need to cooperate, aid and work unanimously with 'ministre of the Citee of london' held as much importance as keeping the King's peace. Whilst the governors of London were subordinate in power to the King, here we see that loyalty to both carried the same weighting. The term 'obeye' especially denotes a sense that those entering 'free plegge' were obliged to assist their rulers, the implication being that this is what would benefit civic governance. This is reinforced by the following section of the oath, which stated that,

yee shuln be Redy at altymes to help the saide ministres at the warnyng of the Conestables and Bedils to make wacche and other charges for the sauf garde of the saide pees aswel in Deynsyns as in straungiers and al the pointes in this wardemote to shewe after yowre power wele and truly to hold And if yee know any evil covyne or felawship withyn the ware or in the Citee yee shal discover hem to your Alderman and do hym to wite and in alother yee shuln do and saye as goode and true men yow bere so god so yow help and al seyntis.¹⁵⁰

The loyalty expected of those taking this pledge to civic officers was characterised by honesty and the will to assist civic leaders if the peace of the City was under threat. The use of the term 'covyne', and the emphasis placed on this misdemeanour, is especially interesting given that in the later 1380s, there was a concerted effort by Brembre to inform Londoners that if they knew of any 'covins' they were to immediately report it. We will explore this in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Binding those entering 'free plegge' through oath was both an administrative tool and way to ensure law and justice operated effectively. The oath imagined the ideal citizen, one who was immediately ready to report any type of misdoing, warning their Constable and Bedil within their respective ward, as well as the Alderman who was in charge of this area. In a sense, they were as responsible

¹⁴⁹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 144v.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

for protecting the ward in which they lived, their own micro body politic, as civic officers who were assigned to protecting the interests of these inhabitants. The same sense of reciprocity between these bodies is present here as in the opening to the Jubilee Book. Members of the London community, whether in a single ward or across the twenty-five of the whole city, were to be easily and well led by their ‘gouernours and soueraignes’ and, in return for this, would ‘loven’ their leaders. In order to earn this love, this required for the ‘gouernours’ of the ‘comune people’ to respect and treat them equally.

The requirement to do so appeared in several of these oaths. With the constitutional changes implemented in London following the Good Parliament to achieve the common good of the City it is no wonder that phrases such as ‘[a]nd that yee do Right to eueriche aswel to straungiers as to Denisyns pore as to Riche in asmoche as appendith on yow to do’ or ‘[a]nd that yee do Right aswel to poore as to Riche without any extorsioun doing to any persone bi colour of your office’ appeared in several of these oaths.¹⁵¹ The requirement to adhere by this promise, albeit with some variations and alterations, was integrated into seven of these oaths, including the Mayor’s oath, the oath of the sergeants of the Mayor and of the Chamber, the Recorder’s oath, the Aldermen’s oath, the Sheriff’s oath, the oath of the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs and the oath of the Sheriff’s Sergeant.¹⁵² In the same way that the term ‘comune people’ did not evoke any sense of wealth, status or grading, the phrases ‘eueriche’, ‘pore as to Riche’ and ‘straungiers as to Denisyns’ conjured a sense of inclusivity and totality. The implementation of these ideas, ‘helped imagine a cohesive community’ that was ‘ultimately equitable to all’.¹⁵³ Medieval society may have been socially stratified and incredibly hierarchical, but we see that in this instance the phrasing of these oaths suggested that governors would do their job and

¹⁵¹ I have quoted from the Mayor’s oath (TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 136v) and the Sheriff’s oath (TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 147v) as examples.

¹⁵² TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 136v (the oath of the Mayor); TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141v (the oath of the sergeants of the Mayor and Chamber), TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 142r-142v (the oath of the Recorder), TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 143r-143v (the oath of the Aldermen), TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 147r-147v (the oath of the Sheriffs), TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 148r-148v (the oath of the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs), MS O 3 11, fol. 149r (the oath of the Sheriff’s Sergeant).

¹⁵³ Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, p. 196.

dispense justice equitably. The point of these oaths was to show that civic officers had an equal duty to everyone, especially needed after a period in which some of the wealthiest aldermen/merchants in London had served their own interests. Moreover, the phrase ‘straungiers to Denisyns’ is particularly striking, including non-Londoners and is indicative of the extent to which traders from outside of London were seen as vital to trade in the capital city.

Rhetoric employed across these oaths demonstrates an awareness of the need to work for all types of peoples within an urban community. This was exactly the concern which, as we saw earlier, had motivated those who had complained through Ralph Strode. In late medieval London, the figures who ruled the City may, at times, have been ‘separated from those they ruled by virtue of their office, status and wealth ... yet – in theory – [were] obliged to serve all citizens’ and this is certainly the case in the oaths discussed.¹⁵⁴ Rigby argued that ‘medieval townsmen viewed their rulers with an uneasy mixture of suspicion and deference and they could, on occasion, perceive their rulers as oligarchs’ but this clearly did not stop London’s civic elite formulating an image for themselves that was the opposite of this.¹⁵⁵ The minds behind the Jubilee Book fashioned an identity for leading civic officers and lesser civil servants as individuals who were dedicated to uphold official duties and legal structures for all types of persons within London.

The revisers of the Jubilee Book thus cast individuals entering office as part of a responsible urban elite that looked out for the interest of the majority. The same idea can be deduced from the rapport construed in these oaths between civic officers and their king, where it was clear that civic officers were to serve the King to allow for proper governance

¹⁵⁴ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁵ Rigby, “Urban “Oligarchy””, p. 67.

and well-being of the City to thrive.¹⁵⁶ The opening of the Mayor's oath is an excellent example of this, detailing that the Mayor,

shal serve our lord the kyng in thoffice of mairaltee in the Citee of london and the same Citee kept sauf and sure to chuse of the kyng of jngland and of his heires of jngland and the profite of the kyng fresh in althynges that to yow appendith ye shuln do.¹⁵⁷

The Mayor may have been considered 'with yn London ... next unto the kyng in alle maner thynges', but he was still the King's subject and was to be loyal, as well as subservient, to him.¹⁵⁸ This oath stresses this fact; it was made specific that it was in the office of mayoralty within the city of London that the Mayor was to perform his duties for his monarch. There was also an overt focus on the City's safety and security, as would be agreeable to the King and his progeny. Such references to monarchs or office show that keeping the common profit was something significant and was not to be forgotten with a change in mayor or king. The indication is that if, on taking his oath, the Mayor were to observe these guidelines and serve the City in a manner that was agreeable to the current king and his heirs, then good governance would ensue. Moreover, the profit of the King was a key element of the Mayor's duty and mirrored the concerns, as well as phraseology, we see implemented in the parliament rolls.¹⁵⁹ Safeguarding the King's profit was also to be continuous, with the term 'fresh' suggesting that it was something considered to be 'of recent making or occurrence'.¹⁶⁰ In this instance, it was clear that the individual profit of

¹⁵⁶ Swearing allegiance to the King was universal in medieval English civic oaths. For an example from Bristol see Lee, 'Ye shal disturbe noe mans right', 29.

¹⁵⁷ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 136v.

¹⁵⁸ *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century* ed. James Gairdner (London: Camden Society, 1867), p. 222; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁹ See Ormrod, "'Common Profit' and 'Profit of King and Kingdom'", 219-252.

¹⁶⁰ 'fresh (adj.)', *MED*.

the King was distinct from that of the common profit, yet the Mayor was still held accountable over it.¹⁶¹

The Mayor's oath also set out the King's rights and Crown's wishes. The oath delineated that 'the kynges Rightis in eueriche that to the Corowne appendip in the saide Citee triewly ye shal kepe'.¹⁶² The oath also determined how the Mayor should ensure these were kept and he was to,

nat assente to distress ne to concele or huyde the kynges Rightis and fraunchises And bi ther wher ye know the kynges right be withdraw ye shul put yow in peyne to Repelle and if ye may nat do it ye shul do telle it vnto the kyng or to theym that bien of his counsail of whan ye bien in veray certeynte that thei wil telle it vnto the kyng.¹⁶³

The Mayor was an active participant in protecting the interests of the Crown and, just as importantly, what the Crown saw as befitting the city of London. The entire passage revolved around what benefitted the sovereign, giving the Mayor an alternative where he was unable to resolve issues himself. There is also a great awareness of holding the Mayor accountable for being unable to carry out his duty with efficacy, holding out the threat of some sort of punishment or penalty for this disobedience. The oath also reveals a wider consciousness on the importance of receiving good counsel, key for any successful king.¹⁶⁴ Not only could the Mayor inform the King of any larger issues but was also responsible for communicating with those who formed part of his council. Moreover, there is also an interesting note of potential distrust of royal councillors and of the concealment of information from the King. The Mayor was held to account if this very travesty occurred.

¹⁶¹ 'ap(p)enden (v.)', *MED*.

¹⁶² TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 136v.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁴ For the importance of virtuous counsel see Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, pp. 1-12.

This connection between sovereign and civil servants was voiced across a number of oaths within the Jubilee Book, and there is overlap in the wording used and themes integrated into these materials. For example, in the Recorder's oath, the oath of the Aldermen and the Sheriff's oath, we see the same promise echoing the Mayor's oath in that they swore they would serve the King and his heirs.¹⁶⁵ Even the Sergeant's Yeoman's oath, an oath for a lesser civil servant, commenced with a statement of allegiance to the King.¹⁶⁶ Other oaths, the oath of the Constables for example, expressed the duty of civic servants to maintain a harmonious society that the King could benefit from. The Constables, for example, were bound to 'swer that ye shul kepe the pees of ours lord the kyng wele and triewly after yowre power and ye shuln arrest altho that maken conteck Riot and debate or affray in brekyng of þe kynges pees'.¹⁶⁷ In order to keep the King's peace, which, by extension, guaranteed the peace of the City, Constables were to arrest any individual involved in causing dissension, riot, quarrels or uproar. The city of London may not have been directly mentioned in this oath but the insinuation is clear.

The oath of the Sheriffs' Sergeant parallels that of the Constables in that the Sheriff's Sergeant was equally responsible for the King's peace. This individual vowed to 'nat tarie and thordynaunces to whiche the comune counsaile of the saide Citee bien accorded for the pees of our lord the kyng and the comune profite of the people to youre connyng and power yee shuln mayntene and kepe'.¹⁶⁸ This example demonstrated the existence of a causal link between the King's peace and the common profit; the King's peace was necessary for the common profit to thrive – one facilitated the other. Having these two statements alongside each other was indicative of the prominence of both of these concerns within the London polity and wider political culture, both being necessary if stability in the

¹⁶⁵ TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 142r-142v, 143r. The Aldermen's oath excluded any mention of the King's heirs and simply swore allegiance to the King.

¹⁶⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 149r-149v. I have assumed that the Sergeant's Yeoman is a lesser civil servant based on Barron's choice of prominent civil servants that she chose to include in her study *London in the Later Middle Ages*. The Sergeant's Yeoman is not included in her analysis on members of the civic bureaucracy and has contributed to my conclusion.

¹⁶⁷ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 137v.

¹⁶⁸ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 149r.

City were to flourish and endure. The duty that the Sheriffs' Sergeant owed his king is further defined by his promise that 'due and diligent execucioun of whatsumever ye shuln be charged bi the soueraignes of the Citee trieuly and without delay ye shuln perfourme'.¹⁶⁹ The bond entered into between the Sheriffs' Sergeant and the sovereign was clear-cut; the sovereign, as head of society, was to be obeyed.¹⁷⁰

The fact that the Sheriffs' Sergeant's conduct was described as being done carefully and diligently, as well as honestly and without any delay, suggests that as a member of a wider system of city governance, he was liable if governance did not proceed or function in the way it should. He was one member in a body of civic governance that was part of a much larger body of people who assisted the King politically. Keeping the King's peace was a chief principle for civic office holders and we see that the oaths preserved in the Jubilee Book, like other civic oaths in medieval England, provide an insight into how this was done.¹⁷¹ Civic figures were the hands to the head of the King.¹⁷² The content of the oaths suggest that those compiling the Jubilee Book actively engaged with general ideas on how political communities worked, having an in depth awareness of the relationship that needed to be upheld with their sovereign and just how important this was as a means of keeping the city of London safe in their hands.¹⁷³ Keeping the rights and liberties of the City in their hands was key and perhaps this offering to protect the royal rights of the King was part of a *quid pro quo*.

From Lilley we learn that Bristol's council acted 'for the perceived benefit of the whole urban community and also reigning monarch', yet in the oaths within the Jubilee Book this civility extended onto the wider body of civic officers who interacted with each

¹⁶⁹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 149r.

¹⁷⁰ Black, *Political Thought in Europe*, p. 15.

¹⁷¹ Lee, "Ye shal disturbe noe mans right", 29. Lee, however, argues that '[c]ivic oaths often began by charging the supplicant to swear allegiance to the monarch'. This is not always the case and several oaths in the Jubilee Book, instead, open up swearing allegiance to the city of London.

¹⁷² This analogy is explained in Black, *Political Thought in Europe*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷³ We see that in 1392 these fears were realized when Richard II removed the City's liberties. See Caroline M. Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II with London 1392-7' in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack* ed. F. R. H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London: Athlone Press, 1971), pp. 173-201.

other.¹⁷⁴ This is explored in more detail in the examples that follow. Civic officers had a key place within the urban community yet, as a group, they too were a body of individuals, a civic body in which each ‘limb’ had to play their respective part. The body metaphor can thus be applied to understanding how members of a civic institution needed to fulfil their duty in order for good governance and the common good to flourish. Furthermore, in order to effectively work in unison and achieve civic harmony we will also see the necessity of sharing common knowledge and the importance of communication in the creation of a civic community that was capable of ensuring obedience and asserting control. As Hawes expounded in her discussion of common knowledge and the public domain in late medieval Scotland, common knowledge was central ‘to the functioning of politics’ and we will see that the same was very much the case in late medieval London.¹⁷⁵ This was certainly an idea shared by medieval political theorists, with recognition from Brunetto Latini that when a ruler entered office, it was crucial that he ask for the counsel of those around him in order to rule a city well.¹⁷⁶ Counsel was given in secret, yet in sharing common knowledge amongst themselves, those who governed the City allowed for proper governance to ensue.

Emphasis within the oaths was usually placed on the loyalty owed to the Mayor. Given the Mayor’s position as head of this body politic and the status given to him in London urban texts like Horn’s *Liber Custumarum*, this is unsurprising. The Sheriff’s oath is a good example of this and from it we learnt that the Sheriff was to ‘be obeisaunt vnto the maire’, ‘at Resonable comaundement of the maire yet shuln be obedient’ and ‘that yee shalbe Redy at Resonable warning of the maire for the pees and estate of the Citee to be kept and mayntened’.¹⁷⁷ There was certainly an established hierarchy between ranks of civic officers and there was no question here about who was acquiescent to whom.

¹⁷⁴ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 134.

¹⁷⁵ Hawes, ‘Community and Public Authority in Later Fifteenth-Century Scotland’, pp. 17, 23.

¹⁷⁶ Latini, ‘The Book of Treasure: Book III’, p. 85.

¹⁷⁷ TCC, MS O 3 11, fols.147r-147v. The characteristics and personal attributes endowed to civic officers will be delved into deeper in the last section of this chapter, see pp. 104-112.

Moreover, the oath made the link between complying with the Mayor's demands and the peace and condition, whether physical, moral or spiritual, of the city of London. In this particular example, there appears to be an inherent consciousness that in order for the Mayor to successfully manage the state of the City, and as a result of this the common good in the body politic, civic officers must work in union with him. Acquiescing to his instructions as a leading figure and maintaining the vow made when taking their oath, thus ensured the common profit and the efficacious administration of the London polity.

Commitment to the Mayor was also usually addressed alongside other civic or legal figures. In the oath of the Sheriffs' Sergeants, for example, we see that in the initial promise taken in the oath that it was requisite for them to be 'obedient ... to the maire and to the juges of the same Citee and their honour on asmoche as in yow is'.¹⁷⁸ There is some overlap with the oath of the Sergeant's Yeomen, where similar phrasing was utilised in the initial vow taken but rather than be compliant to 'juges', as well as the Mayor, this lesser civil servant was, instead, tractable to the 'soueraignes of the Citee'.¹⁷⁹ The choice of language is telling and extended the Sergeant Yeoman's duty beyond civic rule – his conduct and promise to the King was of national importance. The initial promise made in the oath of Sergeants of the Mayor and of the Chamber, gave a similar indication of the need to work with other civic officers. In taking the oath, this particular individual swore that he would 'behave yow in youre office and due execucion do whereof yee shuln be charged bi the maire Aldermen and Chamberlayn'.¹⁸⁰ Loyalty in a civic context was understood as being part of a chain of command, terminating, ultimately, with the monarch. It emphasises that urban governance was characterised by the joint efforts of networks of civic officials and had a significant effect on how the common profit and welfare of the City could be administered.

¹⁷⁸ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 149r.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141v.

The Bedil's oath is a further example of this. The oath stated that 'the same warde that yee anon shewe then of suche to the Alderman to that ende that he do put hem out withyn xv daies'.¹⁸¹ In dealing with political, economic and moral issues, like disputes, peddlers or women running public brothels, the Bedil collaborated with the ward's Alderman to eliminate any problems. The Bedil, however, had other specific civic figures to whom he was to report for particular nuisances and with whom he was to work alongside to suppress any form of deviance in London. For example, if an incident in which 'any make affray or draw sword or knyfe or other armure yee to maken it knowen to the Chambrelayn to the Citee or to the Shereves so that they moven levie bi their seriauntis of suche mysdoers'.¹⁸² Additionally, we see how common knowledge was a vital part of this network between civic officers. By passing on information, the Bedil was able to make those in higher positions of power than himself aware of any forms of deviancy that they had the necessary authority to deal with.

Furthermore, in dealing with matters relating to the Husting the Bedil operated within a system that was formed of the Sheriffs, Coroner and Aldermen. His oath demonstrated that,

yee shul Retourne in to the hustynges and bifore Shereves and Coronours goode men and triewe vpon enquestes and nat men suspect of mayntenaunce or parties And the Retourn that yee make ye shuln shewe to youre Aldermen ij or iij bifore the hustyng that he may over see if yowre Returne be sufficient or nat.¹⁸³

The Bedil's duties also consisted of controlling victuals, like 'pultrie' and 'other small vitailles [such as] cornes ... graynes ... brede', and he was to notify the Mayor and Sheriffs

¹⁸¹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 138r.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

if laws regarding the selling of this produce, specifically if these items were sold in ‘hadlas’, was breached.¹⁸⁴ Working as part of a larger network was clearly important in ensuring effective governance.

Even the City’s more prominent civic officers formed parts of networks, which ensured the proper and effective control of urban protocols. The City’s Recorder, for example, had a wide variety of duties, ranging from, but not limited to, recording and enrolling pleas from the Husting court to distributing justice fairly regardless of wealth, caring for orphans and keeping secrets belonging to the City. He was a key participant in court meetings.¹⁸⁵ This was reflected in the oath for the Recorder written within the Jubilee Book, which outlined these exact responsibilities ‘[a]nd that al þe plees that bifore yow shalbe pleated triewly ye shal Recorde and your diligence sette and oversee that the said plees bien wele and triewly enrolled ne no Right distroubled And that no iugement ye ne tarie without Resonable encheason’.¹⁸⁶ The Recorder was also made to swear that ‘if ye know the Rightes of the profites of the Citee as in londis tenementis Rentis forprised wit drawen conceled or hid yee shul shere to the maire and Aldermen for the Rightes of the same Citee to save’.¹⁸⁷ If any of the revenue from these properties were withdrawn, kept in secret or hidden, this information needed to be shared, by the Recorder, with the Mayor and Aldermen in order to monitor income. We see that this ensured that the people who needed specific knowledge were supplied with it in order to carry out their jobs effectively. It was not surprising that such information was passed on to the Mayor and Aldermen who ‘bore the ultimate authority for ensuring that civic regulations were observed, that transgressors mended their ways, and that the common good was promoted’.¹⁸⁸

The Recorder’s oath continued in its reliance on the necessity of collaborating with other civic leaders to maintain order and stability in the city of London. The Recorder

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 174-175.

¹⁸⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 142v.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 266.

would have promised to '[r]edily come at the warnyng of the maire or Shereves or of their ministers for goode and holsum counsail hem to yeve for the state of the Citee to kepe and maynten'.¹⁸⁹ Yet again, the partnership we have seen amongst established civic figures was defined through the care and welfare of the City. The term 'state', especially, potentially denoted not only the physical wellbeing and condition of the City but also the moral or spiritual condition of the City.¹⁹⁰ Other well-established civic officers formed parts of a larger body made up by several high-ranking civic officers in order to promote the wellbeing of London. The Common Clerk, for example, was not to enrol any material in the Husting Court 'without thassent of the maire and Recordour' and was expected to be 'obeisaunt to the maires juges and counsail of the Citee ... in althynges touchyng the gouernaunce of the Citee'.¹⁹¹ This reveals an awareness of how to run a city and what was necessary from civic officers in order to do so. Moreover, the hierarchical dynamic between civic officers was also made abundantly clear, particularly in the chains created in the way that knowledge was passed onto those, specifically the 'maires juges and counsail of the Citee', who had the authority to act upon this information and enforce order.

Even lesser civil officers had networks amongst themselves as a means of achieving order and stability in the body politic. The Constable's oath demonstrated the Constable was not only required to work with 'the Shereves' but also needed to 'serche at altymes whan yee shuln be Required of Scavageours or of Bedils the commons nat being of þe Warde'.¹⁹² Whilst the 'defautes' the Constable ultimately found were referred to 'the maire and to the ministers of the Citee', the point here is that civil servants, like the 'Scavageour' and 'Bedil' were essential components of the proper governance of individual wards. Amongst themselves they had a contractual bond that was defined by their duties to the ward of which they were in charge. Thus in the same way that high-

¹⁸⁹ TCC, MS O 3 11 fol. 142v.

¹⁹⁰ 'stat (n.)', *MED*. For a discussion on imagining the medieval city as a divinely ordained space that was mapped on to medieval Christian values, particularly an understanding of a medieval city as a city of God, see Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, esp. pp. 15-40.

¹⁹¹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141v.

¹⁹² TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 137v.

ranking civic officers worked in networks to achieve the good governance of the whole city of London, these lesser officers fostered their own networks within the wards, which we may want to think about as a microcosmic version of London, to retain the proper governance, and as a result the common profit, of these smaller areas.

A similar argument can be made for the oath of the Under Sheriffs and of the Clerks of the Sheriffs. Their initial promise stated that ‘ye shuln swere that weel and triewly yee shuln serve your maisters that bien chosen Shereves of london and middilsex for the yeere to come’.¹⁹³ It was only further within their oath that these figures were made to vow that they would obey the Mayor and ‘juges’ in the city of London yet like the Constables, the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs were not immediately defined by their relationship to the Mayor but rather their own personal masters, the two sheriffs that were annually elected for both London and Middlesex. They too, as lesser civil servants, formed networks of layered delegated authority which stemmed from the Mayor.

Underpinning these oaths was the possible intention of those who formulated, and later revised the Jubilee Book, to present the institution of government and its members as united in their endeavours to maintain the values of and concord in the City. What we have in these oaths is a structure that shows how urban administrators were part of a wider body politic and needed to fulfil their duties to these other parts in order for proper governance to flourish. They were part of the metaphor which the poem *Descryuing of Mannes Membres* used to conceptualise social structures in late medieval England.¹⁹⁴ Not only do we get an insight into the type of relationship to be maintained between the urban community and the King but, also, the networks created between both prominent and lesser civic officers that were necessary to maintain between themselves. Good governance was achieved through the effective management of justice and proper collaboration between civil servants as much as it was maintained through upholding the traditional relationship between civic officials with the King and the wider body politic. Moreover, oaths in the

¹⁹³ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 148r.

¹⁹⁴ See ‘Introduction’, pp. 22-25.

Jubilee Book seemed to conflate common profit with obedience to the Council and higher-ranking civic officers from lesser civil servants. On taking their oaths, lesser civil servants were thus not just entering a contractual bond with the ‘comune people’ but also with their superiors. In a sense, then, obedience and loyalty from these lesser civil servants essentially facilitated this reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, the emphasis placed in these oaths in controlling access to information implies that information was passed on to enforce obedience. These oaths may have been coloured with bucolic altruism but it is exactly this system of control and the way that it was operated through the transmission of common knowledge that we will see later on in this thesis to have been abused. The common foci for these individuals, then, was to create a polity in which civic officers were at the centre of a system of government that benefitted all constituent parts in the City, thereby maintaining the common profit of all those whose interests they were supposed to safeguard.

Office Holding and Civic Obedience

The responsibility of civic officers, therefore, was to work in conjunction with all members of the body politic in order to maintain obedience and authority. Nevertheless, Giles of Rome argued in the *De Regimine Principum*, ‘a political community ought not simply to function, but to function according to virtue’.¹⁹⁵ As we saw earlier, people had certain expectations of their rulers and virtue was one of them, particularly when it came to kings. An ideal king was to ‘shyne en vertve above [their] svbgetes’ in contrast to ‘a vycyovs prynce’ who was understood to be ‘a plage mortall’ (47).¹⁹⁶ A good king’s life was ‘establyd en vertve’ (50) and ‘shalbe example to all hes region, / hes lyfe, hes maners, and vertve to ensve’ (51-52). These verses come from the undated poem *Advice to the Several Estates II*, which advised that a worthy ruler was a paragon of virtue and was to be

¹⁹⁵ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 5; Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought*, pp. 138-139.

¹⁹⁶ All quotes are cited from ‘Advice to the Several Estates, II’ in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* ed. R. H. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

openly seen as so. The poem crafted an exemplar of medieval kingship, providing a contrast between what a virtuous and unethical ruler was understood to be.

The same idea was applied to urban rulers and administrators, who were also expected to possess these qualities and rule for the common good. Governing in a way that benefitted the common good was a universal practice across medieval Europe and one, which Eberhard Isenmann has shown, was the ‘urban norm’.¹⁹⁷ Isenmann continued that ‘the city represented a special precinct of peace’ and it was key to have principles, especially Christian values, which aligned with that of an urban community, such as ‘friendship’, ‘brotherly love’, ‘love’, ‘brotherhood’, ‘concord’ and ‘unity’.¹⁹⁸ A particularly important civic duty was the preservation of peace.¹⁹⁹ These ideas have been developed by van Leeuwen, Lee and, most recently, Cuenca who have shown just how useful it is to consider the behavioural conformity which oaths tried to enforce on those who took them. Their scholarship adds to our understanding of how civic officers embodied moral values that befitted urban rulers, examining such norms, like ‘friendship’, ‘love’, ‘concord, ‘unity’ and ‘peace’, which Isenmann viewed as a staple part of the medieval city.²⁰⁰ Trust was vital if urban government was to be supported by the populace.²⁰¹ This is particularly pertinent when considering what made a good ruler and what virtues were tied to notions of common profit. Civic officers were the representatives of towns and cities and should have embodied values that would benefit the City’s inhabitants.

It was imperative that the right individuals were chosen and were suitable to the role, avoiding any temptation to exploit or neglect their responsibilities as leaders of the

¹⁹⁷ Isenmann, ‘Norms and Values’, p. 192.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 192-193.

²⁰⁰ van Leeuwen, ‘Municipal oaths, political virtues, and centralised state’, 193-199; Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, pp. 193-199; Lee, ‘“Ye shal disturbe noe mans right”, 29-30.

²⁰¹ van Leeuwen, ‘Municipal oaths, political virtues and centralized state’, 187.

body politic.²⁰² This was not only evident in the Jubilee Book's oaths. It also was expressed in '[a]rticles for officers and other þinges needeful to the warde' that detailed how 'Conestables Scavageours Aleconners Bedil and Rakier' were expected to carry out their office.²⁰³ Chosen by 'the goode folk of [their respective] warde', these lesser civil servants were 'sworn bifore the Aldermen of wele and triew doying their office'.²⁰⁴ A variation of the above phrase appears at the conclusion of oaths within the Jubilee Book and is expressed as 'in alother thynges that to yowre office appendith wele and triewly'.²⁰⁵ 'Wele' and 'triew' carried particular connotations, stressing the necessary behavioural attributes that were vital in managing their ward. The implication was that individuals taking on this role were to be honourable and conscientious in discharging their obligations.

The terms 'wele' and 'triewly' were, especially, part of a wider formula entrenched in civic oaths, yet the point still stands that we can reconceptualise how those who constructed these oaths thought about the fundamental behaviours of civic officers, especially following the complaints from the commonalty in 1376 regarding civic duty and conduct.²⁰⁶ What we see is a reassertion of a tradition of civic office holding. Individuals entering civic office, therefore, needed to be of a certain calibre, having the correct qualities and attributes that would ensure moral and virtuous governance; only those who were suitable would do the office justice.²⁰⁷

Those summoned by the Mayor for counsel were to be 'expedient and nedeful to take counsail vpon suche matiere touchyng the comune profite or necessite of the Citee'.²⁰⁸ We know from historiography on medieval kingship that good counsel was crucial to the King in managing national governance, and so it seems that the same was true of those

²⁰² Cuenca, 'The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain', p. 194.

²⁰³ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 146r.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ I have quoted from the oath of the Chamberlain (TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 140v).

²⁰⁶ On the formulaic nature of these terms see Cuenca, 'The Making of Borough Customary Law', p. 194.

²⁰⁷ See Lee, "'Ye shal disturbe noe mans right'", 30 for example of Thomas Kebell, who upon being handed the copy of the Recorder's oath, declined because he felt he was not suitable for the role.

²⁰⁸ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 135r.

who were involved in matters of civic governance.²⁰⁹ Here good counsel equalled good governance. The individuals were considered to have the ability and qualities necessary to produce a positive and advantageous result for the City.²¹⁰ The explanation detailing the election of the City's Recorder expounded that those choosing a suitable candidate, a 'semble made of comuners and comune counsail', needed 'to chese a good man to occupie that office'.²¹¹ The men gathered were to 'in comune to be peseibly debated delibered and entreatid what persone theym seeme most able to that office and also most profitable for the Citee'.²¹² The Recorder was to be an experienced lawyer and thus a legal asset to the City.²¹³ The electors had to carefully consider and come to a unanimous decision about who would serve this role to the best of his ability according to these particular attributes and whose virtues would most benefit the city of London. These extracts have not been taken from oaths but give a more nuanced idea of the types of virtues assigned to those who took office in late fourteenth-century London. These characteristics will be the subject of this final section and will be considered through the prism of common profit ideology.

The previous two sections have discussed how office holders needed to competently carry out their duties by promoting the common profit of the City and the 'comune people', in addition to forging links with other officials whom they served and were linked to. Being able to do this demonstrated that they had the right skills and knew what kind of behavioural norms they needed to adhere to in order to keep the fabric of the body politic intact. This final section will thus consider the adjectives and adverbs utilised in these oaths to describe how civic office holders should carry out their duties and the type of men they were expected to be.

²⁰⁹ See Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*. For a more recent work see *The Problem of Political Counsel in Medieval and Early Modern England and Scotland* ed. Jacqueline Rose (Proceedings of the British Academy, cciv; Oxford: OUP, 2016).

²¹⁰ 'expedient (adj.)', *MED*; 'ned(e)ful (adj.)', *MED*.

²¹¹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 142r.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 174.

Studies have shown that obedience, especially, was a virtue that was increasingly referred to across civic oaths in the later middle ages.²¹⁴ The terms ‘obeisaut’, ‘obedient’ or ‘obeye’ are scattered throughout these oaths, appearing in six out of seventeen, including the oaths of the Common Clerk, those entering ‘free plegge’, the Sheriffs, the Under Sheriffs and the Clerks of the Sheriffs, the Sheriffs’ Sergeant, and the Sergeant Yeoman. These terms carried a variety of meanings and are helpful in understanding the qualities that reformers who wished to rejuvenate civic governance felt that office holders needed. ‘Obeisaut’, for instance, implied that the person was a compliant subject, responsive and ready to follow his leader’s direction.²¹⁵ This is especially significant given that when ‘obeisaut’, in the Common Clerk’s and Sheriffs’ Oath, was incorporated into the body of the oath it was used in relation to the duty owed to the Mayor, or other high status civic officers, such as ‘juges’ (in the case of the Common Clerk’s oath).²¹⁶ The term ‘obedient’, in the oath of the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs, connoted the same message.²¹⁷ Cuenca made the point that ‘[m]ayors ... were the foci of obedience for all types of officers’ and the Jubilee followed this model. The verb ‘obeye’ was utilised in a similar manner and related the kind of behaviour expected from London’s civil servants when interacting with other civic figures, such as ‘ministres of the Citee of london’ who those wishing to acquire ‘free plegge’ needed to ‘obeye’ that implied a certain level of subservience.²¹⁸ These terms were used to showcase what virtues those entering office needed in order to foster the relationships with other civic officers discussed previously. As we saw earlier, obedience from lesser civil servants was key to good governance and appears to have acted as a mechanism to achieve the ideals of common profit.

²¹⁴ Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law’, pp. 197-198.

²¹⁵ ‘obeisaut (adj.)’, *MED*.

²¹⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r (oath of the Common Clerk); TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 147r (oath of the Sheriffs).

²¹⁷ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 148r.

²¹⁸ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 144v.

The Mayor was also instructed to act in a certain way. For example, the Mayor was conceived of as ‘triewly and Rightwisly [treating] the people in [his] baile without extorcoun to any doying bi colour of [his] office’.²¹⁹ Mayors of London were responsible for their ‘Bailwikes’, areas in London usually administered by a bailiff, and this behaviour is specifically outlined within an article (one of several) included within the final folios of the Jubilee Book. The Mayor was instructed that in,

the thordynaunce of fisshmongers and vitailliers as it is aforsaide withyn his [the Mayor’s] Bailwik he shal holde and to be holde and of execucioun’ he shal do to be kep duely alfauour sette aback from tyme in to tyme duely he shal demaunde ... That is say that of this maner ordynaunce asmoche as to þem is and either of hem atteyneth in their Bailwikes don to be holden and stidefastly to be kept.²²⁰

The Mayor was to administer his duties effectively in order to exercise good governance.²²¹ These were virtuous actions which maintained the image of the mayoralty and, consequently, London as being lawful and of good repute. Moreover, the term ‘[r]ightwisly’ also had the potential to mean ‘[i]n accordance with God’s precepts’, suggesting that London was conceived of in terms of medieval Christian thinking – London was perhaps viewed as a mirror of God’s celestial city and stood as a symbol of ‘a divinely ordained and ordered hierarchy that extended through from the cosmic “body” above, the macrocosm, to the human body below, the microcosm’.²²²

Linked to the fair and equitable dispensation of justice was carrying out one’s duty ‘honestly’, and we see this in the promise made by individual Bedils. The word ‘honestly’ denoted that Bedils’ treatment of their wards, and the way they kept order and stability in

²¹⁹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 136v.

²²⁰ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 157r.

²²¹ ‘right-wisli (adv.)’, *MED*.

²²² Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 7.

these areas, was expected to be carried out by someone whose primary behaviours included reverence, respectability, dignity, and courteousness.²²³ Bedils entering civic office would thus need to be men who could act virtuously and in accordance with prescribed ways. Tied in with this was the fact of carrying out duties ‘diligently’ or of having ‘diligence’ when exercising urban governance. The term ‘diligently’, for instance, was merged into the oath of the Common Sergeant of Arms to describe how he should ‘pursue’ in working for ‘the comune needis of the Citte’.²²⁴ The oath highlighted the requirement that the Common Sergeant of Arms was capable of carrying out his office attentively and diligently. A Common Sergeant of Arms was to be assiduous and persevere in making sure that the shared needs of the City were protected; it was the welfare of the many that was most valued.²²⁵

Contextually, the use of the term ‘diligence’ in these oaths indicated that individuals holding civic office were to be meticulous in their duties to the people of London and the City in order for urban governance to function effectually. The importance of ‘diligence’ in urban governance is explored in the oath of the Common Clerk, for example, who vowed that ‘and al the plees of hustynge and of nuysaunce with your diligence ye shal sette that they bien triewly entred and enRold’.²²⁶ ‘Diligence’, as a key character trait for urban officers, was equated with having accurate records entered and enrolled in ‘al the plees of hustynge and nuysaunce’, allowing for London’s legal world to function and proceed as it should. The implication made here was that justice was a primary duty for all civil servants and not just those occupying the top of the highest-ranking civic positions.

The importance of ‘diligence’ in supporting London’s legal and urban protocols was also applied to the duties of the Recorder. The Recorder, like the Common Clerk, was involved in the proceedings of the Hustings Court and fulfilled his commitments to the

²²³ ‘honestli(che) (adv.)’, *MED*.

²²⁴ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141r.

²²⁵ ‘diligentli (adv.)’, *MED*.

²²⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 141v.

court by swearing that ‘al þe plees that bifore yow shalbe pleated triewly ye shal Recorde and your diligence sette and oversee that the saide plees bien wele and triewly enrolled ne no Right distroubled’.²²⁷ As Recorder, he was to guarantee that the evidence enrolled in the records of the Hustings Court accurately mirrored what had been plead by those making ‘plees’. Moreover, the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs were also bound to the City by their legal responsibilities and having ‘diligence’, yet again, was a vital quality.²²⁸ Parallel to the Recorder, the Under Sheriffs and Clerks of the Sheriffs shared the same level of responsibility over the enrolment of pleas made: ‘[a]nd that al the plees that biefore yow shalbe pleated truly yee shuln Recorde and sette yowr diligence in surview and oversee that the saide plees bien wele and triewly entred and enrolled’.²²⁹ London’s major courts, such as the Mayor’s Court, the Aldermen’s Court and the Husting were a vital part of the City’s political structure in maintaining order and these oaths stressed that only those who embodied these values were worthy of taking on these particular offices.

The phrase ‘tendre’ was also curiously made use of. We first come across this quality in the Mayor’s oath, which outlined ‘that ye be tendre and take heede to the Rights of Orphans and of the Chambre to save and to mayntene after the lawes and vsages of the Citee ne suffre non Orphan to be married withyn age that ye ne doo anon levie the peyne vpon that Ordeigned’.²³⁰ Additionally, it was important for the Mayor to have a disposition where he was open to ‘take heede’, suggesting he needed to be an individual that was attentive and observant of the environment around him and which he was prepared to care for.²³¹ It was also used to describe both the Recorder’s and Aldermen’s duty towards orphans of the City.²³² The reason that such consideration and compassion was shown to orphans particularly within the Jubilee Book may be the result of its authorship. A

²²⁷ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 142v.

²²⁸ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 148v.

²²⁹ TCC, MS O 3 11, fols. 148r-148v.

²³⁰ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 136v.

²³¹ ‘hed (n.) (2)’, *MED*.

²³² TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 142v.

potential candidate, in Barron's eyes, was Ralph Strode, who we saw earlier acted as the common voice of the people and who was dedicated to the wellbeing of the orphans of the City.²³³ Placed within this contextual framework, 'tendre' created an image of an individual who was easily moved, thinking of the needs of the orphans before his own.²³⁴ If London was the mirror image of God's divine city then there may be somewhat Christian undertones to this. As we see in the Bible, a good Christian was to look after orphans and widows in times of distress, as well as those who were fatherless.²³⁵ As demonstrated throughout, these oaths having this level of devotion was important and it was paramount that those taking civic office were to think of shared interests and the welfare of those who had no other adult male defender before their own.

The emphasis placed on the treatment of orphans in the City thus indicates a greater need to care for a wider body of London's inhabitants. The need to act with one's conscience was indeed reflected in oaths within the Jubilee Book, with the actual term 'conscience' used to stress that it was paramount that 'conscience' was a deciding factor in determining the actions of civic officers. Acting according to their conscience was also a dominant feature of the Sheriffs' oath and a vital aspect of their behaviour. Sheriffs taking office were instructed that '[a]nd no yift of any persone lasse ne more ye take if ye trowe bi your conscience that this be to yow more Rather sent for mayntenaunce of any quarrel of for to distourbe or delay the Right of any man þan for any love ne friendship'.²³⁶ 'Love' and 'friendship', as outlined earlier, were key characteristics of an urban community. This suggests that allowing one's conscience to dictate their movements and activities was a vital component of urban governance. The adjectives utilised in these oaths aimed to show the behaviours that the reformers and later revisers of the Jubilee Book considered necessary for those entering office. Furthermore, this suggests that following these behaviours would ensure the best form of urban governance in a London that had

²³³ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

²³⁴ 'tender (adj.)', *MED*.

²³⁵ James 1:27; Psalm 68:5; Job 29:12.

²³⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 147v.

witnessed the troubles that could arise from the political and economic corruption of their own aldermen.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how oaths preserved in the Jubilee Book are vital in understanding how common profit rhetoric was crucial in reforming urban governance following the Good Parliament of 1376. It has also examined how the body politic was conceptualised, focusing particularly on urban relations that high status and lesser civil servants maintained with the people, sovereign and the city of London. Most importantly it has sought to establish how fundamental it was for civic figures to maintain healthy and loyal relations with each other in order for the City to function as it should, as well as maintain authority and legitimacy through the transmission of common knowledge. Moreover, this chapter has demonstrated what the necessary behaviours needed for civic governance were deemed to be by the reformers and revisers of the Jubilee Book. The oaths examined here demonstrate how medieval government was imagined and what late medieval civic leaders thought would prevent further civic disturbance.

From the oaths and documentation more generally copied into the Jubilee Book, it becomes clear that following the crisis of the Good Parliament and the misdemeanours of London Aldermen, the City's urban elite wanted to recreate and project a certain image for civic officers, one that was deeply linked with common profit values and understandings of how an urban body functioned. A persona was created for each civic officer through these oaths and was couched in notions of common profit as a way of conceiving themselves as efficient urban leaders. Like the oaths of late medieval Flanders, the oaths in the Jubilee Book 'were very much related to political theory'.²³⁷

These reforms, however, did not have any real lasting impact and were only one of several factors that caused dissent in late fourteenth-century London. For example, we

²³⁷ van Leeuwen, 'Municipal oaths, political virtues and the centralised state', 200.

know that the election of the Common Council reverted to the old system used before the Jubilee Book was conceived – it was those from the wards, rather than the guilds, who were responsible for electing Common Council members.²³⁸ The Jubilee Book was a contentious text and only remained safe during Northampton's mayoralty. When William Walworth was mayor in 1380 he attempted to restore the traditional way that the Common Council had been elected through the wards and the text certainly did not last under Brembre, who managed to restore this process in July 1384 after Northampton's sway in London had declined.²³⁹ The Jubilee Book's life may have been short, lasting less than a decade on the London scene, but regardless of this what its creation does tell us is how important the notion of common profit – and values that formed part of this discourse – were considered to be vital in reforming civic governance and revitalising urban protocols and behaviour in a City that had been placed under political duress.

This chapter has thus set out the backdrop against which the role of London's civic leaders and their behaviours is measured against throughout the rest of this thesis. We see what values were key for urban rulers to follow and the kind of relations they maintained between the multiple bodies that made up the body politic of which they too were a part. There was a clear expectation surrounding how urban officers served the polity. Equally, people within an urban body had particular roles to follow. The result of this has also shown a sense of hierarchy in the London polity, with the unenfranchised majority being the responsibility of civic elites who ruled over them, and the sovereign remaining the head of society to whom urban officers, both leading civic rulers and lesser civil servants, were to dedicate themselves and remain loyal. It has also established that common profit was an inherent discourse incorporated in understandings of urban governance and in the formulation of how urban records were structured and written.

In examining this source, this chapter has built on understandings of the Jubilee Book, applying the context of the circumstances from which it was produced, both in terms

²³⁸ Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

²³⁹ Barron, *Revolt in London 11th to 15th June 1381*, pp. 15-16.

of London's link to the Good Parliament and the nature of documentary culture in late fourteenth-century London. The Jubilee Book was revolutionary in that there is a very strong case to be made that it was written in English, and, unlike traditional customs, was a project that aimed to make governance comprehensible to a wider group of people outside the ranks of civic officers. It was because of these motivations that appealing to the 'comune profite' of both the City and the 'comune people' was a useful ideology to implement by those seeking to create an image of London governance that ruled in the name of the many. Common profit may not have saved the Jubilee Book from burning in 1387 at the hands of Exton and Brembre, but what it certainly does show is that ideology was a key consideration in formulating codes that directed the behaviour of civic officers and provided the template for urban governance.

Chapter 2. Condemnation in the Court Room: Negotiating Civic

Power in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls

On the 18th August 1384 Richard II judged Northampton at a trial held in Reading. This followed allegations largely made by Usk, who was also personally present to declaim against Northampton's 'populist program' and attempt to overturn Brembre as mayor by concocting 'fals informacion, excitacion, couyns, gadryngs, [and] confederacies' aired in public.¹ In the *Appeal*, which detailed Northampton's course of action and motivations after losing his position as mayor, Usk accused Northampton of acting against the City's interests and of conspiring in secret, making 'the people ... the more embolded to be rebel a-yeins their gouernours'.² Northampton had risen against the leading urban oligarchy in retaliation to Brembre's unjust installation as mayor in 1383 – an act that had been met with the approval of the King.³ Brembre had 'the aid of an armed mob' when he disrupted Northampton's attempts at being re-elected in October 1383, slighting Northampton in doing so. Despite Northampton's protestations of innocence, the King proceeded to exercise his jurisdiction against him in which Northampton was accused of acting against the City's interests.⁴ According to the *Westminster Chronicle*, Northampton was 'snatched from doom by an act of grace' by the Queen, Anne of Bohemia, who, acting as political intercessor, pleaded that 'Northampton should not die'.⁵ Following his trial he was transferred from Corfe Castle to the Tower of London on 3rd September 1384, following the arrests of John More, mercer, Richard Norbury, mercer, and William Essex,

¹ "Appeal", p. 29; *CPR, Richard II: 1381-1384*, p. 470; *WC*, pp.90-93; *Chronica Maiora*, p. 218. For records detailing Usk's presence at the trial in Reading see *CCR Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 476; Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics', pp. 86-87.

² These are some of the accusations made by Usk, see "Appeal", p. 29. Thomas Walsingham corroborated this, informing readers that 'a clerk of his own household' revealed Northampton's crimes against both the King and London, *Maiora Chronica*, p. 218.

³ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 34; Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics', p. 85.

⁴ Anthony Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (Harlow: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1992), p. 97; Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 35.

⁵ *WC*, pp. 92-95; *CCR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, pp. 477-478; *Chronica Maiora*, p. 218. In contrast to the monk of Westminster, Thomas Walsingham, whilst informing readers of the trial at Reading, does not mention the intervention by Anne of Bohemia. On Anne of Bohemia's role as a political intercessor and the symbolic role of queens as mediators see Paul Strohm, 'Queens as Intercessors' in *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 95-119. Also see Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics', p. 87 on Anne of Bohemia's intervention at the trial in Reading.

draper, in mid-August. Northampton, More, Norbury, and Essex were interrogated alongside each other on 10th September 1384 at the Tower of London by Sir John Montague, the King's steward, as well as Robert Tresilian and Robert Bealknap, Chief Justices of the King's Bench.⁶ Montague, on hearing their confessions, sentenced them to be hung, drawn and quartered. Yet, in a final dramatic twist, they were saved by Michael de la Pole, the Chancellor, who concluded that,

[a]lthough, for the crimes they have committed, these men ought to suffer death out of hand, yet, since they have voluntarily submitted themselves to the royal mercy, the king of his special grace, grants them their lives; it is his will, however, that they shall be kept during his pleasure in places of safety until, if it seems expedient, he thinks fit to show them increased mercy.⁷

Their sentence was downgraded from death and, instead, their chattels and personal property were removed from them and the four traitors were exiled from London, with Northampton being sent to Tintagel Castle in Cornwall.⁸ It was agreed that each of the offenders would be sent to prisons across the realm that were '100 leagues distant from the city' for ten years. They were only to be released once there was assurance 'that no evil or prejudice [would] befall the city or any of the king's lieges'.⁹ Northampton's arrest and trial in 1384 sets the content for this chapter and allows for an examination of Brembre's actions against Northampton prior to this and his treatment of individuals who supported Northampton after he was exiled from London in September 1384.

⁶ *WC*, pp. 96-97. Other individuals were also present, including 'David Hanemere, John Holt, William de Burgh, Walter Clopton and William Rikhil, justices of the lord the King'. See *LBH*, pp. 264-265 and for a translation of the original entry see Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 347-353.

⁷ *WC*, pp. 96-97.

⁸ For proceedings against and seizure of the goods and chattels of John de Northampton and Richard Norbury see TNA, C 49/87; *WC*, pp. 96-97; *Chronica Maiora*, p. 218; *CCR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 482.

⁹ *CPR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 464.

From the *Westminster Chronicle*, we learn that it was royal officials, notably Tresilian and Bealknap, key figures involved in the legal proceedings of the Westminster based central royal courts, such as the Court of King's Bench, who dealt with Northampton and his accomplices. Furthermore, Tresilian stressed that it was Brembre's responsibility as mayor to uphold the King's peace and arrest Northampton, emphasising 'that as mayor and his minister the said Nicholas [should] have full rule of the city so that the peace be not broken, being hindered by the spite and anger of none of the king's subjects there'.¹⁰ Whilst Northampton's actions had significant implications for Richard II's authority, in particular the support he had garnered from John of Gaunt, the King's uncle, it is important to remember that these events occurred within a specifically London context, thus revealing the state of urban politics at this time.¹¹ Multiple sources concurrent with these events demonstrated this. For example, both the *Calendar of Close Rolls* and *Calendar of Patent Rolls* have multiple entries, such as grants, letters of the signet, and decisions made by King and Council, dedicated to the tribulations and misdeeds of Northampton, More and Norbury.¹² Similarly, several folios of *Letter Book H* were dedicated to recounting the proceedings and judgements made against Northampton, More, Norbury and Essex.¹³ The turbulence caused by Northampton and his associates is therefore well chronicled and it was made clear that his conduct had a detrimental effect on London governance. Northampton's deviant behaviour was a matter specific to the City that, as we have seen, was part of the Mayor's jurisdiction. This was certainly recognised by Tresilian who, as

¹⁰ *CCR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 369.

¹¹ Whilst John of Gaunt may not have initially given support to Northampton, for he rejected Northampton's requests at the mayoral election in October 1383, following the increased rivalry between Northampton and Brembre's parties in the early months of 1384, Gaunt saw for himself a political opportunity in which he could turn these disputes to his own advantage. For more see *Testament of Love*, p. 13. Northampton's close rapport with John of Gaunt will be explored in more detail deeper into this chapter. This conspiratorial relationship between London civic authorities and the Crown has been explored by Harry, who posits that following the tribunals during the Good Parliament of 1376, Londoners were suspicious of this relationship. This is especially reflected in the actions of the 1381 rebels. See Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 38.

¹² Some examples include: *CPR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, pp. 464, 470, 503, 515; *CCR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, pp. 369, 370, 465, 470, 475, 477, 478, 481, 482, 483-484, 485, 494.

¹³ *LBH*, pp. 245, 248, 265, 279, 281-282.

the monk of Westminster reported, ‘hesitated to pronounce in a case of this nature ... [saying] that judgement on the accused was a matter for the mayor of London alone’.¹⁴

This chapter explores entries recorded in the Plea and Memoranda Roll produced between 1384 and 1386, during which time Brembre was mayor. Northampton’s and John More’s misconduct against Nicholas Brembre in February 1384, the involvement of their allies in the Guildhall affray of October 1384 and John of Gaunt’s plea of 1386 to restore Northampton to the City will be examined through a consideration of ideas of common profit. Furthermore, the chapter will probe how this discourse influenced the Mayor’s actions within the context of the Mayor’s Court, as well as the records detailing politico-factional events in the City. These Rolls recorded legal actions and judgements made by London’s Mayor in this court. They offer an excellent insight into proceedings which influenced legal structures and civic, as well as juridical, order within late medieval London, in addition to understanding the actions taken by London’s Mayor alongside contemporary events.¹⁵ The latter is particularly important when reading the Rolls produced during Brembre’s tempestuous mayoralty. The tempestuous nature of Brembre’s mayoralty led to a considerable increase in the number of cases copied into the Plea and Memoranda Rolls. There are only fifteen membranes covering Exton’s mayoralty of 1386 to 1388 in comparison to thirty-one membranes covering Brembre’s three-year mayoralty.¹⁶ The Plea and Memoranda Roll for 1384 to 1386, therefore, provides invaluable evidence for the legal dimension and implications of the political troubles which Brembre confronted. A consideration of the importance of the law and its centrality in late medieval society, however, is first needed.

¹⁴ *WC*, pp. 94-95.

¹⁵ *CEMCR*, pp. vii-xxvii.

¹⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028 covers Brembre’s mayoralty between 1384 and 1386 and LMA, CLA/024/01/02/029 covers Exton’s mayoralty between 1386 and 1388. A. H. Thomas noted that ‘[t]he present volume, unlike its predecessors, is described as a calendar of *select* pleas and memoranda, because a somewhat larger number of formal entries and records of small debt actions have been omitted. Care has been taken, however, to include all passages which seem to add in any way to our knowledge of the times, and especially those which may throw light on the civic disturbances regarded by historians as a struggle between the victualling and non-victualling guilds’. When referring to ‘civic disturbances’ caused by London’s ‘victualling and non-victualling guilds’ it is clear that he is referring to the struggles between Northampton and Brembre, see *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. vii.

The law was an all-encompassing part of life in medieval England, reflecting social practices and the intricacies which dominated medieval society, particularly the manner in which individuals understood and responded to circumstances and events. As we learn from Rigby and Elizabeth Ewan, medieval governance was frequently ‘expressed in judicial form’.¹⁷ English law, following the reign of Henry II, ‘both structured and mirrored the increasingly complicated society and forged and incorporated the changing cultural assumptions that made society possible’.¹⁸ The same remained true in fourteenth-century London, in which we see that ‘law was the centre of London life’.¹⁹ It was natural, then, for Northampton’s deviant behaviour to be handled not only within the courts at Westminster but the courts located at the Guildhall, notably the Mayor’s Court – a place where the Mayor articulated and performed his civic importance and authority.

The fifteenth-century political theorist, John Fortescue, famously explained that all subjects, and indeed the King, were bound by law.²⁰ Fortescue was not alone in his beliefs; medieval intellectuals ‘regarded law as an objective yardstick against which human actions could be measured’.²¹ They were in particular agreement about the importance of rulers, especially kings, ‘[acting] in conformity with positive law when it served the common good’.²² This was also the case in a civic context – civic rulers too were expected to promote the common good.²³ By binding all men and women, great and small, the law worked to protect and uphold the common good and common profit above private and

¹⁷ Rigby and Ewan, ‘Government, power and authority 1300-1540’, p. 294.

¹⁸ Robert C. Palmer, ‘England: Law, Society and State’ in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages* ed. S. H. Rigby (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), p. 242.

¹⁹ Mary Flowers Braswell, *Chaucer’s “Legal Fiction”: Reading the Records* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), p. 21.

²⁰ See John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* ed. and trans. S. B. Chrimes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942).

²¹ Jean Dunbabin, ‘Government’ in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350-c.1450* ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: CUP, 188), p. 504.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cuenca, ‘The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain’, p. 135. For a European context see Robert Stein, Anita Boele and Wim Blockmans, ‘Whose Community? The Origin and Development of the Concept of Bonum Commune in Flanders, Brabant and Holland (Twelfth-Fifteenth Century)’ in *De bono communi*, pp. 149-169.

particular profit. Rulers had a responsibility to use the tools the law provided to constrain individuals and subordinate those who strayed beyond legally acceptable boundaries.

In a consideration of Thomas Aquinas's views on the King and law, Jean Dunbabin concluded that '[f]or Aquinas, the common good was a clearly visible objective'.²⁴ Dunbabin recognised that whilst Aquinas's and Fortescue's arguments differed on certain points, both political thinkers agreed on the centrality of the common good in law-making.²⁵ The dispensation of justice and proper administration of the law as a means of guaranteeing the profit of the wider realm was at the heart of Aquinas and Fortescue's tracts. For both, the relationship between king and subject was critical in preserving the common good. This line of argument can be extended to the relationship between mayor and citizen, which was defined by the same principles of loyalty. In the case of London, as detailed in the introduction to this thesis, the Mayor was responsible for ensuring that governance within the City was properly conducted, including that law was administered effectively and efficiently. Like the King, the Mayor protected the interests of the community.

An examination of entries in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls based on the challenges Brembre faced from Northampton allows us to reconceptualise the story of these two rivals. These civic materials offer the chance to better understand how political ideas and language were employed to negotiate conflict and dissent in 1380s London. An analysis of these records is especially important for understanding medieval civic governance, as well as the challenges that civic leaders faced within 1380s London within a judicial framework.²⁶ Issues that are considered throughout this chapter include the

²⁴ Dunbabin, 'Government', p. 508.

²⁵ Ibid. Aquinas's beliefs in the responsibility of authorities to uphold the individual interest has been more recently studied by Christopher Beck, who showed that from Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, one learns that for Aquinas 'the preservation of the common good over individual desire was the natural purpose behind law in general'. Beck, 'Common good and private justice', 102.

²⁶ Williams, *Medieval London*, p. 80.

management of civic relations and power dynamics within a courtroom setting, in addition to the importance of the law in ensuring good governance. Moreover, whilst the Plea and Memoranda Rolls are central urban government records, this analysis of this type of record reconsiders the extracts within the Plea and Memoranda Roll written during Brembre's mayoralty as London texts, products of their time which was shaped by the disputes between Northampton and Brembre. As is demonstrated throughout this chapter, the proceedings of the Mayor's Court aimed for social cohesion, creating an environment in which the concept of common profit could thrive.

The Mayor's Court and Civic Conduct: The Plea and Memoranda Rolls in Context

Mary Flowers Braswell argued that '[b]y the fourteenth century, the conditions that shaped one's actions were ... a natural element of one's thinking, [these emerged] not only in "literary" works, but often in courtroom documents'.²⁷ Documentary culture in late medieval London, like literary texts produced within the City, served as repositories for social and cultural values; namely the political, ethical, hierarchical and communal environments in which these texts were produced.²⁸ What we view within these legal records is how narratives could be controlled in order to enforce power. We also see the type of relationship forged between the City and these powerbrokers, namely the civic officers in charge. This chapter argues for a reappraisal of the dispensing of justice and the motivations behind Brembre's legal conduct through a consideration of the influence of

²⁷ Braswell, *Chaucer's "Legal Fiction"*, p. 37.

²⁸ *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England* ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 3-4. Other studies which have given a similar treatment to the study of law and literature in medieval England include: J. Bellamy, *The Criminal Trial in Later Medieval England: Felony before the Courts from Edward I to the Sixteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Norman Doe, *Fundamental Authority in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); Anthony Musson, *The Local Administration of Criminal Justice, 1294-1350* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1996); Anthony Musson and W. Mark Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics, and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of Black Death, 1348-1381* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Philippa Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia, 1422-1442* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Marianne Constable, *The Law of the Other: The Mixed Jury and Changing Conception of Citizenship, Law, and Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth*; Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; Paul Brand, *The Origins of the English Legal Profession* (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 1992); Paul Brand, *Learning the Law: Teaching and the Transmission of Law in England 1150-1900* (London: Hambledon, 1999).

common profit ideology on legal conduct. This is situated within a consideration of the Mayor's Court and paying close attention to the responsibilities placed on the Mayor as an arbiter of justice.

Despite Braswell's identification of the literary aspects of legal texts, research to date on the broad area of text and law has instead focused upon literary texts concerned with the law.²⁹ The link between literary texts and law is evident from at least the reign of Henry II during which Frederick Pollock and F. W. Maitland suggested that these two disciplines 'grew up together'.³⁰ Legal texts were a fundamental part of medieval life and their ubiquity in medieval England has been recognised by Emily Steiner, especially by the mid-fourteenth century in which 'the legal document was clearly one of England's primary texts, and possibly the only written text available to every social stratum'.³¹ This chapter, therefore, examines the legal text and considers what it tells us about the society in which it was created, specifically the way in which medieval political theory, namely notions of common profit, was present within the Plea and Memoranda Rolls and what this tells us about urban politics and civic authority in 1380s London.

Legal records have a vast potential to tell stories about communities. For Natalie Zemon Davis, for instance, the importance of 'language, detail and order' were critical components to crafting a document that was 'true, real, meaningful and/or explanatory'.³² Zemon Davis's ideas on legal documents as examples of story-telling has parallels with the work of Thomas Brook on nineteenth-century authors, who supported the idea that

²⁹ Richard Firth Green, 'Medieval Law and Literature' in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350 - c.1500* ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwells, 2006), pp. 292-306; Steiner, *Documentary Culture*; John A. Alford, 'Literature and Law in Medieval England', *PMLA*, Vol. 92, No. 5 (1977); Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., 'Medieval Law in the *Tale of Gamelyn*', *Speculum*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1951), 458-464; Angela M. Lucas, 'Fair Play, Justice and the Law in "The Tale of Gamelyn"', *The Maynooth Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1979), 45-49; Joseph Allen Hornsby, *Chaucer and the Law* (Oklahoma, Pilgrim Books, 1988); Joseph E. Grennen, 'Chaucer's Man of Law and the Constancy of Justice', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), 498-514; Andrew Galloway, 'Piers Plowman and the Subject of the Law', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, Vol. 15 (2001), 117-140; *The Letter of the Law* ed. Steiner and Barrington are just some examples.

³⁰ Frederick Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law before the time of Edward I*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), I, p. 161.

³¹ Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p. 4.

³² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 3.

‘[j]udicial opinions can be read as complex stories, within which there are many subtexts, or narratives within narratives’.³³ Legal documents thus constructed a coherent and cogent picture, drawing upon the context of situations to develop reasons for motives behind the actions of perpetrators. Zemon Davis’s work shows the value of studying constructed narratives, yet her study focuses on multiple narratives.³⁴ In contrast, this chapter focuses on the one narrative yet her approach is useful in thinking about how clerks in the Guildhall selectively put together a mayoral narrative. Like the pardon tales of sixteenth-century France, the structures of law and order served as constraints on the stories recounted within the Plea and Memoranda Rolls and these stories were all mediated via the civic elite.³⁵

A. H. Thomas made the selective characteristic of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls clear in the introduction to his monumental edition of the Mayor’s Court Rolls which survived at the Guildhall.³⁶ The preservation of these materials is both a complex and contested issue and the circumstances surrounding the compilation and preservation of materials produced within the Guildhall is not always clear yet they do reflect the viewpoint of those in power.³⁷ The Plea and Memoranda Rolls were no exception, with Thomas postulating that these rolls were copies made by Guildhall clerks of judicial documents and letters which were kept within the “Mayor’s Bag” and retired along with the Mayor on his departure from office.³⁸ Despite being copies of official documentation, they are still useful in reconstructing practices that took place in late medieval London, ranging from mercantile and textile practices to issues concerning debt and domestic

³³ Gary Leedes, Review of Brook, Thomas, *Cross-examination of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe and Melville* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), pp. xii + 300, 195.

³⁴ Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, p. 4.

³⁵ The influence of the civic elite is further explored in chapter three.

³⁶ *CEMRC*, p. vii.

³⁷ Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, p. 75.

³⁸ *CEMRC*, p. viii.

conditions, such as trade and the status of foreign and alien merchants within the capital city.³⁹

Thomas's work is systematic and accessible to researchers and students of medieval London but he does not offer a full edition of the record. In addition to the exclusion of some items, entries included in his volume have not always been translated in full. This is especially noticeable in his edition of Brembre's response to letters received from John of Gaunt, who pleaded for Northampton's return to the City in 1386. Scholars encounter the following entry:

Reply from Sir Nicholas Brembre in identical terms. As regards the matter touching the inheritance of John Northampton's wife and children, he had never urged reasons to the contrary. He concludes his letter "le vaster is vows lest Nichol Brembre".⁴⁰

The manuscript entry is in fact much longer, covering more than half of the dorse side of membrane 26. As a result of these shortcomings in Thomas's work, I have consulted the original. The Plea and Memoranda Rolls have been vital for both Thomas's and Barron's studies on late medieval London, yet their use of the rolls as evidence mainly revolves around the ability to trace who did what and where. This study, instead, engages with the language and ideas used within these records and what this says about the rolls social context, especially what we can learn about the circumstances and what shaped the content of these records.

The ideas preserved in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls captured the power dynamics and social relationships that people experienced when entering this Court. Interactions and social contracts were thus negotiated according to values that aligned with the ancient protocols of the city of London. The recurrent use of specific phrasing also supports the

³⁹ *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. vii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 113.

notion that language and law perfectly co-exist together, an argument that Lawrence M. Solan and Peter M. Tiersma have reinforced.⁴¹ Jenny Benham, Matthew McHaffie and Helle Vogt, however, have extended Solan and Tiersma's approach to the study of law and language within medieval society, stating that in the medieval world 'all communities generate their own legal cultures, and in all historical contexts law uses language at every level on which it operates'.⁴² Whilst the languages of medieval legal records are technical, Benham, McHaffie and Vogt agreed that 'language expresses relations of power' within the context of the law and allows for a conceptualisation of what ideas and actions shaped this power.⁴³ A study of legal language affords researchers the opportunity to not only study the linguistic dimension of these records but also the ideologies which informed legal decision making. As Solan and Tiersma have shown, '[t]he more we know about the use of language in institutional settings, the better we can study particular institutions – legal ones in particular – and learn about their structure and the relationships among them'.⁴⁴ Court cases preserved within London records, in particular, offer a good idea about fundamental tenets and standards that Londoners endeavoured to conserve.⁴⁵

The Plea and Memoranda Rolls, therefore, were the product of the environment in which they were created. Commentators of the period, however, viewed the legal system to be failing and employed traditional tropes to present legal authorities as not following judicial protocols. John Gower made this explicit in his text *Vox Clamantis*, reporting that,

[a]ll love is far from them ['ministers of law'] and all sin very close to them, and every case is made for their own personal gain. Their work and effort are primarily to be connected with their payment – without it the utterance of their

⁴¹ For discussion on the important relationship between language and law see Lawrence M. Solan and Peter M. Tiersma, 'Introduction' in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Law* ed. Lawrence M. Solan and Peter M. Tiersma (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 1.

⁴² Jenny Benham, Matthew McHaffie and Helle Vogt, 'Introduction' in *Law and Language in the Middle Ages* ed. Jenny Benham, Matthew McHaffie and Helle Vogt (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 6.

⁴⁴ Solan and Tiersma, 'Introduction', p. 3.

⁴⁵ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 3.

tongue is mute ... A struggle for gold so consumes the law [like] a fresh ulcer
that stricken justice is no longer safe.⁴⁶

This fraudulent intent is reinforced later in the passage when Gower explains that '[e]verything is tinted in the guise of justice, whereby their sly administration of justice brings them the more profit. They care not in what way a case is just or unjust, but that it be rich in returns for them'.⁴⁷ This was a system tainted by self-interest and conceit according to the poet. This particular view was also propagated in *London Lickpenny*, a satirical poem written from the perspective of a Kentishman, although the author ensured that readers were aware that unethical practices impacted upon a more far-reaching and varied audience other than the protagonist of the poem. Furthermore, the narrator approached several courts at Westminster Hall, including the 'kyngs bench' (12), 'the Comon Place' (line 25), 'the Rollis' (133) and 'Chauncerie' (134) yet despite presenting his complaints to judicial offices, like 'a man of lawe' (line 4), 'a juge' (13) and 'the clerks of the Chauncerie' (34) his grievances were not dealt with as a result of 'lacke of money' (8).⁴⁸ The verse '[f]or lacke of money, I may not spede' recurred with slight variation throughout the poem in an attempt to stress the corrupt nature of seeking legal assistance in the realm's legal capital.⁴⁹ For example, when the protagonist went to the Court of Chancery, readers learnt that although he,

Shewyd them [Chancery clerks] myne evidence and they began to reade.
They seyde trewer things might there nevar be,
But for lacke of money I may not spede (38-40).

⁴⁶ *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, p. 220. The need for lawyers and legal advocates to further enrich themselves with the possessions of others is explored in greater length in Book VI, chapters two and three, pp. 222-225.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 220-221.

⁴⁸ All quotes from *London Lickpenny* are cited from *Medieval English Political Writings* ed. James M. Dean (Kalamazoo: TEAMS (the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages, 1996).

⁴⁹ This specific verse is repeated 15 times throughout the poem. The sixth stanza in the poem, however, stated that "Ley downe sylvar, or here thow may not spede" (line 48) and epitomizes the same point.

The Chancery clerks recognised that he had a case and his complaints were valid yet because of his lack of finances they would not assist him with legal redress. Furthermore, in the third stanza of the poem, readers learn that,

Benethe hym ['a juge'] sat clerks, a great rowt;
 Fast they writen by one assent.
 There stode up one, and cryed round about,
 "Richard, Robert, and one of Kent!"
 I wist not wele what he ment
 He cried so thike there in dede;
 There were stronge theves shamed and shent,
 But they that lacked money mowght not spede (17-24).

In this instance it was not only the author who was unable to seek redress because of limited financial means but a broader part of society who have also been dismissed as a result of their fiscal status. The figures of "Richard, Robert, and one of Kent!" – a localised figure who may have been used as a trope to denote a disgruntled, regional, 'everyman' sort of figure (the association perhaps emerging from men of Kent's involvement in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381) – who are called upon by the clerks waiting to deal with their impending cases, serve a representative function, encompassing individuals whose injustices had been left without redress due to a lack of funds. The malpractices of courts and legal advocates, for both Gower and the author of *London Lickpenny*, were deeply embedded in the legal structures of both medieval London and Westminster. Furthermore, *London Lickpenny* revealed the special mistrust, hostility and suspicion by those from outside the City, who sought legal redress, of London's legal system.

Legal corruption was also bemoaned in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, especially in the depiction of Meed's trial in Passus II and the group she forms around

herself in Passus III of the B-Text. The latter perfectly sums up the type of court corruption discussed so far. As we see,

Ac ther was murthe and mynstralcie Mede to plese;
 That wonyeth at Westmynstre worshipeth hire all.
 Gentilliche with joye the justices somme
 Busked hem to the bour there the burde dwellede,
 Conforted hyre kyndely by Clergies leve,
 And seiden, “Mourne noght, Mede, ne make thow no sorwe,
 For we wol wisse the Kyng and thi wey shape
 To be wedded at thi wille and wher thee leef liketh” (B-Text, Passus III.11-18).⁵⁰

The allegorical figure of Meed functioned as an archetypal symbol for reward, readily lending herself, in Langland’s text, to financial corruption in courts, legal proceedings and even in theological matters – legal corruption permeated this passage. The behaviour of the lawyers in this extract was deplorable, for they comforted and supported Meed’s worries over her marriage despite her purpose in the text to epitomise the materialistic exploitation and self-interested manipulation inherent in court culture.⁵¹

Piers Plowman, *Vox Clamantis* and *London Lickpenny* were all texts produced concurrently with the events described within this thesis and were written in response to the corruption – political, legal, financial, and ecclesiastical – that occurred within London. Gower’s treatment of legal standards in London, however, still provides an understanding

⁵⁰ All quotes from *Piers Plowman* are cited from *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17 2nd edn.* ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Everyman, 1995) unless otherwise stated.

⁵¹ Victoria Thomas has further highlighted Meed’s ability to ‘[corrupt] the workings of the law’. She provides an example in which Meed does so ‘with her bribes and payoffs on settlement days, so that honest men have no chance of reparation through litigation, the only system in place for earthly justice’. Victoria Thomas, ‘*Piers Plowman*, Legal Authority and the Law of Subject Status’ (PhD diss., Washington University in Louisiana, 2012), p. 151.

‘that law is good in itself’ if properly abided by.⁵² In a similar vein, Langland, in *Piers Plowman*, recognised London as a place in which ‘there is lawe yshewed’ (B-Text, Passus II. 135). In London, law would be set forth and enacted accordingly.⁵³ This consciousness of how the law was supposed to function suggests an awareness of the values traditionally attached to legal practices and its fundamentality in modelling civic morality. We know from Hanawalt’s work on civic behaviour in London that ‘[c]ity governance ... was openly on view’ and civic officials needed to behave within the confines of the law – they were part of a larger body who were expected to conduct themselves in a manner which was in the interest of both the City and wider populace.⁵⁴

This responsibility was certainly recognised by Langland, who constructed a legal world that functioned according to ‘Conscience’. He wrote that,

Shal neither kyng, ne knight, constable ne miere
Over[carke] the commune ne to the court sompne,
Ne putte hem in panel to doon hem plighte hir truthe;
But after the dede that is doo noon doom shal rewarde
Mercy or no mercy as Truthe [moot] accorde

Kynges court and commune court, consistorie and chapitle –
al shal be but oon court, and oon baron be justice:
That worth Trewe-tonge, a tidy man that tened me nevere
(B-Text, Passus III. 315-22)

Langland’s extract presents the ideal legal setting, indicative of the expected social contracts and obligations of those who offered justice. Included here as a mediator of justice was the ‘meire’ (315). *Piers Plowman*, a text specific to London, placed particular

⁵² *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, p. 225.

⁵³ ‘isheuen (v.)’, *MED*.

⁵⁴ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, pp. 157-158, I have quoted from p. 161.

responsibilities on the City's leading civic officer, making the notable observation that the Mayor could not act without 'Truthe' and 'Conscience' (who was part of Truthe's 'counseil' (B-Text, Passus II. 139) – the innate God-given sense of natural justice – if he was to govern well and properly. Conscience, in the way that Langland used it, and as explored in Dennis R. Klinck's comment on the text, was 'something that [was] necessary so that the law itself shall go aright'.⁵⁵ Not only did the allegorical figure of 'Conscience' guide the King in order for him to govern well, as argued by Klinck, but also directed the Mayor and other judicial figures to do the same. This seemed to mirror social practice. We know that by the fourteenth century, the Mayor had additional powers in the form of '[remedying] injustices "in conscience" (later in equity) where strict law or custom could not do so'.⁵⁶ This was probably the result of the 'inflexibility of the Husting compared to other city courts' whose plaintiffs, due to the lack of an efficient compromise or desperation over the situation, began to have their complaints heard in the Mayor's Court.⁵⁷ These incidents have led Penny Tucker to believe that it was these 'types of pressures which were to lead to the development of the Mayor's Court as a court of conscience'.⁵⁸ The Mayor's Court, therefore, appeared to be imitating very closely the role of the Court of Chancery, having formed in the later fourteenth century when paths to legal redress were unavailable and, as a consequence, was recognised as 'the Court of the King's conscience'.⁵⁹ It is also curious that, dating-wise, this development happened simultaneously, although Tucker has recognised that '[i]n some shape or form, this [The Mayor's Court] power had no doubt been in existence for as long as the mayoralty had

⁵⁵ Dennis R. Klinck, *Conscience, Equity and the Court of Chancery in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010), p. 19.

⁵⁶ Penny Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers in the City of London, 1300-1550* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 113.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ For the dating of the Court of Chancery see Klinck, *Conscience, Equity and the Court of Chancery*, p. 13 and Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death, 1348-1381* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 130-131. For the first use of 'conscience' in relation to the Chancery see J. L. Barton, 'Equity in the Medieval Common Law' in *Equity in The World's Legal Systems* ed. Ralph A. Newman (Brussels: Bruyant, 1973), p. 146.

been'.⁶⁰ The parallels we see between the Court of Chancery and the Mayor's Court afforded the Mayor significant latitude. Keeping this in mind, we can start to imagine why the Mayor's Court was an appropriate space to deal with Northampton and any other matters relating to him. If the Mayor, Brembre, was to act with 'Conscience' in mind, he would be acting with the full force of the law to counteract any member of society who behaved unlawfully, disturbing the harmony and peace of the City. In doing so, the Mayor's Court was a useful space in which to quash his enemies and re-establish his own authority whilst maintaining this appearance that he was working with common profit principles in mind.

With the exception of Tucker's magisterial work on the courts of medieval and early modern London, studies on the Mayor's Court, and the records produced within this institution, have been lacking.⁶¹ As outlined earlier in this chapter, the treatment that the Plea and Memoranda Rolls have received so far has not focused on what these sources can tell us about standards and ideologies within the city of London. In thinking about how these records are reflective of London principles, it is also of value to consider how they reveal ways in which social relations within society were managed, particularly in regards to upholding harmony within the City. Controlling social relations was essential to the wellbeing of London and ensured that civic practices, as well as the peace of the City more generally, were not disrupted.⁶²

There was no better tool to do this than the law. Courtrooms were representative of both legal and moral authority, dealing with and responding to disputes in a manner which maintained good order in society.⁶³ Proper and just government was not only conceived of in terms of virtuous individuals but, also, effectual and competent establishments.⁶⁴ This notion extended to the Mayor's Court in which we have seen that city ideals were drawn

⁶⁰ Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers*, p. 113.

⁶¹ Ibid; Paul Brand, Review of Tucker, Penny, *Law Courts and Lawyers in the City of London, 1300-1550* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 438.

⁶² Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 11.

⁶³ Thomas, 'Piers Plowman, Legal Authority and the Law of Subject Status', p. 104.

⁶⁴ Rigby and Ewan, 'Government, power and authority 1300-1540', p. 308.

upon to maintain a civic culture in which the common good and prosperity of the City's inhabitants were protected. Brembre, as Mayor, should have had a strong commitment to Londoners and carried with him legal authority, having the influence to suppress recalcitrant offenders, especially those like Northampton, More, Norbury and Essex who presented a direct menace upon his own well-being and position.

Civic officials, like those presiding over courts at Westminster, were meant to fortify social dynamics and remain steadfast in their duty and responsibility to the body politic. The Mayor, as shown by Hanawalt, 'arbitrated disputes, represented the city in the realm and with the King, and generally oversaw the smooth running of the City'.⁶⁵ This man was the primary figure in London governance, so much so, that Hanawalt argued that the hierarchical nature of Carpenter's *Liber Albus* reflected this very fact, with the structure of his book being interpreted as a 'metaphor for government [as] a body politic with the Mayor as head'.⁶⁶ Carpenter's text offered this recognition of the Mayor as head of London society and as having a responsibility to hold all aspects of governance in check, including justice and legal conventions. The Mayor governed the City by enforcing the powers of his jurisdiction, which extended across all official institutions and courts that he presided over, including the Court of Aldermen. The Mayor's Court was one of nine courts within the Guildhall and was given particular importance by Tucker, who categorised the Mayor's Court as one of the major courts within the City, 'that is, a court which "belonged" to the city, was peculiar to it, and over which it had control'.⁶⁷ The Mayor's Court, therefore, was a court of law which dealt with matters that were particular to London.

⁶⁵ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 17. On the mayor as an arbitrator of justice see Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 153.

⁶⁶ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 58; Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 288.

⁶⁷ *A Survey of London Written in the Year 1598 by John Stow* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 237-238; Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers*, pp. 84, 87. Barron also comments on the status of the Mayor's Court, informing readers that the court 'rapidly became a member of the triumvirate of city courts', Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 154.

Despite being an ancillary court prior to 1300, during the later Middle Ages the power of the Mayor's Court grew, developing in such a way in order to meet the judicial needs of an increasingly commercial community.⁶⁸ By the fifteenth century, the Mayor's Court had taken on a new sense of importance and was the first point of call in receiving personal pleas.⁶⁹ In particular, Tucker has placed importance on the development of the Mayor's Court and legal administration within London during the later fourteenth century as the result of the City's friction with both Richard II and John of Gaunt, the King's uncle, during the 1380s and 1390s.⁷⁰

Because the dispute between Richard II and his uncle John of Gaunt was part of the wider rivalry between their respective supporters, Northampton and Brembre, it is possible that the development of the Mayor's Court was partly driven by this dispute. Furthermore, the increase in power of the Mayor's Court was a phenomenon which occurred alongside the development of the Mayor as a figure to whom, as we have seen, citizens looked for remedy.⁷¹ By the mayoralities of both Northampton and Brembre, therefore, the authority and juridical powers of mayors had been established. Both individuals would have been aware of their rights and influence as leading figures within the City, and it would be reasonable to assume that this would have very much been the case in the setting of the Mayor's Court which, as we have seen, represented good and proper justice. In examining entries written within the Plea and Memoranda Rolls under Brembre between 1384 and 1386, we can see Brembre's awareness of safeguarding his mayoral authority and how he used the legal powers and privileges as mayor, and status of the Mayor's Court as an institution of justice, to do so. He was able to justify his standpoint by drawing on notions of common profit, mainly good governance, the peace of the City and populace, and the

⁶⁸ Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers*, pp. 99, 118; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 154.

⁶⁹ Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers*, p. 111. On the development of the Mayor's Court, see Williams, *Medieval London*, p. 83.

⁷⁰ Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers*, p. 119.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

traditional relationship between ruler and ruled, which will be considered in the rest of this chapter.

**‘feuront en deffaute de Johān Norhampton’: Consequences of dissension, division
and disunity**

The Mayor’s Court, as has been demonstrated, dealt with a range of activities but its main purpose was regulatory. This court controlled economic and trade concerns such as prices and weights, as well as guardianship, inheritance and apprenticeship. Yet the court also managed and oversaw cases like ‘major disturbances, insubordination to the city’s governors and misconduct by city officers’.⁷² The next three sections of this chapter are concerned with this latter function, specifically the commotion and disturbance of 1380s London and how these were treated by Brembre within the context of the Mayor’s Court and office. The first entry within the Plea and Memoranda Roll covering the period 1384 to 1386 plunges readers head first into Brembre’s tempestuous mayoralty. The first account within the roll narrated that William Mayhew, a grocer, criticised the administration of city governance by both the Mayor and Aldermen, using the example of ‘Johanes Constantyn Cordwaner qui nuper decollatus fuit in Chepe pro insurrectione’ to justify his point of view, as well as stating that more generally the City was badly ruled.⁷³ In response to his actions against a civic leader, it was judged that Mayhew should be imprisoned for the length of a year commencing on 18th May. Mayhew’s criticisms were considered as ‘false et maliciouse’, causing the ‘dedecus et obroprium maioris aldermannorum et aliorum gubernatorem dicte Ciuitatis expresses sonabant’.⁷⁴ This attack on the character of the Mayor and his civic administrators was a criticism of their

⁷² Ibid, p. 99.

⁷³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 1 (John Constantyn, Cordwainer, who was recently beheaded in Cheapside for insurrection); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 50. Thomas’s edition of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls have been consulted for translations and, unless otherwise stated, translations used are cited from his text. Unless otherwise stated translations of these records are taken from this volume. Transcription and translation of the source is also available in Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 487-490.

⁷⁴ LMA, CLA/024/02/028, membr. 1 (false and malicious), (shame and disgrace of the mayor, aldermen and other governors of the said city). Ellis’s translation has been consulted, Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 489. See Reynolds, ‘Medieval urban history’, 15 for more on criticism on governance from communities.

reputations and skills as leaders, calling into question their ability to govern effectively. Yet despite this, ‘ex gratia dicti maioris et ad requisicionem plurimorum aldormannorum et aliorum proborum hominum’ Mayhew was shown mercy and instead mainprised by Adam de St Ives and Henry Perot for his good conduct towards individuals, including the King, rather than face imprisonment.⁷⁵ This rested on the condition that Mayhew would speak no bad words against Brembre and thus served to ensure the smooth running of governance whilst providing assurance that Brembre’s power remained untainted and unquestioned.

Furthermore, the first account on membrane two, for example, described that ‘[e]n presence des quex mair Aldermans et Comunes purce qe plusours rumours couynes congregacions et affrays sunt este en la dite Cite puis le temps qe le dite monseignour Nichol feut eslieux al office’.⁷⁶ On the same membrane, it was recorded that the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council gathered because ‘lungement ad este et vnqore est discencioun et diuisioun en la dite Cite entre plusours gentz dicelle dount grant mal et peril ent purroient soudre en destruccioun et parte sibien de mesme la Citee come de tout le roialme’.⁷⁷ These are prominent examples of actions that threatened the stability of civic governance and, by extension, the City’s chances to prosper. As readers learn from Thomas Walsingham, the actions of Northampton and his allies were ‘to the terror of the peace-loving masses’.⁷⁸ Challenges posed by Northampton’s supporters were thus widespread and posed a threat to civic governance under Brembre and the security of London.

⁷⁵ LMA, CLA/024/02/028, membr. 1 (by the mayor’s favour and at the request of several aldermen and other good men). Ellis’s translation has been consulted, Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 489. For more on Mayhew see Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ LMA, CLA/024/02/028, membr. 2. (In the presence of which the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council because many rumours, covins, congregacions and affrays took place in the City since the time that Sir Nicholas had been elected into office as mayor). This is my own translation as Thomas’s edition leaves out the first part of this extract.

⁷⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (lately and even now there had been dissension and division in the said City between many men). This is my own translation.

⁷⁸ *Chronica Maiora*, p. 214.

Tied up with issues of governance in London was the governance of the realm; this was not a localised problem but one that had wider implications for national governance. Principles of common profit were thus at risk on a much grander scale. Both examples also show that the root cause of the disunity that followed the election in October 1383 was Northampton. The first description given on membrane two confirmed that those gathered in Council, which included representatives from twenty-three of the City's twenty-five wards, the Aldermen, as well as the Mayor himself, Brembre, were of general consensus, asserting that,

touz les ditz rumours couynes congregacions et affrays susditz feuront en deffaute de Johan Norhamptoun nadgair ^mair^ de mesme la Cite et pur lui feuront faitz puis qi le dit monseignour Nichol feut eslieux al office susdite et puis qi le dit Johan Norhamptoun feut discharge du dit office.⁷⁹

Northampton's unruly and contemptuous behaviour was aligned with the disturbances that had broken out in the City. The entry is also specific in determining exactly when disgruntlement and restlessness emerged in London, underlining that it was during the shift between Northampton and Brembre's mayoralties when tribulations within London erupted. Furthermore, the final line in this entry narrated that '[e]t qi mesme celi Johan Norhamptoun feut cause des <ou>z les rumours couynes congregacions et affraitz suis

⁷⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (all the said rumours, covins, congregations and affrays were made by default of John Northampton, lately mayor of the said City, and had been made by him ever since he had been discharged from his office and Sir Nicholas Brembre had been chosen to that office); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 54. I have borrowed from Thomas's translation yet replaced the word 'disturbances', which Thomas uses to summarise the dissensions and divisions which Northampton has caused, with 'rumours, covins, congregations and affrays' to add to the specificity of Northampton's misdemeanours against Brembre and the City. For meaning and importance attributed to these terms during Brembre's mayoralty see chapter three. From the remnants of the Jubilee Book, recorded within Trinity College Cambridge, MS O 3 11, we see that the gathering of these individuals within the Mayor's Court is standard practice. The oath of the Mayor included in this text is demonstrative of this, detailing that '[a]lso that the maire hold his general court so alwey as hath bien vsed the moneday next after the feste of the Epiphany At which Court shalbe al the Aldermen and Shereves present and the ministers of every warde if they have ne no veray excusacioun', see TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 137r. Aldermen present at this meeting were: 'monseignour William Walworth', 'Johan Hadle', 'Thomas Cornwaleys', 'Johan Hende', 'Johan Sely', 'Adam Bamme', 'Hughe Fastolf', 'Johan Chircheman', 'Johan Organ', 'Richard Prestoun', 'William Staundoun', 'Adam de Seint Iue', 'Geffrei Cremelford', 'William More', 'Thomas Welford', 'Johan Estoun', 'William Ancroft' and 'Roger Elys'.

ditz'.⁸⁰ That the same offence is linked to Northampton and repeated at the end of the record is telling. Those gathered agreed that Northampton was the prime reason for the formation of these wicked gatherings. In portraying Northampton as the instigator of disruption within the City, the authors of the record implied that rather than working alongside civic governors to maintain the peace of the City, he was more concerned for his own self-interest rather than working towards the common profit.

On the same membrane additional evidence has been included detailing what 'la cause et racyne des ditz discencioun et diuisioun' was.⁸¹ In this extract, members representing the wards in London, the recorder, 'William Cheyne', and Aldermen of London, and the Mayor, Brembre gathered as they 'desirantz pees tranquillite accord vnite et quiete estre entre le poeple'.⁸² It was made clear that the main concerns of Brembre and civic leaders present was preserving unanimity within London. In this official space of justice, these individuals discussed what course of action would be best to ensure that good governance was maintained and that appropriate justice was bestowed upon whoever disrupted London custom, life and law. Parallel to the preceding extract, this narrative recounted that the civic officials present agreed that,

est la vie de Johan Norhamptoun car taunt come il serra en vie touz ceux de sa
couine espoirent qil reuendra ala dite Citee et en ce confortount autres per qie
discencioun est et touz iours serra tant come il est viuant.⁸³

⁸⁰ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (And that the said John Northampton was the cause of all the rumours, covins, congregations and affrays abovesaid); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 54. I have replaced Thomas's 'disturbances' with 'the rumours, covins, congregations and affrays abovesaid' to add specificity to the accusation made against Northampton.

⁸¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (the cause and reason for the said dissension and division). This is my own translation.

⁸² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (desiring peace, tranquility, accord, unity and quiet among the people); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 55. The Aldermen present at this meeting were: 'Johan Hadle', 'Johan Boseham', 'Robert Warbultoun', 'Henri Vannere', 'Johan Hende', 'Adam Seint Iue', 'William More', 'Nicholas Exstone', 'Johan ffresshe', 'Johan Rote', 'Roger Elys', 'Johan ffraunceis', 'Thomas Welford', 'William Staundoun', and 'Simond Wynchecombe'.

⁸³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (it was the life of John Northampton, for so long as he remained alive all those that were of his own coven hoped that he would return to the city and by this hope they comforted others, whereby dissension arose and would always continue so long as he lived); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 56.

Northampton's accountability is made obvious here and the clerk responsible for copying this made sure that the cause behind the unrest that occurred was not under debate. The long-term impact of Northampton's presence within the City is also discussed, stressing the detrimental effect that his person would have on London and the overall stability that citizens would experience. Like the central government sources discussed at the start of this chapter, these two entries identified Northampton as the instigator of unrest and were thus written within an understanding of certain civic values. The ideas and language used within this legal framework, furthermore, were the product of the circumstances in which Brembre and his allies found themselves. As shown earlier in this chapter in my consideration of Benham, McHaffie and Vogt's scholarship, language utilised within a legal setting could be a product of the environment fostered by and the concepts present within a particular society.⁸⁴ Within the Plea and Memoranda Rolls for Brembre's mayoralty, then, what we see is that the Mayor's Court was used as a space to legitimise one political rival by finding another guilty. The decisions were finalised and enforced by the language, ideologies and the legal structures available to them. The dialogues of which these records were a part, therefore, expose the voices of those in power and the way in which common profit rhetoric was employed within the courtroom. In the first chapter, we saw that the oaths which civic leaders took, Mayor and Aldermen included, required them to work towards maintaining common profit values. In these two examples, we see that decisions regarding Northampton's responsibility in these matters was based on the 'serement qil ad fait ala dite Citee'.⁸⁵ Like civic leaders then, Northampton was also bound by a promise made to the City.

Acting in accordance with civic custom is not explicitly stated here, but in abiding by their oaths, these men maintained the traditional duties of an urban leader. In doing so they determined what was the root of the evil that plagued London, keeping in mind, or at

⁸⁴ Benham, McHaffie and Vogt, 'Introduction', p. 1.

⁸⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 2 (the oath which he had made to the said City); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, pp. 54, 56.

least being seen as keeping in mind, unity, concord and harmony – all aspects of common profit rhetoric – within the City.⁸⁶ The wider interests of London citizens and livelihood of the City were thus deeply embedded within these decisions. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, Northampton's story permeated several records produced during the later fourteenth century yet only the records preserved within the Plea and Memoranda Rolls give an idea of the intricacies behind Brembre's decision making and the justification behind his actions against Northampton.

A grant 'for the peace and tranquillity of the city' was given to Brembre in September 1384 and the commonalty of London by the King, the main purpose of which was '[f]or the strengthening of good government in the city and for the punishment of rioters and those who [were] guilty of such assemblies, congregations, covins or insurrections'.⁸⁷ Yet again we see echoes of the responsibility and duty expected of both the mayor and civic officials in managing the insurrection of Northampton, More and Norbury, who not only acted against 'the king's peace' but also 'the governors of the city and its government'.⁸⁸ The duties placed on these individuals is also a comment on their influence and ability to administer justice, as well as peace within the City, particularly because 'this grant [was] to remain in force without revocation'.⁸⁹ Concord and reconciliation within London was the central aim for the City's civic officials who needed to rejuvenate and bring harmony to the City, as well as the King who used it as a tool of legitimation. From this we can see how the rhetoric of common profit could be used to justify the elimination of a political rival.

This is made obvious in the mainprise of Northampton, who on 22nd January 1384 appeared before Brembre and the Aldermen 'in mansione eiusdem maioris' in the parish of Saint Michael Paternosterchirche in London.⁹⁰ Here he was mainprised by John More and

⁸⁶ *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 56.

⁸⁷ *CPR, Richard II: 1381-84*, p. 464.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (in the Mayor's house); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57.

Simon Wynchecombe, ‘vicecomites Londoniensis’, and men from his own guild, the drapers, John Toures, William Eriote, Thomas Lyncolle, Richard Brendewode and William Rule.⁹¹ By mainprising Northampton, Brembre forced him to enter a legally binding agreement, alongside his mainpernors, individuals who were legally obligated to ensure that the accused attended court. This was a bond which not only Northampton but, also, his mainpernors entered and was one in which the heavy ‘sub pena’ of ‘quinque milliarum librarum’ would be incurred if broken.⁹² Northampton’s trial reveals the anxieties Brembre felt about Northampton’s political position in the City. We know that Northampton responded aggressively to the loss of the mayoralty in October 1383, threatening Richard Odyham, the City’s Chamberlain, and John Yorke, in addition to forming unlawful gatherings in places like the Goldsmiths’ hall, churches and friaries, where he intended to ‘stir up people to rebel against Brembre’.⁹³ Northampton, as we know, broke his promise made before Brembre and other prominent civic leaders which led to his arrest on 7th February 1384.

Values of civil society saturate this entry and, for the most part, emphasis is placed on the fact that peace in the City must be maintained. The entry recounted that,

nullam couinam conuenti culam alligacionem seu contregacionem palam vel occulte per se nec alios eius procuracione aut aliquod aliud quodcumque opere vel sermone faciet vel fieri procurabit. Per quod rumor perturbatio commocio vel affraimentum infra libertatem Ciuitatis predictae quo quo modo oriri vel euenire poterit in perturbacionem pacis.⁹⁴

⁹¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr 3; *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57.

⁹² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr 3. The penalty amassed to £5000.

⁹³ Brad Kirkland, ‘The Life Records of John Northampton’ (Unpublished MA thesis, University of York, 2010), pp. 37-38; Bird, *Turbulent London*, p. 82.

⁹⁴ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (not to make or cause to be made any covin, conventicle, league or congregation openly or secretly by himself or by means of others, or any other thing by his means or speech, whereby rumour, disturbance, commotion or affray might in any way arise within the liberty of the city to the disturbance of the peace); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57.

Northampton's offences threatened the liberties of London and the potential impact that his actions could have on this. Northampton's misdoings were specific and there is no vagueness to the discord which he created. The actions taken against him within the Mayor's Court also served the purpose of a deterrent, and he was warned from taking further action both 'palam et occulte'.⁹⁵ Whether concocted openly or secretly, any form of rebellious action was unacceptable if a peaceful polity was to exist. Yet there is a certain duality in the way that this concern is expressed. The wording and ideas ingrained here suggests that the security and safety of the City was at the very heart of this discussion between civic leaders and action taken against Northampton. Simultaneously, however, Brembre and the Aldermen present, were establishing their own positions and status as civic governors. Common profit rhetoric was used in a way that reinforced officials' positions within a turbulent city. To work towards the good of the City, then, was a fundamental tenet of London life and expected of all freemen in the City. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, protecting the good of the City was a key element of civil society. Northampton's actions were a betrayal of this system and social expectancies which the civic elite used to protect and enhance their own position within the confines of what London law would allow them.

The reciprocal relationship between rulers and ruled is also made evident. These records showed that Northampton was instructed to 'quod ipse bene et pacifice se geret domino Regi et populo suo et ministris Ciuitatis Londoniensis et pacem dicti domini Regis tam infra libertatem Ciuitatis Londoniensis quam extra firmiter custodiet et conseruet et obediens erit ministris Ciuitatis predictae'.⁹⁶ Here the traditional reciprocal expectations and relationship between king and subject was extended to civic leaders and their 'subjects'.

⁹⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (publicly and openly); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57. This is my own translation.

⁹⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (to bear himself well and peaceably towards the lord the King and his people and the officers of the city, to preserve the king's peace within the liberty of the city and without, to be obedient to the officers of the said city for the time being and to be); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57. Alterations, however, have been made to Thomas's translation here. I have added in a translation for the term 'bene' which Thomas omitted and have made it clear that the civic officers referred to at the start of this passage, specifically Brembre, the Mayor, and aldermen present.

Furthermore, the extract specified that Northampton was not only to bear himself peaceably towards the ‘domino Regis’ but, also, his ‘populo’.⁹⁷ By including the King’s subjects more broadly in this statement, we see that the notion of mutual reciprocity extended to all members of the body politic, highlighting the role that citizens needed to partake in as a means of ensuring good rule. This sense of hierarchy reflected social beliefs and practices within the medieval polity in terms of who held authority and who was subject to this power. Northampton, in this context, was not Brembre’s equal but his subject, one who needed to abide by established social hierarchy and be ‘obediens’ to the ‘ministris Ciuitatis Londoniensis’.⁹⁸

As a citizen of London, Northampton was supposed to be loyal to his mayor and the expectations which were part of this relationship were explained in greater detail by detailing that ‘si aliquam couinem conuenticulum alligacionem seu congregacionem sciuerit inde premuniet maiorem qui pro tempore fuerit et eas impedit’.⁹⁹ As a citizen of London, Northampton was bound to Brembre by oath; as a freeman of London, Northampton’s civic status and citizenship relied on obeying his governor.¹⁰⁰ He was part of an active community that was supposed to work alongside civic leaders to avoid the types of collusions and disruptions that he himself was accused of causing. This legal setting afforded Brembre the chance to remind Northampton that he too was responsible for implementing preventative measures against disorder that would benefit both civic leaders and the City of London. This interaction reminded Northampton of his legal status

⁹⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (the lord the King), (people); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57.

⁹⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (obedient ... to the ministers of the City of London); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57.

⁹⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3 (if he should discover any such covin, conventicles, allegations and congregations, to reveal the same to and safeguard the mayor for the time being and to prevent it); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 57. I have added in the offences of ‘conventicles, allegations and congregations’ to Thomas’s translation, as well as the additional word ‘safeguard’ as a translation of ‘premuniet’ to emphasise the obligatory nature of the relationship between civic official and citizen of London.

¹⁰⁰ For an outline of oaths and their importance within urban communities see chapter one. For more on urban politics and tensions within urban citizenship, see Christian D. Liddy, ‘“Sir ye be not kyng”: Citizenship and Speech in Late Medieval and Early Modern England’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 60, No.3 (2017), 571-596.

as a citizen of London and all that came with it. Yet again, emphasis was placed on delegitimising a civic rival.

A similar treatment was given to More, Northampton's co-conspirator, who appeared at the Mayor's Court on 13th August 1384 and was also mainprised by members of his guild, the mercers: John Boseham, Robert Warbulton, John Shadeworth and William Shiryngham.¹⁰¹ More and his mainperners were also subjected to a hefty 'sub pena' if More did not appear in court.¹⁰² However, in contrast to Northampton's case, More faced a much heavier penalty than his mainperners if this contractual obligation was ruptured (More was to pay 'quatuor milliarum librarum' and his mainperners 'mille libre').¹⁰³ Despite his presence alongside Northampton and More in *Letter Book H*, the *Calendar of Patent Rolls* and the *Calendar of Close Rolls*, curiously, there is no extant entry for Norbury in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls. This may possibly be, as noted earlier in this chapter, because scribes copied what was available of the Mayor's documents into this roll and were unable to access a record of Norbury's fate at the time they did so. Nevertheless, from the treatment given to Northampton and what we see happen to More, it seems plausible that Norbury was given a similar sentence. The description dealing with More's treatment, whilst not as long as the narrative about Northampton, outlined the same expectations placed upon him as a citizen of London.

As Northampton had been, More was reminded of his allegiance to Brembre and the Aldermen present. There is significant overlap in the wording used, with More being referred to as acting against the 'bene et pacifice' of the 'dominum Regem', his 'populum' and 'ministris Ciuitatis Londoniensis'.¹⁰⁴ Like Northampton, More was to avoid making 'nullam congregacionem couinam conuenticulam alligacionem seu congregacionem palam

¹⁰¹ More was to be mainprised by these individuals until 1st November. Reasons for this dating are unclear.

¹⁰² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v; *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59

¹⁰³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v; *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59. More was to pay a penalty of £4000 and his mainperners £1000 each.

¹⁰⁴ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v; *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59 (the good and peace of the] lord the King [his] people [and] officers of the city of London). This is my own translation.

vel occulte’, as well as ‘rumor perturbacio commocio vel affraimentum’.¹⁰⁵ These actions caused the ‘perturbacionem pacis’ and interfered with public life on a grand scale.¹⁰⁶ The importance of maintaining the appropriate behaviour in the relationship between citizens and civic authorities was reinforced, with More being informed that he was expected to be ‘obediens’ to ‘ministris dicte Ciuitatis’ and ‘si aliquam talem congregacionem couinem conuenticulum alligacionem seu congregacionem sciuerit inde premuniet maiorem qui pro tempore fuerit’.¹⁰⁷ As we saw, citizens of London had obligations which included maintaining a rapport with the Mayor, in turn this worked towards safeguarding the Mayor’s own authority and concomitant ability to protect the citizens. This particular entry goes further, stressing the need to ‘pacificabit’ for the ‘dictis maiore et aldermannis vel eorum successoribus’.¹⁰⁸ This was not just a temporary effort to restore the peace but an action by Brembre that would establish the longevity of peaceful conduct and preserve the good of the London populace for his own successors in office. His clerks employed contractual language seen across other records, like treaties and land exchanges, which was used as a measure to maintain power. The formulaic language in these records may have been utilised for speed and constructing legitimacy through following proper precedents and form, but the ideas incorporated and concerns at the heart of these records, the good governance and the peace of the City, reflected issues of common profit ideology. In framing his responses to both Northampton and More around the peace and common profit of the City, Brembre used political ideas and this legal establishment to appear as acting for the communal good. At the most basic level,

¹⁰⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v; *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59. (not to make or cause to be made any covin, conventicle, league or congregation openly or secretly) and (rumour, disturbances, commotions and even affrays). I have added in the specific crimes of conventicles, allegations and congregations. The latter is my own translation.

¹⁰⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v (disturbance of the peace); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v (if he should discover any such covin, conventicles, allegations and congregations, to reveal the same to and safeguard the mayor for the time being and to prevent it); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59. I have expanded Thomas’s translation by including the specific crimes as opposed to providing a summary under a single term.

¹⁰⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 3v. (make peace [with] ... the said mayor and aldermen and even their successors); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 59. This is my own translation.

Northampton and More were political beings who were part of a wider body of individuals who needed to be reminded of their subservience to their civic leaders.

These descriptions are indicative of how political and social relationships were negotiated and controlled within the legal structures of the Mayor's Court, emphasising the wrongs these individuals had specifically done within the context of the City's liberties and wellbeing. In defining political relationships, we get a window into the mentalities of these individuals and their need to maintain power. Northampton and More's quests for enhancing their own personal profits and agenda within the City was seen as duplicitous and disloyal to the communal values that London stood for. In causing insurrection on London's streets and infringing the liberties of the City, both Northampton and More had also disrupted civic governance. Ideas of common profit within medieval society may not have stopped these infractions from occurring but by infusing this ideology within records showing responses to infraction, the leading faction could be shown as having acted with the City's interests in mind.¹⁰⁹

The Guildhall Affray of 1384

So far this chapter has examined Northampton and More's rebellious behaviour against Brembre and the effect that this had on civic governance and the peace of the City. In this section, similar ideas are considered but in light of where this took place, the Guildhall, and what Brembre did when 'the place of government' had been disturbed.¹¹⁰ Northampton and More had not been alone in outwardly defying the power of Brembre and his associates, whose interests were conceived of being diametrically opposed to their own. Individuals linked to Northampton and belonging to multiple artisanal guilds in London openly showed their discontent of Brembre's mayoralty, by causing commotion at

¹⁰⁹ On the common good and quarrels in medieval London see Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ For the significance of spaces like the Guildhall, as well as streets and courts, and the symbolic relationship between these spaces and the influence of civic leaders in medieval cities see M. C. Howell, 'The Spaces of Late Medieval Urbanity' in *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe* ed. M. Boone and P. Stabel (Leuven: Brill, 2000), p. 18; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 66.

the mayoral election held at the Guildhall in October 1384. The election of the Mayor was one of many civic rituals that were key elements with civic structures and of importance in maintaining order and stability within the City.¹¹¹ ‘Urban elections [however] were often controversial events’, and the tensions that emerged in 1384 were treated with seriousness, particularly because of the threat this posed to established hierarchies.¹¹² Such interactions within urban spaces, the Guildhall included, also had the potential to cause friction between citizens.¹¹³ For this reason, it was fundamental to protect and manage these spaces, policing those who made these places and institutions sites of political instability and polemical disputes.

Mayoral elections were official mechanisms used to authenticate civic power.¹¹⁴ In rising against Brembre, allies of Northampton disturbed tradition and custom, disrupting a ceremony that encapsulated ideas of good and proper conduct within the City. With this in mind, this section considers a set of entries regarding artisans who disrupted the mayoral election of October 1384, briefly considering Brembre’s treatment of them and, more importantly, how civic governance was undermined by their actions. Their lawlessness and violation of the mayoral election is particularly pronounced given the traditional proclamation made on the eve of the translation of St Edward, the night before the mayoral election, which,

[forbid] any one to attend elections in the City except the Mayor, Aldermen, and good folk elected from the Wards to serve as a Common Council and others who shall be summoned from the Wards by advice of the said Mayor

¹¹¹ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 162.

¹¹² Matthew Davies, ‘The tailors of London and their guild, 1300-1500’ (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1994), p. 87.

¹¹³ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp. 56-57.

¹¹⁴ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 59.

and Aldermen, on pain of imprisonment, forfeiture of goods, and loss of franchise.¹¹⁵

Prohibiting those who had not been summoned from attending the mayoral election had a long precedent and what this measure did was make it illegal for anyone to disrupt this civic ceremony.¹¹⁶ The phrase ‘good folk’ is particularly noteworthy, signifying that only those deemed as worthy and of virtuous character were allowed to attend this event. Exclusivity is made explicit in this entry, highlighting that attendees were selected by the dominant civic power. A proclamation of this sort, albeit with some variation, was delivered on the eve of Brembre’s mayoral election in October 1384, ‘throughout the liberty of the city of London’ by order of the Mayor and Aldermen, as well as on behalf of Richard II, by his writ. The proclamation announced,

that no one of whatsoever rank or condition should go armed or wearing breastplate or jack, or should lead an armed force against the king's peace, nor that any one should go to the election of the mayor and sheriffs, except the mayor, aldermen, sheriffs and good men of the wards summoned thereto, under penalty of imprisonment and forfeiture of all that he might forfeit to the king, and under penalty of losing the freedom of the city.¹¹⁷

Like the proclamation highlighted in Carpenter’s *Liber Albus*, the proclamation made before Brembre’s 1384 election was specific in the kind of behaviour that would not be tolerated in order to ensure that the election of the Mayor would proceed according to civic

¹¹⁵ *LBH*, p. 251.

¹¹⁶ *Liber Albus*, p. 17. Carpenter stated that ‘because it would frequently happen that, upon the day of such election, the populace who had not been summoned rushed into the Guildhall, the Mayor and Aldermen, sometimes upon the strength of their own official authority – as set forth in the ordinances entered in the last folio of Book F – and sometimes upon that of a royal writ, caused proclamation to be made throughout the City upon the Vigil of such day of Saint Edward, that no one should appear, under a heavy penalty, at the Guildhall during the election on the morrow, unless specially summoned thereto; as set forth in Book D, folio 3, Book E, folio 41, and Book G, folio 254’.

¹¹⁷ *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 62.

practice. Central to this message was proper conduct of an ancient civic ritual, as well as the King's peace – components key to the maintenance of the wider common profit of the London polity. Those acting contrary to the proclamation would face punishment and, more drastically, the loss of their rights as a citizen of London.

The reason for taking this action was highlighted by Carpenter in the *Liber Albus*, who demonstrated that,

[a]t Elections of the Mayor and Sheriffs, because in ancient times a vast multitude used to resort to the Guildhall – seeing too that, as the Wise Man bears witness in the 26th Chapter of Ecclesiasticus, a gathering together of the multitude is a thing to be feared, because in such case riots and tumults may readily occur, - the Mayor and Aldermen were wont for some days before the day for electing the Mayor, and the Sheriffs as well, - as indeed they are still in the habit of doing, - to meet together and discuss how such election might be made in a peaceable manner, and without tumult or outbreak of the populace. For which purpose, they nominated the more discreet and more sufficient citizens of each Ward, in such number as to them seemed requisite, and had them summoned by name to be present at the election of the mayor and on the day of Saint Edward, the King and Confessor.¹¹⁸

At the heart of this was good and peaceful governance, in which ‘the populace’ were controlled and tradition maintained without any major interferences. As shown by Carpenter, there was a precedent for mayors to take such action yet Brembre appears to have utilised this civic ordinance to curtail the actions of his opponents. Ironically, however, this civic ordinance was aimed at preventing exactly the kind of force used by

¹¹⁸ *Liber Albus*, p. 17.

Brembre himself in the mayoral election of 1383 during which he was elected.¹¹⁹

Mayoral elections were a time in the year during which ‘all citizens insisted upon their entitlement to speak’ yet this chance was removed from London’s citizens in October 1384, for we see that Brembre intended to remove any action that could ‘[produce] a clamorous urban politics’.¹²⁰

Therefore, in historically taking place at the Guildhall, mayoral elections were given legitimacy by the very fact that they were held at an institution that was infused with civic power; an encroachment on the election of the Mayor was an encroachment on the supremacy that the Guildhall represented.¹²¹ Status and authority were thus intrinsically linked up in this matter. Political spaces, like the Guildhall, ‘conferred status on their occupants – and denied it to those they excluded’.¹²² Brembre’s authority and status, as the leading civic figure, had been jeopardised by the interruption and violence caused by figures who were not included within this civic ceremony. As explored in the introductory chapter, the way in which urban spaces were conceived of affected how the rights, capabilities and identity of an individual were imagined. Martha C. Howell, in particular, has identified how central this concept was to late medieval urban communities, for whom ‘urban rights, privileges, and duties were defined and given force ... [establishing] legitimacy’ for activities in these sites and those who were bound to them.¹²³ Brembre’s election was only able to proceed once ‘the storm had subsided’ and ‘any disorderly persons he [Brembre] might find should be clapped in irons at Newgate for a time as an example to others’.¹²⁴ Wendy Scase demonstrated how clamour of the people could be

¹¹⁹ This is one of the major criticisms made against Brembre in the 1388 Guild Petitions, which are explored in chapter four.

¹²⁰ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 101.

¹²¹ Caroline M. Barron, *The Medieval Guildhall of London* (London: Corporation of London, 1974), p. 24.

¹²² Howell, ‘The Spaces of Late Medieval Urbanity’, p. 9.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹²⁴ *WC*, p. 103.

used to justify complaints against a particular individual due to its political force.¹²⁵ In taking actions to suppress those who could speak out against him, we see Brembre's awareness of the political force of public clamour.

Those present at Brembre's election were meant to include the Mayor, the Aldermen, Sheriffs and 'good men of the wards', in addition to more prominent figures like 'Lord de Nevyll, Lord Fitz Wauter and Thomas Moreux, knights, who were sent by order of the king and his council'.¹²⁶ They were joined by a crowd made up of several artisanal guilds across the City, who gathered at the Guildhall and were presented as the antithesis to these individuals. They were described in the Plea and Memoranda Roll as 'being banded together in a great congregation and assembled in Guildhall' and causing 'a great clamour and outcry to the great affray of the mayor, aldermen and commonalty and against the proclamation made in the city'.¹²⁷ Terms like 'congregation', 'clamour', 'outcry' and 'great affray' all carried with them negative connotations and were used across the descriptions which follow in this section to denote actions that infringed upon good governance under Brembre; as mayor he could not proceed with efficient governance under these circumstances.

By describing 'these offences [as] having been committed as well against the king as the mayor, aldermen and sheriffs', those at the centre of power constructed an identity for the rioters as a collective who threatened vital figures who were in charge of protecting the common good and profit of London and the wider realm.¹²⁸ It is not surprising then that Brembre acted against those who rioted at the 1384 election. The number of individuals, totalling eighty-seven artisans, who appeared at court as a result of the Guildhall affray in 1384 is reflective of this. Brembre acted decisively and strategically in order to maintain political authority, using legal measures, specifically the actions of bail and mainprise, as a

¹²⁵ Wendy Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England 1271-1553* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 62-77. We see that Scase discusses clamour of the people in relation to Brembre through a discussion of the 1388 Guild Petitions.

¹²⁶ *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 62.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

means of controlling Northampton's allies. In doing so, Brembre's administration released those in their custody based on the surety that they would appear back in the Mayor's Court for trial. The way in which this process worked is explored, for example, in *The Tale of Gamelyn*. Gamelyn, 'kyng of outlawes' (695), protested against being accused of outlawry before his eldest brother, the sheriff, when he 'com boldelych. into þe moot-halle' (717) yet was 'atte last/ ... cast into prisoun' (726) when his protest failed to remain imprisoned 'til þe iustice come' (742).¹²⁹ Sir Ote, knight and middle brother of Gamelyn, pleaded with their eldest brother, exclaiming that,

"I bidde him to maynpris. Pat þou graunt him me
Til þe nexte sitting. of delyueraunce,
And thane lat Gamelyn. stande to his chaunce" (744-746)

Whilst the terms 'mainprise' and 'bail' carried their own idiosyncrasies, Edgar F. Shannon Jr. has shown that they have 'apparently no distinction' in this occurrence.¹³⁰ Within the Plea and Memoranda Rolls the terms are used interchangeably and describes a process which placed the mainpernors under obligation to ensure miscreants attended the court.

In entries explored earlier in this chapter, including that of Mayhew, Northampton, and More, mainprising was employed as a form of punishment. Hanawalt has demonstrated that in the case of mainprising, '[p]unishment was reduced to a bond to be paid if the man offended again, and he had to produce sureties for his good behaviour'.¹³¹ In contrast to the extracts on Northampton, More and Mayhew, however, the following extracts are less detailed and the fines were set at a lower value.

¹²⁹ All quotations from *The Tale of Gamelyn* are cited from *The Middle English Metrical Romances* ed. W. H. French and C. B. Hale (New York, 1930 repr. 1964).

¹³⁰ Edgar F. Shannon Jr., 'Mediaeval Law in the *Tale of Gamelyn*', *Speculum*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul., 1951), 460. Also see Angela M. Lucas, 'Fair Play, Justice and the Law in "The Tale of Gamelyn"', *The Maynooth Review/Reviú Mhá Nuad*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Dec., 1979), 47.

¹³¹ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, pp. 3-4.

Several of these entries specified who was under scrutiny, their occupation, their mainpernors, usually succeeding the phrases ‘manu captus est’ or ‘in ballam’ and, occasionally, followed by ‘corpus pro corpore’, the occupation of their mainpernors, the penalty to be paid if they did not appear for court and the date of the entry. In particular what we learn from these entries is that the mainpernors of those tried were frequently members of their own guilds. Overall, entries regarding the Guildhall affray of 1384 are short, concise and generally formulaic. Some of these accounts, however, are much more detailed and raise issues related to the governance and wellbeing of the City, from both the perspective of the individual being scrutinised and from the individuals who determined the terms of bail and mainprise. This chapter shows how issues relating to common profit ideology and civic governance were used within the context of the Mayor’s Court to undermine the legitimacy of Northampton’s supporters and to re-invigorate the political authority of Brembre following the Guildhall riot. This will be examined through analysing the narratives concerning the rioters behaviour, in which we see how political voices were mediated by the clerks recording these trials.

The cordwainer John Remes, for example, who was examined by the Mayor and Aldermen on 2nd March 1385, admitted that at ‘vltimum parliamentum tentre apud Westmonasteri publice ^{^dixit^} quod numquam foret quies nec requies in Ciuitate londoniensis quousque finis factus fuisset de Nicholai Brembre nunc maiore’.¹³² In making this statement, Remes focused on the conditions of London, in particular the ‘quies’ and ‘requies’ of the City, making a direct connection between this and Brembre’s mayoralty. The implication here was that Brembre’s style of governance was behind the current atmosphere in the City, taking away legitimacy from his capability to govern London efficiently. What Remes gives us is a city that would continue to suffer until the cause of discontent had been eradicated.

¹³² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (at the last parliament held near Westminster publicly said that there would never be any quiet or rest in the city until an end had been made of Nicholas Brembre, now mayor); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 60.

The official version of events that was expounded by those in power, however, reversed the perspective given by Remes. For example, John Lyncolle and Robert Fraunceys, both goldsmiths, made similar confessions in which they acknowledged that their improper conduct had ‘reprobrant et retardant’ civic governance.¹³³ Their misconduct went further. Both Lyncolle and Fraunceys were guilty of doing this ‘in perturbacionem pacis domini Regis et contra sacrum suum’.¹³⁴ As seen in chapter one, taking an oath was a vital part of being a citizen and breaking it incurred severe consequences. In renouncing their oaths both individuals violated a key aspect of urban citizenship, breaking the bond between freemen and civic leaders. They also disturbed the expected relationship between king and subject. Every action they took thus disrupted societal expectations and any sense of cohesion that would result in the common profit of the City.

Lyncolle and Fraunceys, especially, were prominent participants in Northampton’s feud with Brembre, even receiving attention in Usk’s *Appeal*.¹³⁵ Taken from the perspective of London’s ruling elite, it would have been important to ensure that individuals of significance, like Lyncolle and Fraunceys, were to confess their misdeeds against them. According to the clerks, both individuals admitted that

ipse plures antea [se] male inobediente et indebite se gessit dicto maiori et aliis ministris Ciuitatis et diuersas prosecuciones cum aliis malefactoribus fecit tam in parliamentum et magnatibus quam aliis quampluribus contra dictum

¹³³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (reprobated and retarded); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 61. Quotations used to present their confessions are taken from Lyncolle’s entry. Frauncey’s entry recorded that he was guilty of the same as Lyncolle yet the entry in Thomas’s edition is brief and does not include full details of Fraunceys’ trial.

¹³⁴ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (in disturbance of the king's peace and against his oath); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 61.

¹³⁵ Lyncolle and Fraunceys, along with Usk, were sent to John of Gaunt to inform him that John of Northampton ‘was the beste ma[ir] that euer [was]’, “*Appeal*”, p. 30. Also see *CCR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, pp. 474-475.

maiores specialiter et alios gubernatores [~~predictis~~] eiusdem Ciuitatis et eorum gubernacionem.¹³⁶

Central to this passage was their offence against the Mayor, which, in contrast to ‘alios gubernatores’ was referred to as ‘specialiter’, stressing the great hurt especially done to him. Their aberrant behaviour, alongside other wrongdoers, towards the Mayor and other ministers of the City reversed the expected status quo between citizens of the City and the civic authorities. The acknowledgement by both Lyncolle and Fraunceys of their misdeeds gave London’s leaders the legitimacy needed to establish that they were in fact the ones who had suffered as a result of the Guildhall affray.

Emphasis placed on maintaining the traditional relationship between rulers and ruled is particularly clear in Richard Sturdy’s judgement. Tried on 29th August 1386, Sturdy, a skinner, was sworn to be ‘bonus et fidelis domino Regi et heredibus suis et quod ipse decetero bene et pacifice se geret erga dominum Regem et populum suum et quod erit obediens maior vicicomitibus et alijs ministris’.¹³⁷ The proper functioning of a community depended on keeping strong bonds between all members of a body politic and this example is a reminder of that. In Sturdy’s trial we can see the importance placed on remaining obedient to his rulers, the mayor, sheriffs and ministers of London, and act peaceably towards one’s superiors, especially the King. His onus in dedicating himself to preserving these relationships is stressed during his trial, during which he was, in a sense, made to promise to keep the ‘pacem domini Regis ... pro posse suo fideliter conseruet’.¹³⁸ By adhering to his duty as a freeman of London to keep the King’s peace, Sturdy would have preserved not just the King’s wellbeing but the wider realm’s also.

¹³⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (often been disobedient and had borne himself improperly towards the mayor and other officers of the city and, together with other evildoers, had made divers prosecutions, as well in parliament and before the magnates as before many others, against the mayor in particular and other governors of the city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 61. The word ‘predictis’ has been struck through.

¹³⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 6 (to be good and faithful to the king and his heirs, to behave peaceably towards the king and his people, to be obedient to the mayor, sheriffs and other officers); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 69.

¹³⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 6 (the king's peace and to preserve it faithfully to the best of his power); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 69.

Further connections between a citizen's loyalty and keeping the peace, particularly that belonging to the city of London, can be inferred from the warnings given to Sturdy. He was to avoid 'nullam congregacionem couinem conuenticulum seu alligacionem faciet ... posset qum illud pro posse suo impediet et dictos maiorem et alios ministros inde et premuniet et ad talem congregacionem conuenticulum vel alligacionem non contrahet nec consentiret'.¹³⁹ Yet again we see that citizens were expected to report malicious activities to the Mayor and ministers of the City as a means of impeding those threatening civic authority and governance. The reason given for this in the extract was the potential these kind of activities had in causing 'insurrecioun', 'malum populi' and 'lesionem gubernacionis dicte Ciuitatis'.¹⁴⁰ It was made clear to Sturdy what the antithesis of the common good was, providing a lesson on what caused the detriment of the City.

This showed that the current governors were not at fault for the derelict state of the City and, instead, that it was the deviant behaviour of those behind the Guildhall affray of 1384 that were to blame. Many individuals acted against the Mayor and prominent civic officials, particularly through the form of ill speech. Malicious words and the impact this had on reputation is considered to a greater extent in the following chapter but for our present purposes it is worth emphasising the seriousness with which London rulers took seditious speech. John Remes, for example, returned to the Mayor's Court on 1st August 1385 for 'verbis suis indecentibus dictis de gubernacione Ciuitatis et aliis malefactis'.¹⁴¹ Similarly, seven mercers, John Feraunt, John Cheddar, Richard Guy, John Vyne, Thomas Everard, William Willesdon and John Toke, were delivered by John Boseham and other masters of the Mercers' guild to the Mayor and Aldermen and tried on 22nd October 1384 for similar reasons to Remes. It was noted that these individuals had 'maliciose consueti

¹³⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 6 (to make no congregation coven conventicle or allegation ... but to hinder such congregations conventicle or allegation with his posse and to warn the said mayor and other officers of the city of them); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 69. I have edited Thomas's translation.

¹⁴⁰ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 6 (insurrection), (the harm of the people) and (injury to the government of the city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 69.

¹⁴¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (his indecent words said against the governance of the City and other malefactors); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 61.

sunt loqui de maiore et aldermanis et eorum gubernacione'.¹⁴² This complaint is repeated further in the passage, with the clerk who copied this information writing that they should 'male non loquentur de gubernatoribus Ciuitatis'.¹⁴³

Another group of eleven artisans belonging to the Goldsmiths' guild committed the same offence against the Mayor, the Aldermen and their style of governing and were brought forward by leaders of their 'mistry', John Coraunt and John Somervyll.¹⁴⁴ The language used in this instance is similar to that above, with the point being made that these goldsmiths were 'suspecti et consueti sunt ad male loquend de maiore aldermanis et eorum gubernacione'.¹⁴⁵ Parallel to the mercers, these goldsmiths did not just criticise the person of the Mayor and Aldermen, thereby casting them in an unfavourable light, but the very style of government that emanated from the Guildhall. The reputation of civic leaders may have been important but what was at stake here was the representation of efficient and effective government, the link that bound all citizens together to maintain the common profit. In vilifying the governing skills of those in power, the potential was there to disrupt the smooth running of the polity. It was an idea that could have serious consequences for those in power and in making this a crime aimed specifically at disrupting London governance, which benefitted the wider citizenry, those in power ensured that it was viewed as subverting the normal way of city rule. Moreover, through defining these rulers there was a simultaneous suppression of public expressions of complaint against bad governance.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5 (were accustomed to speaking malicious words about the mayor, aldermen and their government); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 64.

¹⁴³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5 (and that ill would not be spoken about the governors of the City); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 64. I have edited Thomas' translation.

¹⁴⁴ The Goldsmiths that were brought to the Mayor's Court by the leaders of their guild were: Hugh Wetherby, Roger Broun, William Lucas, Andrew Stamelden, Stephen Walpole, John Walyngford, Robert Willy, John Welford, William Stamelden, Henry atte Grene and William Lyncoll.

¹⁴⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5 (suspected and accustomed to speaking badly about the mayor, aldermen and their government); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ For examples of the consequences which expressions of bad governance and corruption could have see Scase's work, Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 52-62. Her example of the Beler affair, Richard Willoughby and John Stratford, Archbishop of Canterbury illustrate this.

We see that the cutler Edmund Wodhull was guilty of the same. Like the individuals so far mentioned, Wodhull was also tried on 22nd October 1384 for having ‘diuersis verbis maliciose dictis de maiore’.¹⁴⁷ Malevolent words spoken against the Mayor seems to have been a common feature of the Guildhall affray. The exact words uttered against the Mayor were not made explicit, yet the fact that they were considered to be ‘maliciose’, carrying connotations of wickedness, is enough to give the reader a sense that the words spoken were damaging. In very much the same way that the mercers and goldsmiths criticised London governance, Wodhull was doing this indirectly by speaking acerbically of the Mayor rather than praising his leadership skills and qualities. The rioters’ accusations that Brembre was a liar were taken just as seriously. The barber William Frere, for example, was taken to prison for ‘dixit quod Johannes Northampton’ peruentus fuit apud londoniensis et vidit eum in londoniensis’.¹⁴⁸ The start of this chapter established that Northampton, after much deliberation, was sentenced to imprisonment at Tintagel Castle in Cornwall, as a result of disrupting the peace of the City. Being strongly opposed to Northampton’s presence in London, as well as his reforms, Brembre could not tolerate any form of encouragement for Northampton’s cause. As we saw earlier, Brembre and the Common Council agreed that Northampton’s return to the City would comfort his supporters, instigating dissension and allowing for havoc to continue as long as Northampton lived. It was for these reasons that such behaviour was described as being a hazard to any chance of peace within the City. Frere had ‘false et maliciose menciendo’ and the severity of his offence was stressed by the fact that his ‘verba sonare possent in affraymentum’.¹⁴⁹ The insinuation here is that Frere’s words could have incited another affray. Frere, in these records, became a public menace, a figure with a disregard for the good of the City and he was used as a contrast to a virtuous citizen to provide a severe

¹⁴⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5 (diverse malicious words said about the mayor); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (for saying that John of Northampton had arrived near London and that he had seen him in London); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (spoken falsely and maliciously) and (words heard could result in an affray); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 61.

comparison between a virtuous citizen and one who did not consider the wider implications of their actions upon the peace and profit of the City.

Concern for the peace of the City also featured prominently, as seen in the earlier example regarding Sturdy, and this was ensured by making those guilty of disturbing the peace to not repeat their actions. For example, the ‘probi homines misterii de Armureris’ brought before the Mayor, the Aldermen and sheriffs of London six members of their guild, who, under the terms of their mainprise, were expected to avoid participating in ‘nullam couinem conuenticulum alligacionem seu congregacionem palam vel occulte’.¹⁵⁰ The point behind making this agreement was to avoid the ‘perturbacionem pacis’.¹⁵¹ The formation of congregations, covins, conventicles and bonds appeared earlier in this chapter as an allegation made against Northampton and More, and a deeper discussion of these terms ensues in the following chapter. This is another example in which Brembre’s administration sought to stop these gatherings in this case, with the threat of £1000 if the agreement not to hold them was breached. This agreement was used as a way to stifle any further uproar from large groupings who had previously caused tensions for Brembre and was framed within the context of the peace of the City, for which maintaining common profit values was vital.

There are other cases of masters bringing their guild members to the Mayor’s Court as a result of their involvement in the Guildhall affray of 1384. Several tailors brought forward by their master, William Rule, for example, were tried on 21st October 1384 for ‘fuerunt in quadam congregacionem ... in ecclesiam sancti Pauli londoniensis die eleccionis maioris predicti et abinde venerunt vsque Guyhald londoniensis ad faciendum clamorem super dicta eleccionis in perturbacionem pacis et contra proclamacionem et

¹⁵⁰ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (no covin conventicle allegation or congregation openly or secretly); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 63. Entry much more detailed than Thomas allows for. For example, Thomas omits that these gatherings were not to be held openly or secretly, removing from the extract the malicious connotations that were attached to these gatherings in 1380s London. These six armourers who were tried were: John Hood, William Randulf, Robert Wormewell, William Pountfreyt, Richard Pecok and John Shirewode.

¹⁵¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4 (disturbance of the peace); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 63.

cetera'.¹⁵² Again we see that congregation here was used to denote a malign and vindictive body of people whose gathering at St Paul's and outcry during Brembre's election at the Guildhall had a detrimental effect on the peace. Moreover, mention of Brembre's proclamation delivered on the eve of the 1384 election also served as a reminder that the tailors had violated civic law, disregarding any sense of respect for their mayor and the body of people which he served and maintained standards of common profit for.

Others were tried for acting contrary to the law enforced by the Mayor, specifically for contravening Brembre's proclamation. William Wodecok, tailor, for example, was guilty of doing just this and readers learn that he 'venit ad Guyhald die electionis predicto contra proclamacionem et cetera'.¹⁵³ In acting against the proclamation issued by Brembre, it was possible that Wodecok may have been asserting his right as a citizen of London. This was a right that Brembre had attempted to limit by issuing his proclamation, ostensibly as a way to maintain his own civic power (or, in the propagandist version, the peace and common profit of the City). In doing so Brembre could suppress traditional opportunities for public clamour. In rejecting the Mayor's authority, Wodecok challenged the established levels of authority in late medieval London, overruling civic power and destabilising accepted principles of governance. His actions were also violent, breaching the instruction of the proclamation which commanded that no individual, regardless of status, was to bear arms. Wodecok, in contrast, went to 'shopam suam et portant ibidem a domo sua vnum gladum linkelare et vnum pollax sperando de r<...>re oriri'.¹⁵⁴ Mention of his intent to collect his weapons implied that Wodecok was ready for an altercation, an action that was the very antithesis to a harmonious and stable environment. Nevertheless,

¹⁵² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 4v (taking part in a congregation ... in the church of St Paul's in London on the day of the said election and thence went to the Guildhall in London to make clamour on the said election in disturbance of the peace and against the proclamation et cetera); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 63.

¹⁵³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5v (came to the Guildhall on the day of the said election against the proclamation et cetera); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 67.

¹⁵⁴ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5v (his shop and fetched a sword, buckler and poleaxe, hoping that a riot would arise); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p.67. The word preceding 'oriri' is illegible.

whilst this is representative of the kind of violence that emerged in this period, we may want to view these trial testimonies with suspicion for they were constructed from a particular viewpoint.

The cases of Edmund Clay, cordwainer, who was tried on 22nd October 1384 and William Kirkeby, tailor, who was tried on 24th November 1384 were similar to that of Wodecok. In the cases of Clay and Kirkeby, however, readers are not informed of any additional details pertaining to their actions at the Guildhall affray, only that they both went to the Guildhall ‘contra proclamacionem’.¹⁵⁵ Being portrayed as scoundrels and breakers of the law took away any justification for their actions, meanwhile Brembre emerged as an active political player who embraced his duty as mayor to extricate and deal with anyone who threatened the rule of law.

These examples were essentially political statements in written form, designed to draw a distinction between citizens who interrupted proper governance and those enforcing government rules designed to provide good governance, offering a persuasive justification of Brembre’s standpoint against the rioters. The type of rhetoric and language employed differentiated between actions that would benefit governance and actions that would be to the detriment of governance in London. These entries conveyed a sense that those in power were righting a great wrong which impinged upon civic tradition and values. They drew upon common profit ideals, such as the expected relationship between rulers and ruled, good governance and the peace of both citizens and the City to fashion themselves as being London’s saviours against a threat that was clearly dangerous and growing.

‘pur cause de nostre comun profit et aise et quiete de pueple’: Rejecting support for Northampton

Throughout this chapter it has been made clear that Northampton presented intense problems for Brembre, both through his own uprising and inciting his supporters. Even

¹⁵⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 5v (against the proclamation); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 65.

during his absence from London in exile, Northampton still had some support. The Plea and Memoranda Roll shows that Northampton, however, was not easily forgotten and there were figures in the city of London who were ardent in their support for him. This final section examines the protection and approval bestowed upon Northampton by one of the King's closest family members and potential antagonist, John of Gaunt.

Gaunt is a key figure in understanding London politics and played a crucial role in the later stages of the political feud between Northampton and Brembre.¹⁵⁶ Whilst Gaunt may have supported Richard's royal prerogative in the final decade of his reign, during the 1380s Gaunt, in the eyes of chroniclers like Walsingham was a political outcast who had a fraught relationship with his nephew and the City.¹⁵⁷ Gaunt, however, was politically astute and realised the political influence he could gain by supporting Northampton, despite the 'dent in ... prestige' that Northampton's downfall had on his reputation.¹⁵⁸ Gaunt was initially reluctant to assist Northampton, as is made clear in Usk's *Appeal*, which describes Gaunt's rejection of Northampton's wish for 'the kynges writ to a Newe eleccion'.¹⁵⁹ However, Gaunt's attitude changed during the later 1380s. Gaunt bargained for Northampton's return to the City and the restoration of his rights as a citizen of London following the latter's exile. Indeed he continued with his efforts to assist Northampton into the 1390s when he was allowed to return to London, albeit as a 'stranger', in 1390.¹⁶⁰ In the following section, we see how a series of letters between Gaunt, Nicholas Brembre and the Common Council, preserved within the Plea and Memoranda Roll, demonstrates how

¹⁵⁶ Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 241-242; Strohm, 'Politics and Poetics', p. 83.

¹⁵⁷ Saul, *Richard II*, p. 240; Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 101; Barron, 'The reign of Richard II', p. 310. From the beginning of Richard II's reign, Gaunt had tensions with the City. See *Chronica Maiora*, pp. 34-36 for the Duke of Lancaster's reconciliation with the Londoners as an early example of this tension.

¹⁵⁸ *Testament of Love*, p. 13; Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 2. From Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, see pp. 98, 101, 106 and 147 on the detrimental impact that support for Northampton had on Gaunt, particularly with regards to Gaunt's relationship with his nephew, Richard II.

¹⁵⁹ "Appeal", p. 28. Northampton's relationship with Gaunt has been shown by Kirkland to be longstanding. He has located the beginnings of the link between these two individuals to 1377 and has connected them through a network of figures linked to Gaunt's household, including Chaucer, and from those related to Northampton by marriage, Kirkland, 'The Life Records of John Northampton', pp. 25-26.

¹⁶⁰ *CPR, Richard II: 1388-92*, p. 297; Saul, *Richard II*, p. 241; Barron, 'The reign of Richard II', p. 316. We know that Northampton did not return to the political scene following his return. We know this from his will and see that many of his properties were not returned to him. See Kirkland, 'The Life Records of John Northampton', pp. 66-67.

each of these parties drew upon issues linked to common profit rhetoric as a tool to portray themselves as having a vested interest in the well-being of London's citizens and in the stability of the City. This comprises two letters from Gaunt sent in May 1386 and separate responses from the Common Council and Brembre dated between May and July of the same year, in which Northampton's return to the City, riotous behaviour and the threat that he posed to the City was discussed.

Following the parliament of 1385, Gaunt's requests for Northampton, Norbury and More's release from prison was approved by the King, with the condition that they were not to come within thirty miles of London. In contrast, his pleas were not viewed with the same favour by Northampton's opponents who were intent on preventing this concession, convincing the King that Northampton and his allies should be forbidden from coming within a hundred miles of the City.¹⁶¹ Gaunt had reconciled with Brembre on 5th December of that same year, at a dinner which both the King and Queen were present at, yet his political influence did not have the desired effect and Northampton remained, in the eyes of the King and civic elite, a pariah.¹⁶² Regardless, Gaunt continued to exert his influence, appealing to Brembre and leading powers in London in 1386.

The first of Gaunt's letters was sent on 7th May and the second on 12th May 1386, both signed under his signet at Plympton. Gaunt's missive to Brembre opened with formal addresses, clarifying that these letters were written '[d]epar le Roy de Castille et de leon duc de lancaestre'.¹⁶³ This convention served to remind the recipient of the sender's power and position as a member of the royal family.¹⁶⁴ From the start of this communication there was already an established sense of hierarchy, one which was a symbolic reminder that Gaunt's opinion was of value. The opening lines of both letters enhance this sentiment. The first affirmed that '[i]l vous souient bien coment nous vous avons parle deuant ore pur

¹⁶¹ *WC*, pp. 148-151; Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 106.

¹⁶² *WC*, pp. 317-318.

¹⁶³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (On behalf of the King of Castile and Duke of Lancaster). The address is written on both letters.

¹⁶⁴ Simon Walker, 'John [John of Gaunt], duke of Aquitaine and duke of Lancaster styled king of Castile and León (1340-1399)', *ODNB*. Also see Barron, 'The reign of Richard II', p. 303.

Johan Norhampton' Johan More et Ricard Northbury et coment qe vostre voluntee et purpos feurent non resonables et outrageouses'.¹⁶⁵ Brembre, from Gaunt's viewpoint, lacked reason for taking these actions, which he conceived of as being outrageous. He was not acting with the levelheadedness that was needed of leading civic officers. The second recounted further details from a meeting between the King and Gaunt in which a pact concerning Northampton was agreed upon and, consequently, jettisoned following the contemptuous actions of Brembre. It read that,

nous fumes enformez qe la on nostre tresredoute seignour le Roi an darrein qe nous estoimes ouesqe luy nous granta chartre de pardoun a Johan de Norhampton' iadis mair de londres vous mettez tiel pursuyt en la contrarie qe le dit chartre ne poet pur vous estre pur mille manere enseale ne delivere dount nous esmerveillous grantement et nous teignous tresmalement pur contempt.¹⁶⁶

Despite Brembre and Gaunt's reconciliation on 5th December 1385, Brembre had overturned the Duke's ruling and the above extracts portrayed Brembre as acting against the status quo. Rather than following the royal will, which Gaunt protected as long as it coincided with his own political will, Brembre had acted in contempt of his sovereign, following the advice of his Uncle and counsellor the Duke. These letters were reminders for Brembre that Gaunt was part of this wider political dialogue which concerned Northampton and, as a consequence, what occurred within the city of London.

The King's royal will featured prominently within both letters, with Gaunt making it explicit that the royal will had been curbed in the case of the 'chartres de pardoun' for

¹⁶⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (The mayor will remember that the duke has spoken to him before now on behalf of John Norhampton, John More and Richard Norbury, against whom the mayor's wishes and purposes were unreasonable and outrageous); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 109.

¹⁶⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (he has learnt that, whereas the king, when the duke was last in his company, granted to him a charter of pardon for John of Norhampton, late mayor of London, the mayor had petitioned so strongly to the contrary, that the charter cannot be sealed or delivered, whereat the duke is greatly astonished and takes it very ill as done in contempt of himself); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 110.

Northampton, Norbury and More.¹⁶⁷ The previous chapter demonstrated that the Mayor's oath required for the Mayor to work in conjunction with the King, upholding his rights and profit yet Gaunt presents Brembre as the antithesis of this, a man who used 'tout vostre pouer puis nostre dit departir avez destourbe la dice grace issint a nous grantez'.¹⁶⁸ Gaunt continues establishing that he 'prions qe vncore vous ne distourbez la dice grace destre perfourmez et accompliez en manere come il est grantez issint'.¹⁶⁹ The transaction that occurred between Richard and Brembre was, in the eyes of Gaunt, one in which Brembre abused his influence. Gaunt drew upon distinctive notions of the political relationships between ruler and ruled, in this instance between the King and Mayor, and the reciprocity that was to be maintained between them to actively promote his position in relation to London. The access that civic governors had to the Crown has been explored by Harry who argued that the common profit of London was based upon the privileged access that the City's aldermen had to the King; this relationship allowed them to protect the welfare of London's citizens.¹⁷⁰ The same expectations were applicable to the figure of London's Mayor and we very much see that, in these letters, Gaunt wrote from a perspective which portrayed Brembre as misusing his access to the King and his position of favour.

This disservice to the royal family extended to Gaunt himself in the second letter. Gaunt noted that Brembre acted against 'nostre honour' and that 'vous uanez nulle mestier de tiel sugger faire encountre luy' as Northampton would 'volunte de luy absentier du realme et daler certainement ouesque nous en espaigne le pluyt tost come ycele grace luy

¹⁶⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (the charters of pardon); I have brought attention to this as the charters of pardon for all three individuals (Thomas only includes a charter of pardon having been discussed for Northampton) have been excluded mention of this from Thomas' edition of the extract.

¹⁶⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (all of your power after our said departure [that being the departure of Gaunt from the King's presence] have disturbed the said grace issued to us [that being the King's agreement with Gaunt from giving Northampton, Norbury and More a charter of pardon]). This is my own translation and mention of this is omitted from Thomas's edition.

¹⁶⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (prays the mayor not to hinder the king's favour from being performed and accomplished in such manner as it was granted); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁰ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 65.

soit fait en effect'.¹⁷¹ In his exchange with Brembre, Gaunt made it clear that he was the injured party. In his account of events, Brembre acted dishonourably against his superior without any justification for it, yet in contrast, Northampton was willing to voluntarily absent himself from the Kingdom. Indeed, since he would be accompanying the Duke on his journey to Spain once the King's grant of a charter of pardon was put into effect, the pardon meant that Northampton was no longer a threat to Brembre. In trying to prevent the pardon, Gaunt suggested that Brembre was attempting to sabotage his efforts to help Northampton. Their reconciliation as leading political figures would have benefitted the wider body politic yet their personal discord threw the urban body back into instability and greater political disagreement. Reconciliation would have assisted in achieving common profit values yet the factional environment they inhabited did not allow for this to be possible.

In his second letter Gaunt warned Brembre of the potential discord that could unfurl between them as a result of their disagreement over Northampton's fate, as well as that of Northampton's children and wife's, Parnell's, inheritance.¹⁷² Gaunt used this as an opportunity to underline for Brembre that 'pursuyt contre nous et distourbances des ditz grace' would result in potential dissonance resuming between them, despite their recent reconciliation. Gaunt almost presents a compromise for Brembre in that 'come vous veuillez qe nous ferrons a vous de ces qe nous puissons faire entendant qe droit come vous deseruez enuers nous nous mettrons peyne defaire pur vous a nostre pouer'.¹⁷³ This was somewhat of a *quid pro quo* between them, in which Gaunt would afford Brembre the respect deserving of a mayor to the best of his ability as long as Brembre reciprocated the same. It was made evident how different members of a body politic were meant to act

¹⁷¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (our honour), (the mayor has no need to make any such suggestion against him) and (wishes and fully intends to absent himself from the kingdom and to accompany the duke to Spain as soon as the king's grant has been put into effect); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁷² In this letter Gaunt also pleads for Northampton's wife and children by having 'enuoie a nostre tresredoute seignour suisdit pur grace auoir a sa femme et as enfantes du dit Johan de lertage sa dite femme'.

¹⁷³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (even as the mayor would wish that the duke should act towards him, for in the same manner as the mayor shall prove deserving towards the duke, so the duke will behave to the best of his power towards the mayor); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111.

towards one another. Brembre, as mayor, may have had the power equivalent to that of an earl yet Gaunt treated the Mayor as his social inferior. This served to remind Brembre of the role he ought to play. As outlined in the introduction, each part of society had their own unique role in preserving the common profit and a united body politic. This battle between Gaunt and Brembre over their authority and influence on Richard, adds to this understanding of expectations and roles of conduct of different political figures. Gaunt's letter also reveals his understanding of political identities within the City, one in which he purported a grander role than Brembre. From Gaunt's viewpoint this was not a relationship of co-operation or joint agreement but one in which Brembre had surpassed the limits of his authority to push forward his own agenda and private interests. The language Gaunt used focused on honour, respect and hierarchy to show that Brembre steered away from his position within the urban body, causing discord and turbulence. The common good of the city of London was unachievable if a mayor exerted the limitations of his office.

Gaunt's agency and power in political matters, however, has been questioned by Simon Walker, who posited that '[i]n reality the duke's political influence, though considerable, was never all pervasive'.¹⁷⁴ Gaunt may have had an awareness of his own political standing but this was clearly not enough to exercise authority over the political situation in 1380s London. Instead, 'his intermittent sponsorship of John Northampton's faction within the city of London failed to alter the balance of power in London politics decisively' and Gaunt was to leave England for Castile without securing Northampton's return to London.¹⁷⁵ His ineffective role in overturning the decisions of London's civic leaders and reinstating Northampton as a citizen of the City is exemplified in the Common Council and Brembre's responses to his letters sent between May and July 1386.

Gaunt first received the response from the Aldermen and Common Council on 23rd May and Brembre's two months later on 20th July. Both letters are similar in tone and almost mirror the other in wording, despite some minor alterations, mostly in terms of verb

¹⁷⁴ Walker, 'John [John of Gaunt]'.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

conjugation and pronouns.¹⁷⁶ Regardless, this demonstrates an element of dialogue between these parties and, potentially, a planned strategy to maintain their authority within the City. The length of these letters also differ somewhat, with the response of the Aldermen and Common Council being fifty-three lines long and Brembre's being forty-nine lines long. Nevertheless, both letters delivered the same message, clarifying Brembre's position against Northampton and the reasons for his judgement, in addition to re-emphasising the 'grant tribulacion et murmur' caused by Northampton.¹⁷⁷

Both responses begin with general formula, addressing Gaunt as '[t]resredoute et trespuissant seigneur', acknowledging receipt, that being the Aldermen, members of the Common Council, had 'entenduz vos lettres comandes a monseigneur Nichol Brembre mair de la Cite de londres' and Brembre, who had also 'resseu et entenduz vous honorables lettres'.¹⁷⁸ Replicating Gaunt's phrasing, these two letters turned to the subjects of governance and mayoral authority which were at the heart of this exchange. In copying the content of Gaunt's letters, the civic elite also disclosed that they had understood the content of his letters, showing deep consideration for the implications and seriousness of the issue at stake. This imitation by the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre was used as justification for their rejoinder; Gaunt's letters portray a particular perception of Brembre's interests but it was exactly this accusation which was, paradoxically, used by those in power to contradict Gaunt as a means of conveying their own 'truth'.

Readers also note that the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre pinpoint what information Gaunt used to build his standpoint, making effective use of the verb 'enfourmes' to establish, as well as challenge, Gaunt's mindset. By invoking Gaunt's

¹⁷⁶ In contrast to the letter from the Aldermen and Common Council, for example, Brembre's letters responds to Gaunt's pleas regarding the inheritance of Northampton's wife. Due to the overlap in wording, the quotations I use when referring to these letters is taken from the letter from the Aldermen and Common Council. I will make it clear when quoting from Brembre's letter.

¹⁷⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (great tribulation and discontent); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111. Unless otherwise stated I am quoting from the Common Council and Aldermen's letter due to the similarity between this letter and Brembre's.

¹⁷⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (most redoubtable and most puissant lord), (understood the content of your letters sent to lord Nicholas Brembre, mayor of the city of London), (received and understood your honourable letters); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111. Brembre's letter is noted by Thomas yet there is no full translation for the letter.

arguments, the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre laid the basis from which they could argue that Gaunt had been gravely misinformed of Brembre's intentions. For example, the letters targetted Gaunt's conviction that Brembre had misused his power and sway over the King, as well as his estimations about Northampton; for the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre, in contrast Northampton would continue to bring 'grant peril et damage' to London.¹⁷⁹

This is made most obvious by the agreement between the Aldermen and Common Council that 'la verte est qe la dite seute faite enuers eux de restreindre la dite grace puis vostre dit departir nest mye seulement soun fait ne sa seute einz le fait et seute de nous touz'.¹⁸⁰ Brembre's letter reinforced this standpoint, echoing the response of the Aldermen and Common Council by underlining that 'la verite est qe la seute faite enuers eux de restreindre la dite grace puis vostre dit departir nest mye seulement mon fait ne ma seute mais la seute des aldermans comun conseil et autres sages de la dite Citee'.¹⁸¹ The Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre manipulated Gaunt's central arguments to re-center Brembre's authority and the decisions taken against Northampton. In this defense, Brembre emerged as an individual dedicated to working alongside the wider members of the institutional body that he was representative of and the machinery of civic government that they were responsible for. As outlined in chapter one, Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council were to work in unison to guard the peace of the City and matters touching the common profit of London. The letter from the Aldermen and Common Council in particular drew on this notion that their actions were for the greater good, stating that these

¹⁷⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membrs. 26-26v (great peril and damage); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111. This is my own translation and differs to Thomas's phrasing 'great unrest' which he used to summarise the difficulties Northampton would cause.

¹⁸⁰ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (in truth the steps taken to limit the pardon after the duke's departure were not only the action and motion of the mayor but the action and motion of all of them); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111.

¹⁸¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v. The translation in Brembre's letter is identical except in the way that he describes who these were taken by. Brembre made Gaunt aware that 'not just by his action but the actions of the Aldermen, Common Council and other wise men of the said City', stressing that he worked collectively with other civic leaders to ensure that decisions and actions were agreed upon unanimously.

decisions were undertaken ‘pur profit et quiete de nous et de la dite Citee’.¹⁸² The perspective emanating from within the structures of civic government encompassed a civic body that aimed to protect the interests of the City over that of one individual.

The collaborative effort between Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre is further noted in their explanation behind Brembre’s actions. Both letters concurred that Brembre had moved so that ‘nul tiel peril auenist en lachesse de moi/lui’.¹⁸³ This was a direct comment on his duty as mayor and awareness of what these responsibilities entailed, stressing his agency in preventing future danger from happening. The Aldermen and Common Council’s letter, however, had an additional detail, making it appear clear that they, with Brembre, had acted for ‘nostre comun profit et aise et quiete de pueple’.¹⁸⁴ The inclusion of this phrase added a specific ideological overtone to this dialogue, noting that ‘commun profit’ was a key part of this matter. Whilst ‘commun profit’, in this instance, referred to the general wellbeing and maintenance of the Aldermen and Common Council their use of ‘commun profit’ by being aligned alongside the welfare of the wider community did not exclude those not immediately involved in civic governance. In this context ‘commun profit’ encapsulated all aspects of life as a citizen of London, whether it be political, social or economic; in retracting the King’s planned pardon to Northampton, Brembre was presented as the defender of both his colleagues and citizens of the City on a much grander scale.

It was for these reasons that ‘nous [the Aldermen and Common Council] couenist defaire tiele seute’, with Brembre repeating the same point in his response: ‘il moi couenist ouesque eux de faire tiele seute’.¹⁸⁵ From the viewpoint of those overseeing civic

¹⁸² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (for the profit and peace of us and the said City); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111.

¹⁸³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (no such peril will occur because of my negligence). This is my own translation.

¹⁸⁴ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (for our common profit and the comfort and peace of people); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112. My translation differs to Thomas in that he has translated ‘commun profit’ as common good. Whilst these ideas were certainly used interchangeably in the late medieval polity, I have added specificity to the translation of this phrase.

¹⁸⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (we had convened together to make these motions); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111. This is my own translation, which is simplified from Thomas’s.

government, the course of action taken by Brembre was unquestionable considering the circumstances and stakes. These texts constructed Brembre as the definitive figure of a good civic leader and an individual who followed the will of the King. For example when,

nostre dit seignour le Roi auoit grante adeuant a la commonialtie de la dite Citee par ses lettres patentes pur meilloure seurte de pes et de quiete qils ne nul de eux ne de deussent approcher la dite Cite par C leuges deins les boundes Dengleterre.¹⁸⁶

Brembre was thus keeping the King's decisions, which were aimed to keep the peace of the realm intact. For the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre, the latter's conduct was based on royal will. The extract referenced letters patent, issued by the King, which prohibited Northampton and his allies from being within 100 leagues of London and had been issued to guarantee 'la commonialtie' of the 'greater assurance of peace and quietness' within the City.¹⁸⁷ This was an action taken with the good and livelihood of the people in mind and one which civic leaders were portrayed as protecting, so much so that the letters commented that 'nous espoirons qe par bon auisement ewe et consideres a vostre hautesse vous tendres le dit Nichol et nous excuses endroit a cel point'.¹⁸⁸ As outlined in the previous chapter, it was expected of civic officials to work alongside the King and this very example reinforced that responsibility was carried out. These letters actively engaged with political rhetoric, centering on the relationship between king and civic officers in carrying out the royal will – a point designed to resonate strongly with

¹⁸⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (our the king had previously granted to the commonalty of the city by his letters patent, for greater assurance of peace and quietness, that none of the aforementioned persons should approach nearer to the city than 100 leagues within the boundaries of England); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

¹⁸⁷ *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

¹⁸⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (we hope that the duke, after taking good deliberation and consideration, would hold the Nicholas [Brembre] and ourselves as excused on this point); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112. I have made slight alterations to Thomas's translations, changing both the tense and pronouns used.

Gaunt who we have seen was a firm believer of safeguarding this very aspect of the crown's power.

Given the obvious contention surrounding this decision, the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre remitted Northampton's exile from London by 20 leagues, claiming that this decision was made 'par comun assent'.¹⁸⁹ Yet again, the letter reiterated that this was a shared decision made by several, thus creating communal responsibility. It is not particularly surprising that they stated that this concession was made to Northampton's punishment with the 'pleasance de nostre dit seignour le Roi et de vous [John of Gaunt]' in mind.¹⁹⁰ Brembre's letter includes the same point but earlier in his letter noted that 'iai fait ma diligence de service et pleiser a vous [Gaunt] et tous les vos qont en faire deinz la dite Cite'.¹⁹¹ The emphatic use of the theme of servie to the King continued throughout these texts but their loyalty to Gaunt was also emphasized. In stressing their devotion to Gaunt and consideration for him, the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre suggested that they had not sought to cause the Duke any offence. Instead, they appeared as working alongside him and others who were involved in the affairs of the City, an indirect reference to Northampton's rebellious actions.

Brembre's claim he was not working against Gaunt but rather with him is further reinforced in his statement concerning the inheritance of Northampton's wife and children. Addressing this particular point was a considerable departure from the structure of the letter from the Aldermen and Common Council, whilst maintaining the same purpose. In turning to this matter, Brembre replied that 'a la matire touchante leritage la femme a dit Johan Norhampton et de ses enfantz ieo ne pursiwy vnqes le contrarie mon treshonure seignour'.¹⁹² This underlined to Gaunt that Brembre was not his enemy nor acting out of

¹⁸⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (by common assent); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

¹⁹⁰ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (with the pleasure of the King and you [John of Gaunt]); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

¹⁹¹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (I do my diligence of service and please you [Gaunt] and all those who were in the matters within the said City). This is my own translation.

¹⁹² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (on the matter concerning the inheritance of the wife of the said John of Northampton and of his children, I will never take steps contrary to my most honourable lord).

self-interest and, instead, had no intention of acting contrary to the Duke's aims. In this way, Brembre reframed the persona that Gaunt had cast for him in his letters of 7th and 12th May, articulating that Brembre, in his own eyes, aimed to work harmoniously with other major political players. He did not view himself as an individual acting against the status quo in a 'non resonables et outrageouses' manner, as Gaunt alleged in his letter, but rather his motivations were very much in keeping with the tenets of common profit ideology. The story told in the letters from the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre was one of co-operation, and of loyalty to the Crown and members of the royal family. Corroborated by Brembre's supporters working in the Guildhall, these letters served to frame Brembre as the saviour of the City, who unfailingly played the part assigned to him. Contrary to Gaunt's letters, Brembre was depicted as a man who did not venture above his station but rather as one who worked within a hierarchical model in which the interests of the King went above his own.

Prosperity and the peace of the City were at the heart of these responses and the efforts of the Aldermen and Common Council in achieving this was made clear. Both letters established that the Aldermen and Common Council caused 'graunt clamour et instaunce' in appealing to both Gaunt and Brembre 'qe la venue de eux ou dascun de eux et nomeement de dit Johan Norhampton si pres la dite Cite come vous desirez come semble par le content de vous susditz lettres serroit grand desaise a tote la Citee'.¹⁹³ In causing commotion over Northampton's sentence, the Aldermen and Common Council reinforced their position that this was an issue that went beyond Brembre and there was concern on a much grander scale over the City's future. Further, in referencing the content of the Duke's letters, the Aldermen and Common Council juxtaposed their wishes against his, creating a scenario in which Gaunt has been made to appear as not fully realising the danger that would arise if Northampton were to be within closer proximity to the City.

¹⁹³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (great clamour and persistence), (the coming of the above-mentioned persons or any of them, and especially of John Northampton, so near to the city as the duke wished, as appeared by his letters, would be a great cause of unrest to the city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 111. The first of these is my own translation.

Brembre's letter included the same anecdote, supporting the statement made by the Aldermen and Common Council and their greater role in the decision-making process behind defending the City's welfare from Northampton's destructive endeavours.¹⁹⁴

These potential effects were imagined by the Aldermen and Common Council in which 'occasion de tresgrant tribulacioun et murmur deins mesme la Citee et subuersion dicele et ency tresgrant desplesance a nostre dit seignour le Roi et a vous treshonour seignour et a tut roialme'.¹⁹⁵ The language employed warned of a troublesome future for London if Northampton and his co-conspirators were permitted a pardon from the King limiting their sentence. Northampton was considered to be a threat to a stable community, and was the instigator behind a destabilised community ruled over by subversion and anarchic behavior. London, in the eyes of those in power, would become Northampton's dystopia, an unnatural environment which undermined social structures, if their will and that of the Mayor was not heeded.

The importance of royal will and power, as well as the authority of civic leaders, is especially highlighted by the explanation that Northampton had been 'arrestuz et emprisonnes par iouste comandement de Roi et de son noble conseil et par mairs et ministers de la dite Cite'.¹⁹⁶ Were Gaunt to reject the judgments passed by the King, his noble council, the Mayor and city officers he himself would be subverting both the natural way in which an urban polity functioned. The King's will was supreme to any subject, even the mighty Duke. By imagining the harm that would result, from acceding to his request, the Aldermen and Common Council stressed to Gaunt that 'nous espoirons qe vous verrez nullement desirer issint'.¹⁹⁷ The inclusion of this phrase following their

¹⁹⁴ The letters differ, however, in that the Aldermen and Common Council state that their grievances concerning Northampton's and his allies presence in the City was made to 'lui [John of Gaunt] come a nostre mair' whereas Brembre's letter stated that these concerns were simply 'faitz a moi'.

¹⁹⁵ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26 (the occasion of great tribulation and discontent within the city, to the subversion of the same, and thus would prove very displeasing to his lordship the king and to the duke himself and to the whole kingdom); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁹⁶ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (arrested and imprisoned by just commandment of the king and of his noble council and by the mayor and officers of the city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

¹⁹⁷ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (they hoped you, the Duke, would in no wise desire); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

explanation of the damage Northampton would cause to ‘nostre dit seignour le Roi et a vous treshonour seignour et a tut roialme’ was a tool to outline Gaunt’s own role in protecting the interests of the City, wider realm and his sovereign.¹⁹⁸ Gaunt too was a member of the political community whose actions, intentions and desires had an impact upon the good of all. Both texts commented that ‘et si vous eussez mesmes plus longement demore enpays nous eussions pursiwi a vostre haute seignourie pur mesme la matire’.¹⁹⁹ As a dominant political figure, the Duke’s departure for Spain left, in the words of Nigel Saul, ‘a void at the centre of politics’.²⁰⁰ This was ‘a void’ that the Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre clearly used to their advantage in their replies to Gaunt; without him the clear alternative was the Mayor, whose duty it was to preside over issues to the good of both City and the King.

Gaunt’s obligations to the King, civic officers and the city of London were reinforced to a greater degree further on in this letter, in which the Aldermen and Common Council detailed that ‘nous fioms si entierement en vostre tresnoble seignour qe vous desirez plus tost le comun aise et profit de nous et de la dite Cite’.²⁰¹ Trust and faith were placed in the Duke’s steadfast loyalty to maintain peace and stability. These points were permeated by ideas of communal interests in which the term ‘comun’ was used to indicate that the benefit of Gaunt’s allegiance would be felt on a scale that surpassed those situated within the Guildhall; ease of life and profit of both civic officers and the citizens of London would be guaranteed by the Duke’s cooperation. In this particular context, ‘profit’,

¹⁹⁸ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (our said lord the king and to the duke himself and to the whole kingdom); *CPMR*, 1381-1412, p. 112.

¹⁹⁹ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (if the duke had remained longer in the country, they would have approached his lordship concerning the same); *CPMR*, 1381-1412, p. 112. In Brembre’s letter the same point reads: ‘et si vous eussez messes plus lungement denier en pays nous eussions sywy a vous pur mesme la matire’.

²⁰⁰ They also reminded Gaunt of the impact his departure to Spain in 1386, who ‘with his duchesse dame Custaunce seyled with a grete poeple into Spain to chalenge his wyves right’, had on their deliberations. See *The Great Chronicle of London* ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (London and Aylesbury: George W. Jones, 1938), p. 46. For on Gaunt’s claim to the Castilian throne and his departure to Spain also see *WC*, pp. 164-65, *KC*, pp. 340-41 and the *Chronica Maiora*, pp. 238-39. Also see Strohm, *The Poet’s Tale*, pp. 10-11, 27, 44-45, 137, 254 and Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 55, 96, 148-49, 151 for Gaunt’s ambitions to claim the throne of Castile. Gaunt’s involvement in Iberian affairs is explored in Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 111-43. Simon Walker’s entry on Gaunt in the *ODNB* also explores these issues further – see Walker, ‘John [John of Gaunt]’.

²⁰¹ This particular point was not included in Brembre’s letter.

especially, denoted that in working alongside the Aldermen, Common Council and Londoners, the Duke was ensuring the good of them all. It was this sort of conceptual relationship, and the benefits that came from it, that the Aldermen and Common Council skillfully deployed to legitimate their claims that they, with Brembre, were working to rid the City of anyone who posed a threat to the common profit.

Yet the Aldermen and Common Council did not simply provide a basic reminder for Gaunt of the general duties of a loyal servant to the crown, civic officers and the City but tactically coupled this expression of loyalty to the wider body politic alongside an iteration of transgressions associated with Northampton's past conduct in London. They recounted,

qe de aider ou sustiner ascuns tielx persones qont este de si lung temps sibien en temps de nostre tresnoble seignour le Roi vostre piere qi dieux assoille come en temps de nostre tresredoute seignour le Roi qore est arrettez et tenuz riotours baratours destourbours de la pes commerceours et mayntenours de comuns debatz et riotes en la dite Citee.²⁰²

According to these individuals this harmful behavior had a longstanding history, originating during the reign of the King's grandfather, Edward III. This message would have struck a chord for Gaunt; being Edward III's second-eldest son, Gaunt would have been familiar with this longstanding history of notorious and harmful behavior that originated during his father's reign. The point here is that London had long suffered. The terms used may not be the exact complaints voiced in the Plea and Memoranda entries which dealt with those who acted against Brembre in 1384, but the 'rioter baratours destourbers de la peas' and others recalled the 'rumours couynes congregaciouns et affrays' formed at Northampton's command. These terms were saturated with ideas

²⁰² LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (to aid and sustain persons who for so long, both in the time of the late king, the duke's father, whom God assoil, and in the time of the present king, had been regarded as rioters, brawlers, disturbers of the peace, initiators and maintainers of common quarrels and riots in the city, and as such notified and published as well in places of record as in the said city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 12.

associated with breaching the peace, political subversion, duplicity, betrayal, sedition and inciting insurrection, with the clear aim of demonising any individual who was perceived as being guilty of these treacheries. In this way, the Aldermen and Common Council made these perfidies an embedded part of London's history which had the potential to further uproot and derail the well-being of the City if left untreated. Recognition of the dangers of this behaviour was made clear in that the letter noted that 'pur tielx notefiez et publiez sibien enplaces de Record come en la dite Citee'.²⁰³ By recording these occurrences in an official capacity, London's leaders established what and who they considered were a threat to the City.

The identity created for Northampton and his allies in this letter were those of men who had caused the 'oppression de pueple et subuersion de mesme la Citee a lour poair'.²⁰⁴ This consistent image was cultivated with a particular intention in mind. It demonstrates what sort of individual the Aldermen and Common Council considered to be against the public good, order and stability and, on a more nuanced level, a menace to themselves. These letters tell us how issues and language that reflected common profit rhetoric were strategically used to counteract a strong political player. They offered insights into the strategies considered to be effective in maintaining a grip on power – by working together and presenting a text that sought to reestablish the good of the City, the Aldermen and Common Council defended the standpoint of their colleague, Brembre.

This combination of London's political history and Northampton's aberrant behaviour allowed the Aldermen and Common Council to justify their viewpoint – London had for too long suffered at the hands of a scoundrel and they, with Brembre, were the individuals to correct these wrongs. The way that Northampton's behaviour was perceived and remembered by those ruling London dictated and influenced the content of these letters, ensuring that his behaviour was presented in a way which fit within common profit

²⁰³ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (as such notified and published as well in places of record as in the said city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

²⁰⁴ LMA, CLA/024/01/02/028, membr. 26v (oppressing the people and subverting the city); *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 112.

ideology or, rather, against the aims of the conceptual notion of common profit. This letter provides a comment on the consciousness of those dictating its content. In presenting themselves as working in the interests of the City, they created an image for themselves in which they were the defenders of the common profit.

Underpinning these responses to Gaunt, there was a sense of re-imagination, in which Aldermen, Common Council and Brembre provided a united front to counter the Duke's accusations and recreate an image of the mayor whose priority remained the good of the people, the City and the King. Yet the same sort of imagination is seen in Gaunt's letters to Brembre, in which the Duke formulated his own interpretation of events to argue that the Mayor's misconduct had been coated in self-interest, all the while keeping his aim of resolving Northampton's problem in clear view. In sending these letters to each other, Gaunt, the Aldermen, the Common Council and Brembre created texts which entered into the wider political debate regarding London political culture and theories of governance. In both questioning and defending mayoral power, this correspondence epitomised the model created by Strohm in which texts are viewed 'as argumentative and interpretative documents in their own right, as historical contestants and as objects of contestation'.²⁰⁵ For both sides, the circumstances of 1384, whilst certainly creating fractured narratives, served as a basis from which they could push forward their own agendas by drawing upon wider political issues linked to the conceptual notion of common profit. In essence, these letters were political statements by those in power, producing a justified argument that was peppered with common profit rhetoric to legitimate Brembre's actions to limit both Gaunt's influence and impede Northampton's return to the City. These letters may not have changed the opinions of these political rivals but they provide a commentary on the intent behind these texts and this awareness of the ideology of common profit as a tool of political discourse.

²⁰⁵ Strohm, 'Introduction', p. 9.

Conclusion

What we have in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls is a narrative crafted from the viewpoint of Brembre, in which he forged an image of himself as a mayor acting with the good of the City and wider common profit in mind. As the leader of civic government, Brembre ‘used urban laws to instill social order in the city ... and [reinforce] internal hierarchies’ that would consolidate his own authority and devalue the authority of Northampton, as well as those connected to him.²⁰⁶ It shows an awareness on Brembre’s part of how medieval urban societies functioned and how law and ideologies were powerful tools in shaping the body politic and marginalising those who did not fit his model. This chapter has examined entries specifically related to Brembre’s rivalry with Northampton and what we can discern about Brembre’s attempts to consolidate his authority in a time of political uncertainty. Maintaining his power depended on the strategies he employed and on being seen as working towards the betterment of society. Brembre’s attempts at conserving his authority was rooted in common profit ideology, which although not outwardly stated, is present throughout as a means of protecting his status as a leading figure in London political culture. The material reviewed here has revealed anxieties over civic authority and has shown that a means of protecting this power was to show that Northampton, and his supporters, had corrupted the urban body, adversely affecting the City and its moral, economic, social and political well-being.

The Plea and Memoranda Rolls are emotive literature that scholars have largely ignored.²⁰⁷ This examination of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls has considered this particular quality of the roll and shown that by considering the language and ideas present within the roll covering 1384 to 1386, researchers can delve into the minds of London’s key political players and provide suggestions as to how they protected their authority and for what reasons. It has taken into consideration what the duties and responsibilities of civic leaders were, as outlined in chapter one, and used this to consider how Brembre and

²⁰⁶ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 153.

²⁰⁷ I am grateful to Dr Lawrence Warner for sharing his thoughts with me on the Plea and Memoranda Rolls.

his colleagues attempted to present themselves as primarily interested in the King's, City's and populace's wellbeing, when in reality, their efforts and use of common profit rhetoric was invoked to guard their own interests.

These materials are infused with key civic values to citizens of late medieval London, allowing for an understanding of what civic leaders, as well as Londoners more generally, deemed important enough to preserve within their communities or, at the very least, believed would safeguard their authority if illustrated as benefitting the wider public. Viewing these materials as emotive also expands on Hanawalt's idea that within London records '[e]motive language signalled the betrayal of the common good'.²⁰⁸ Within these sources we see that transgressors abandoned the common good and profit, and that the dominant political leaders did not. Brembre, the Aldermen and members of the Common Council were presented as the very opposite of Northampton, More and Northampton's supporters who disturbed civic protocols.

Gaunt's letters also demonstrate the subjectivity of this language and of how to frame one's argument around an interest in the common profit and good of the City. Brembre and the Common Council forged strong replies against Gaunt but his letter certainly used the same rhetoric with a similar purpose in mind. The recognition of the utility of the discourse of common profit as a tool of negotiation is undeniable. As has been shown, referring to good governance and the peace of the City is present in almost every record discussed within this chapter. Those working against the common profit were demonised and presented as a foe to the wider public and, more significantly, the King and realm.

There is an inherent awareness in these records of what constituted urban politics and the kind of conduct that was necessary to stay afloat, giving an idea of the behaviour and tools that civic officials resorted to in an unstable environment. This chapter shows that in using a political and legal institution, Brembre exerted his power and jurisdictional

²⁰⁸ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 3.

privileges to suppress his foes. As the court which dealt with major civic disturbances in the City, the Mayor's Court was the ideal site for this. The fear and need to suppress these kinds of disturbances is present, nonetheless, throughout Brembre's time as mayor. The period covered in this chapter, 1384-1386, and the recurring appearance of issues and events tied up with Northampton demonstrate Brembre's vulnerability as mayor, a vulnerability that will be made evident in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Proclaiming Authority in Letter Book H: Speech and Social Misbehaviour in 1380s London

On 9th December 1391, William Mildenhale of London recounted before the chancery the opprobrious words of his deceased father, Peter Mildenhale, who accused Richard II of being an ineffective ruler. Mildendale '[said] that the king was not able to govern any realm, wishing that he were in his gong (*latrina*), where he might stay for ever without further governing ever'.¹ This insult 'and many other disrespectful words [disparaged] the king's person' and reputation.² Mildenhale's speech was treated as an act of defamation, slandering monarchical authority. As a result of concealing 'his father's iniquity, unlawful wish and abuse' from the King and Council, William Mildenhale faced imprisonment.³ He was later released and forced to swear a pledge of loyalty to the King. Mildenhale guaranteed that he would 'speak reasonably of the king's person; and, if he heard unlawful words or abuse of the king spoken by any person of the realm, he would declare it as speedily as he could, either to the king himself or to one of this counsel [sic] whom he trusted to reveal this to the king'.⁴

This episode is one of several cases of monarchical slander that occurred during Richard II's reign. Mildenhale's vituperative words highlighted public concern over the King's ability to govern well and control the Kingdom, capturing his tense relationship with Londoners.⁵ The incident demonstrated the ability of Londoners to speak out and act

¹ *CCR, Richard II: 1389-1392*, p. 527.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cases of defamation abounded during the last quarter of the fourteenth century as a result of political crises under Richard II. An early example, and another based in London, is that of the clerk of the church of St Peter-the-Less, Thomas Knapet, who in 1378 used 'disrespectful and disorderly words' when speaking of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster. As a result of his slanderous words, Knapet was imprisoned at Newgate by the Mayor of London. See *Memorials*, p. 425. For more on this episode and the defamation of Gaunt see Michael Hanrahan, 'Defamation as Political Contest During the Reign of Richard II', *Medium Aevum*, 72 (2003), 261 and Stephen Halliday, *Newgate: London's Prototype of Hell* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, repr. 2012), p. 7. 'Reginald Newport alias Reginald de la Chambre' is another example of a Londoner who was imprisoned at Newgate for speaking ill of a member of the royal family. Although he was eventually pardoned by Richard II, 'he was alleged to have spoken against the king's person and other trespasses and misprisions for which he had been committed to Newgate', *CMPR, 1381-1412*, p. 28.

against their rulers. His son's punishment and penance detailed the type of measures taken to control behaviour and public perception of the King's power; maintaining the loyalty and devotion of Londoners was vital if the King was to govern the City effectively.⁶ It demonstrated the seriousness of popular criticisms of the King and the actions taken to deter this behaviour.⁷

Mildenhale's deposition illustrated that it was fundamental for the King to be both loved and respected by his subjects, especially Londoners, in order to suppress and control public debate about his kingship. It highlighted a subject's duty to declare knowledge of seditious words to their ruler. Acquiring the support of these citizens to perform their duties was only achievable through the allegiance and governance of London's civic leaders. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the efforts of London's civic leaders to regulate public attitudes and social misbehaviour that threatened their civic authority. Circumstances conducive to this, however, could not be properly established in the wake of the factional fighting and oligarchic conflicts that are at the heart of this chapter. To understand how these ideas circulated in the public domain, this chapter analyses how ideas of common profit were orally disseminated. This allows for a reconsideration of the way in which urban officials controlled the behaviour of London's citizens and reinforced their authority during the 1380s. Mildenhale critiqued the governance of the realm, placing culpability upon the King for ineffective rule of his kingdom, yet this negligence of rule extended to the governance of London and the manner in which civic leaders redefined the liberties and freedom of the City.

⁶ Barron, 'Richard II and London', pp. 129-154; Barron, 'The Quarrel of Richard II with London, 1392-7', pp. 27-55. For more on the relationship between the Crown and the capital see Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, pp. 33-51.

⁷ Helen Wicker, concurring with the work of R. L. Storey, Bertram Wolffe, Ralph Griffiths and I. M. W. Harvey, has examined the dangers of 'cases of treasonable language as evidence of popular criticism in the build up to the outbreak of civil war in 1455'. She demonstrates that seditious speech aimed at Henry VI was responsible for this. As is the case with Wicker's examination of Henry VI, Richard II is 'the central issue' in Mildenhale's slanderous words. See Helen Wicker, 'The Politics of Vernacular Speech: Cases of Treasonable Language, c. 1440-1453' in *Vernacularity in England and Wales, c. 1300-1550* ed. Elisabeth Salter and Helen Wicker (Turnout: Brepols, 2011), p. 171.

This chapter largely focuses on eight proclamations issued between 1383 and 1391 recorded in *Letter Book H*, a manuscript containing civic documentation relating to London governance. Previous scholars, notably Reginald R. Sharpe, H. T. Riley and Barron, have utilised the Letter Books to detail London's administrative history, yet this analysis approaches the content of these eight proclamations from an ideological perspective, considering, instead, the language of common profit within *Letter Book H*. Reassessing these proclamations allows for a broader conceptualisation of why and how London's leaders utilised common profit ideology in an oral context. This examination argues that mayors of London, especially Brembre, used common profit rhetoric as a means of safeguarding their position as Mayor of London. Language and ideas featured in the proclamations also raise an awareness of the precariousness of Brembre's position and of the need to spread ideas of common profit within the wider London populace.

The distinctiveness of the Letter Books epitomised London civic culture and it is for these reasons that *Letter Book H* is at the centre of this study. This text documented London's administrative, legal and civic history between 1375 and 1399, an age Sharpe described as 'an eventful period in the municipal history of the City of London, no less than in the constitutional history of the kingdom'.⁸ Sharpe's introduction to *Letter Book H* contributed a description of the factional rivalries of this period, as well as an insight into the internal concerns and dealings with the City.⁹ He recognised that the manuscript was useful in '[tracing] the various measures which caused Richard II – The "Londoners' King" as he was called at his accession - to lose the support of the City, and eventually his crown'.¹⁰

The need 'to regulate behaviour, produce social distinctions and ensure the survival of oligarchic rule' was reflected in the textual activities of the mercantile elite who, as we

⁸ *LBH*, p. i.

⁹ *LBH*, pp. -lvii.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. i.

have seen so far, were active participants in London's political culture.¹¹ Marjorie McIntosh's research on social misbehaviour within English communities demonstrated the increasing concern for social regulation between 1370 and 1600.¹² Studies on social regulation have claimed that, following the Reformation and rise of Puritanism there was an intensification of attempts to vigorously 'maintain good order and enforce ethical conduct'.¹³ Control and regulation of social wrongdoing, however, was not only a phenomenon of the Elizabethan and Stuart regimes. McIntosh challenged this historiographical tradition arguing, instead, that interest in civic control of moral behaviour and the influence of ideology on social control were in fact concerns for the governing elite in late medieval England.¹⁴

Popular opinion and popular speech have long been recognised as a central aspect of medieval political culture; seditious speech, like that of Peter Mildenhale, had the potential to turn into social discord, which was a recurring feature of Ricardian politics, as well as broader medieval society as a whole.¹⁵ Michael Hanrahan commented that

¹¹ Lindenbaum, 'London texts and literate practices', p. 285.

¹² Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 1.

¹³ Studies which have pinpointed the post-Reformation period as an age in which the social regulation of villages and towns became a priority include: Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1982); David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford: OUP, 1985); Martin Ingram, 'Reformation of Manners in Early Modern England' in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), pp. 47-88; Martin Ingram, 'From Reformation to Toleration: Popular Religious Cultures in England 1540-1690' in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850* ed. Tim Harris (New York: Palgrave, 1995), pp. 95-123; Martin Ingram, 'Religion, Communities and Moral Discipline in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century England' in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: Aalen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 177-93; Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1964); Christopher Hill, *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 1975); James A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London: Routledge, 1984); James A. Sharpe, *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England: A Country Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983); Marjorie K. McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

¹⁴ McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, pp. 1-4. For more on social control and regulation in medieval England see Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Margaret Spufford has also noted the parallels between control over sexual deviancy between the early fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Margaret Spufford, 'Puritanism and Social Control?' in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* ed. Antony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 41-58.

¹⁵ Hanrahan, 'Defamation as Political Contest', 259; Dusan Zupka, 'Communication in a Town: Urban Rituals and Literacy in the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary' in *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy II* ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 28 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), p. 358; Rosamund Faith, 'The 'Great Rumour' of 1377 and Peasant Ideology' in *The English Rising of 1381* ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), pp. 43-73; Christopher Fletcher, 'News, Noise, and the Nature of Politics in Late Medieval English Towns', *Journal of*

“slanders”, however defined by civic or royal authorities, always threatened to ... challenge the official interpretation of events’.¹⁶ Harry furthered this idea, stressing the capability of slander to cause political disturbances and undermine ‘the status of public officials’.¹⁷ Christine Winter noted the seriousness of offences that threatened civic authority, arguing that, as a result, the castigation of transgressions and offences was a priority for civic officials in late medieval London.¹⁸

Slander was defined as a malicious crime by the Constitution of the Council that took place at Oxford in 1222 and it was during this session that English law and standards regarding defamation materialised.¹⁹ It was an offence of such severity that even if the author of the slander was not found, those who related it faced chastisement. Those at the Parliament at Cambridge in 1275, in which the *Scandalum Magnatum* was formulated, a statute which targeted the author of slander, ‘accorded and agreed in this Parliament, That when any such is taken and imprisoned, and cannot find him [which was the First author of the Tale] as before is said, that he be punished by the Advice of the Council, notwithstanding the Statutes aforesaid’.²⁰ This legislation highlighted both the severity of the offence and the responsibility of those involved in governing, in castigating not only the ‘the First author of the Tale’ but, also, those who spread the ‘Tale’.

Table 1 details types of public punishments which were recorded in London civic records in the decades between 1282 and 1489, highlighting a noticeable increase in the use of the pillory as a form of public punishment during the 1380s:

British Studies, 56 (April, 2017), 262; Christopher Fletcher, ‘Rumour, Clamour, Murmur and Rebellion: Public Opinion and Its Uses before and after the Peasants’ Revolt (1381)’ in *La comunidad medieval como esfera pública* ed. Hipólita Rafael Oliva Herrer et al. (Seville: Secretariado de Publicaciones, Universidad de Sevilla, 2014), pp. 193-210.

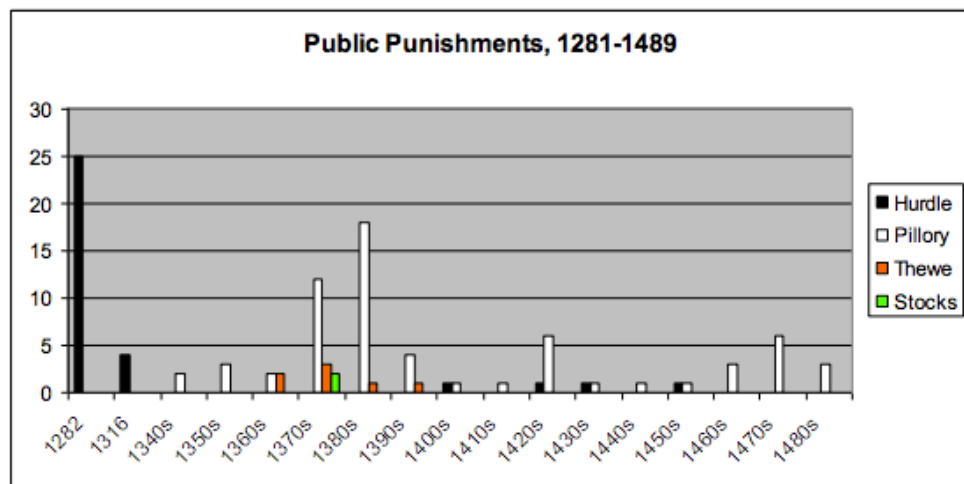
¹⁶ Hanrahan, ‘Defamation as Political Contest’, 260.

¹⁷ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, p. 49.

¹⁸ Christine Winter, ‘Prisons and Punishment in Late Medieval London’, (Unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012), p. 137.

¹⁹ *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600* ed. Richard H. Hemholz, (London: Selden Society, 1985), p. xiv.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

1. Instances of public punishments recorded in the *Letter Books, Plea and Memoranda Rolls* and*Journals*²¹

From this graph Winter summarised that the pillory was the preferred method of public punishment, particularly in comparison to the stocks which was rarely utilised.²² Yet her conclusions can be furthered if we focus on the 1380s. Whilst the graph may represent an increase in criminal activity, and a rise in the efficacy of carrying out punishment, as a result of the strife caused by those vying for civic authority – miscreants may have seen this as an opportunity – caution is needed when interpreting these findings. As J. S. Cockburn cautioned, ‘the dark figure of crime’ – the unreported and unrecorded criminal activities – mean that we need to be clear about figures compiled from court records which reveal patterns of prosecution whose relationship to actual levels of criminality is hard to expose.²³ London’s authorities needed to maintain their hold on the City, as well as their dignity and reputation. This surge in public punishment may be indicative of a desire to crack down and a reflection of a way in which civic elites publicly humiliated and discredited their opponents rather than increased misbehaviour.²⁴

²¹ This table is printed in Winter, ‘Prisons and Punishments in Late Medieval London’, p.160.

²² Ibid, p. 159.

²³ J. S. Cockburn, ‘The Nature and Incidence of Crime in England 1559-1625: A Preliminary Survey’ in *Crime in England 1550-1800* ed. J. S. Cockburn (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977), pp. 49-71 and J. S. Cockburn, ‘Early Modern Assize Records as Historical Evidence’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, Vol. 5, No. 215 (1975), pp. 215-31.

²⁴ See Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility* and Barbara A. Hanawalt, ‘Of Good and Ill Repute’: *Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: OUP, 1998) for more on this. See Julian Goodare, *The Government of Scotland 1560-1625* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) for more on the resources that officials needed to maintain their authority.

The reputation of merchants and craftsmen was at stake if subjected to this public punishment. A public pronouncement of their misdoings would label them a fraudster and damage their trading practices.²⁵ These were the very kind of men, deeply ingrained in the worlds of the artisanal and victualing guilds, who were associated with both Northampton and Brembre. It is possible, then, that it was for this reason that there was an increase in the use of public punishment during this decade in London's history. Like the stocks, the pillory functioned as a device on which to display perpetrators who worked against the social order, causing them extreme humiliation.²⁶ Its location in Cornhill, a site which housed shops and traders, made this pointed. Placing an individual in the pillory was a municipal reminder of the consequences of acting against a civic official or city custom. In contrast to the stocks, in the pillory the offender was required to stand, occasionally, with a whetstone around their neck which weighed them down, earning the description of being a 'physically arduous' punishment.²⁷ It was not about royal justice but, instead, was about reinforcing the power of those who controlled the City. In enforcing public punishments, officials left perpetrators fully exposed to humiliation and shame. These punishments were meant to be seen – they were public in nature and a statement made by civic officials of what they expected of their social subordinates.

Slander was also closely linked to riotous behaviour, which unsettled civic governance and was a key concern of late medieval London - this fear manifested itself during the turbulence of the 1381 revolt. Whilst scholars, such as Steven Justice, have reconsidered the extent of the rebels' actions and violence, for contemporaries witnessing the revolt the disturbances and rioting that ensued were a cause for concern.²⁸ Fear of revolt, however, did not end after 1381; the rebels entered a city which, by 1381, was

²⁵ Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', p. 151.

²⁶ Ibid; Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, pp. 228-236; Martin Ingram, 'Shame and Pain: Themes and Variations in Tudor Punishments' in *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500-1900: Punishing the English* ed. S. Deveraux and P. Griffiths (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 49.

²⁷ Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', pp. 154-56.

²⁸ See Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, pp. 49-95.

characterised by disunity amongst Londoners, who engaged in violence alongside the rebels as a means of combatting their own grievances.²⁹ The suppression of the rebellion and the civic response to it did not bring unity to the City but, instead, brought factional fighting, which intensified between the smaller crafts and victualing parties.³⁰ The proclamations examined here entered the public domain, therefore, during a period of growing unrest and political upheaval. The *Westminster Chronicler* commented that in popular memory ‘[t]he 1381 revolt left an aftermath of unrest in London which continued throughout the reign, causing England’s rulers to fear that London politics would again disrupt national government’.³¹ Insurgency survived in popular imagination.³² The author of the *Westminster Chronicle* narrative conjured alarm and fear in the minds of those reading this account. A healthy and stable polity could not exist if uncontrollable masses were left to thrive and seditious actions continued. Accounts centring on the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 continuously imagined ‘the rebel companies ... all together’.³³ Ellis argued that following the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, there was a greater emphasis from the King to control riotous gatherings, in which ‘conventicula et congregaciones’ were forbidden, and this will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.³⁴

Reforming society and administering social justice, therefore, was at the heart of political culture in late fourteenth-century London. William Langland tackled these issues in *Piers Plowman*, a text which in its B and C versions, was probably composed and certainly circulating in Ricardian London. Langland’s poem took issue with ecclesiastical, political and social reforms.³⁵ In the C-Text, Langland added an extra passage, situating

²⁹ Barron, ‘Richard II and London’, p. 145.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

³¹ *WC*, pp. 62-64.

³² Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp. 193-254.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁴ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 59. For this motion made by Richard II see *PROME*, III, 105.

³⁵ For an examination of Langland’s concern with community identity as opposed to individual identity see Jennifer Garrison, *Challenging Communion: The Eucharist and Middle English Literature* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2017), pp. 81-104. Also see F. R. H. Du Boulay, *The England of Piers Plowman: William Langland and His Vision of the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), p. 6 for an exploration of ‘a protest at a society gone wrong’.

himself in Cornhill, an area Derek Pearsall has described as ‘a lively portrait of the predatory city’, thus reinforcing the notion that Langland’s text was a credible representation of both the vices and virtues of the city of London.³⁶ The text focused on community ideas rooted in Christian values and the good of society as a whole situated in the ‘middle erthe’ of his Dream Vision. Exploring the duties and social responsibilities of different parts of society, Langland wrote that ‘[t]he Comune contreved of Kynde Wit craftes,/ And for profit of al the peple plowmen ordeyned/ To tilie and to travaille as trew lif asketh’ (B-Text, Prologue. 118-120). Whilst the poem satirised late medieval society, these verses alluded to the way in which communal profit was achieved through working in unison as an undivided body.

This was fundamental in ensuring a good life for the wider community. By cooperating harmoniously the common good could be established, yet this vision of social altruism would fall apart if the different parts of the communal body did not come together. This was a concept Langland represented in society’s failure to cooperate without self-interest in his chapter depicting the ploughing of the half-acre. This notion was reflected by Wastour’s unwillingness to work with the same dedication that Piers and the other labourers displayed. Instead, Wastour was dubbed by Piers as a figure who ‘wasten that men wynnen with travaille and with tene’ (B-Text, Passus VI. 133). Wastour benefitted from the hard work of others rather than contributing to the effort of earning his food and wages. Rather than participating in this communal activity, Wastour flew into a rage, spewing indecencies towards Piers. The egoistic and venal behaviour of men like Wastour inhibited the prosperity of the wider community. The passage emphasised the need for all parts of society to work as one.

This idea was epitomised by the instability experienced in 1380s London. The civic elites may have failed to unite Londoners for unselfish purposes, yet attempts were made

³⁶ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text* ed. Derek Pearsall (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p. 110, fn. 1. Langland wrote: ‘Thus y awakede, woet god what y wonede in Cornehull’ (C-Text, Passus V. 1).

to control behaviour and coerce society to conform as a means of preserving authority. Several proclamations preserved in *Letter Book H* contain evidence of notable concern over victuals, how they were sold and administered, as well as ordinances on how to regulate and control the selling of these items.³⁷ This chapter, however, focuses on how the City's civic elite, notably Brembre and his faction, utilised notions of common profit to control behaviour and speech in the city of London. In circulating these ideas via proclamations, civic officials utilised rhetorical justification in order to enforce a rigid and vigorous programme against disagreeable speech and actions that had the power to foster a 'conflictual climate'.³⁸

Eight proclamations from *Letter Book H* are considered in this chapter, five of which were issued under Brembre between 1383 and 1386, two under Nicholas Exton in 1386 and 1387 and another during the mayoralty of Adam Bamme in 1391. Themes which recur throughout these proclamations include the formation of malicious assemblies and ill-speech, spreading false information and the act of murmuring. Through exploring this type of deviant behaviour, this chapter shows how proclamations were useful devices to enforce obedience in the medieval polity through employing common profit rhetoric.

Letter-Book H: Collective Genres and Medieval Record Keeping

The London Letter Books span a vast time period, recording material relating to London civic culture, governance and life between the reigns of Edward I and James VII and II respectively.³⁹ Unusual amongst Letter Books, the London Letter Books were labelled as such by those who penned these manuscripts and were organised in a series by

³⁷ See for example *Memorials*, pp. 426, 432, 435, 438, 448, 458, 467, 481, 508, 516.

³⁸ Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, p. 174.

³⁹ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 46. The Letter Books of the City are owned by the Corporation of London, manuscript and microfilm copies are kept at the London Metropolitan Archives. Contents of the Letter Books were published by Reginald R. Sharpe between 1899 and 1912, these are known as the *Calendar of Letter Books A-L*. Extracts from the Letter Books were translated and edited by H. T. Riley in *Memorials*. Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 354-366 has been consulted for transcriptions and translations. Translations of material in *Memorials* and *The Reign of Richard II: From Minority to Tyranny 1377-97* ed. A. K. McHardy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) have also been used.

their alphabetic lettering.⁴⁰ Earlier Letter Books in the series were originally branded under different titles – Horn in the *Liber Horn* recorded that *Letter Book A* was known as the *Parvor* or *Minor Liber Niger*, *Letter Book B* as *Liber Niger*, *Letter Book C* as *Maior* or *Maximus Liber Niger*, *Letter Book D* as *Liber Rubeus* and *Letter Book E* as *Liber Albus* or *Liber Albus novus de brevibus et memorandis*.⁴¹ Many of the labels included in the Letter Books were contemporary with their creation. On a flyleaf of *Letter Book H* there is a note concurrent with the manuscript recording the title of the text: ‘liber vocatus h Alphabetite ordine’.⁴² The longevity and survival of these manuscripts is suggestive of their continued utility to successive generations who desired to preserve city custom and regulations in London.

Scholars encounter a variety of materials dealing with the administration and organisation of the City.⁴³ These included: a ‘mixture of correspondence, accounts, fines, apprenticeship records, petitions and whatever else needed remembering’ including proclamations.⁴⁴ Other civic documents such as writs, judicial processes, statutes, indictments, trading regulations and content relating to the election of mayors and aldermen, as well as the actions of the Common Council are also found in these volumes.⁴⁵ The Letter Books were collective genres, codex volumes which had a distinct purpose, containing *miscellanea* related to London civic practices; they were mediums from which city administrators and private citizens constructed city administration, law and history.⁴⁶

The content of these manuscripts made it clear how authority was enforced and who held power. The relationship between rulers and ruled, as well as what it was like to be a citizen of London and what those in power needed from them were common concerns within the Letter Books, and are explored in more detail within this chapter. We not only

⁴⁰ For more on the alphabetical labeling of the London Letter Books see ‘Introduction’ in *LBA*, p. i and Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing*, p. 84.

⁴¹ *LBA*, p. ii.

⁴² LMA, COL/AD/01/008, flyleaf (The Book called H in the alphabetical order). This is my own translation.

⁴³ Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, p. 83.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, pp. 46-47; Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, p. 73.

⁴⁶ Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, p. 73.

learn of the rights and identity of citizens but, also, of their loyalty and responsibility to the City.⁴⁷ For Malcolm Richardson, these texts convincingly ‘transmitted a particular view of the city to posterity indirectly through what the aldermanic class and city clerks chose to include and exclude’.⁴⁸ The Letter Books, therefore, are helpful in providing a particular perspective on London civic culture, authorising, through selective consideration, what those in power deemed worthy of preserving and of what these materials could do for them in cultivating respect and control.

Asserting civic authority was paramount but in order to do so decisions needed to be publicised to the wider community. As Liddy explained, ‘their [those in power within towns] decisions were meaningless without them being made known publicly’.⁴⁹ Materials limited to the written record were ineffectual if not audibly and visually enforced.⁵⁰ Communicative tools built a foundation from which good order and public well-being were enforced beyond the central institution of power, such as the Guildhall. Claiming to speak with unity in mind ‘was as much about hegemonic control as it was about popular representation’ and this notion is reflected in the eight proclamations scrutinised in this piece.⁵¹ This chapter adds to work carried out on communication and authority, considering the ideology and social influence that shaped proclamations issued during the mayoralty of Brembre and their role in preserving the common good.

Copying proclamations into *Letter Book H* was part of a wider programme of maintaining and managing administrative documents. Early modernists have developed

⁴⁷ Liddy has equated the idea of ‘urban politics’ with ‘citizen politics’. For Liddy, this meant that ‘politics [was] about the contested identity, role, rights, and responsibilities of the citizen’. Urban life, therefore, needs to be viewed through an examination of how rulers and ruled interacted. See Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, p. 73. Similarly, Ellis has concluded ‘that each entry [in the Letter Books] is read through the prism of mayoral authority’. This is due to their distinctive headers which each recto side of the folio contain. These headers are contemporaneous with their entries and provide the surname of the mayor in power at the time the record was copied into the Letter Book. Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 48. For more on measures taken by authorities to keep official and legal records within the Chamber or the City Treasury of the Guildhall see *CEMCR*, p. vii. Comparable is the view posited by Clanchy who argued that ‘[o]ver the passage of centuries medieval royal documents have taken on the same qualities as monastic records: they have become a monument for posterity to the power and organization of the kings who persisted in making and keeping them’. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 147.

⁴⁹ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 145.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

this idea, explaining that ‘documentation became integrated into the daily routines of ordinary people’ in Europe between 1500 and 1800.⁵² Materials within archives could be ‘manipulated to serve particular ends’, yet research undertaken by Jennifer Bishop on the Goldsmiths’ Company in sixteenth-century London has demonstrated the reasons why these materials were preserved and the variety of contexts in which documentary evidence could be used. By the early modern period, documentary reporting and the establishment of authoritative repositories continued to be a key practice within the mercantile and civic communities that are at the heart of this chapter.⁵³ By ensuring that records were written regularly and safely stowed away, the ‘integrity and functionality’ of an archive was guaranteed and allowed for a reconstruction of the ‘social, political and cultural meanings of the documents produced’.⁵⁴ Records kept within pre-modern archives were a necessity to administrators wishing to maintain custom and law.

The narrative and memory constructed of the City within these materials has proved fruitful for medieval contemporaries writing about London’s history and governance. The Letter Books are demonstrative of this practice and could be referred to when necessary, especially if law and order were not adhered to. Horn and Carpenter, for example, used these resources to compile their customals and show which customs and ordinances related to London governance.⁵⁵ Furthermore, chroniclers like Robert Bale and Richard Arnold, writing during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, also had access to materials kept within the Guildhall’s administrative library, like the Letter Books,

⁵² Alexandra Walsham, ‘The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe’, *Past & Present* (2016), 12.

⁵³ Jennifer Bishop, ‘The Clerk’s Tale: Civic Writing in Sixteenth-Century London’, *Past & Present* (2016), 112.

⁵⁴ Bishop, ‘The Clerk’s Tale’, 112-113. For more on the ‘creative’ nature of documents during the medieval and early modern periods see Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*; Shannon McSheffrey, ‘Detective Fiction in the Archives: Court Records and the Uses of Law in Late Medieval England’, *History Workshop Journal*, lxxv (2008), 65-78; Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Frances E. Dolan, *True Relations: Reading, Literature and Evidence in Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ *LBA*, p. ii.

utilising their content for the composition of their own narratives.⁵⁶ Other sixteenth-century writers, such as Robert Fabyan, Edward Hall and John Stow, made further use of these texts for their descriptions of London.⁵⁷

There are many studies, then, which are indebted to the Letter Books. This has been observed by Ellis, who highlighted that both Riley's *Memorials of London Life* and Barron's commanding study *London in the Later Middle Ages* are both primarily based upon these texts.⁵⁸ Despite the wealth of scholarship based on the Letter Books, Ellis has argued that Horn, Carpenter, Sharpe, Riley and Barron 'approach the letter-books from a similar perspective: viewing them as repositories of factual information about urban customs and about the political and social life of the city', yet there is still work to be done on 'how London [was] depicted in the volumes'.⁵⁹ A reconsideration of the language and ideology within these manuscripts, however, is needed. David Wallace has especially showed the value of these texts in providing a colourful and vibrant image of everyday and political life in Chaucer's London.⁶⁰ The present work expands on these considerations, stressing that London's identity and character can be traced within administrative texts, like the Letter Books.

Chronologically the earlier Letter Books overlapped in time periods covered, with 'Letter-Book A [comprising] the period from circa 1275-1298, and Letter-Book B from circa 1275-1313'.⁶¹ The overlap between *Letter Books A* and *B* is suggestive of the environment in which they were written and of those who produced these texts. The haphazard and irregular dating of these texts suggests that the clerks who wrote them 'had been in the habit of keeping in his own custody the books or calendars upon which he

⁵⁶ Mary C. Erler, 'Guildhall library, Robert Bale and the writing of London history', *Historical Research*, Vol. 89, Iss. 243 (2016), 182.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Wallace, 'The Absent City', pp. 62-85.

⁶¹ *LBA*, p. iv.

happened to be engaged for the time being'.⁶² Elected by the Common Council, the Common Clerk was at the heart of civic governance and was responsible for producing and preserving records. As outlined in my introduction, scribes were key 'literary agents and political actors' whose writings provided an insight into the workings of London governance.⁶³ This individual was a civic officer whose responsibilities lay in guarding the rights of the city of London, and who had a close relationship working with leading civic officials, like the Mayor.⁶⁴ The Letter Books were thus a communal resource in which rules relating to the City could be checked.⁶⁵

The influence which their maker had on their composition meant that the Letter Books had common aims; the texts recounted the City's 'history and its contemporary politics'.⁶⁶ The Letter Books, paralleling Horn's customals, touched upon 'history, geography, law and customs, a discussion of its form of government which allowed its rule to be considered in more theoretical terms, and the officials and procedures of its government'.⁶⁷ Moreover, like Horn's customals, the Letter-Books 'constituted a useful guide-book for those participating in London's government'.⁶⁸ They too were 'a type of professional handbook for governmental officials' that deserved to be recognised as 'an accoutrement of governmental power'.⁶⁹ The Letter Books, therefore, are worth revisiting to gain a more nuanced understanding of the way in which common profit ideology was ingrained within administrative records as a means of enforcing authority within late medieval London.

⁶² Ibid, p. iii.

⁶³ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 186; Bishop, 'Clerk's Tale', 113.

⁶⁴ Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, pp. 1-2, 8; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 186, 306. For more on the activities of scribes in the medieval period and their role in political life, particularly London, see Mooney, 'Locating Scribal Activity in Late Medieval London', pp. 183-204; Matthew Davies, "'Monuments of Honour": Clerks, Histories and Heroes in the London Livery Companies' in *Parliament, Personalities and Power: Papers presented to Linda S. Clark* ed. Hannes Kleineke (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), pp. 143-166.

⁶⁵ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 187; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 47.

⁶⁶ Debbie Cannon, 'London Pride: Citizenship and the Fourteenth-Century Customals of the City of London' in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad* ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), p. 188.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 189.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 196.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Parallel to London customals, the Letter Books were the ‘[city’s] scrap books’ that formed their own histories and ‘facilitated the writing of the City’s past’ for medieval and early modern London.⁷⁰ Research carried out on his customals identified Horn’s efforts to establish the legal identity and status of London through the inclusion of civic documentation. In compiling texts based on London’s history and contemporary politics, he aimed to provide evidence for rights and precedents in the City.⁷¹ The production of texts, like the London customals, was ‘a public task undertaken for public use’ and this is certainly the case with the Letter Books.⁷² Parallel to other texts kept within the Guildhall, the Letter Books were also ‘office books in the sense that they were for working purposes’, which ‘[preserved] for its citizens and future generations a narrative [of] the authority and leadership of the nation’s “capital city and mirror”’.⁷³ The Letter Books constituted the City’s memory and conscience. This chapter transforms our understanding of the Letter Books by showing how they moulded the identity of the City through an examination of *Letter Book H* and the political language of proclamations issued between 1383 and 1391.

This sense of their official and legal status is reinforced when considering the location of the Guildhall’s administrative library. Barron identified that the administrative library was located between the Mayor’s Court, a key court in administering justice within London, and the inner council chamber, a space used by London’s aldermen to administer the City’s administrative business.⁷⁴ Materials kept within this archive were, therefore, readily available to London’s leaders who referred to them when needed; these were liminal texts which preserved both the memory and conscience of the City, guiding civic leaders in dispensing good governance.

⁷⁰ Richardson, *Middle Class Writing*, p. 83; Erler, ‘Guildhall Library’, 176-177. For more on an interest in London’s history see Catto, ‘Andrew Horn’, pp. 367-91.

⁷¹ Cannon, ‘London Pride’, p. 188. Also see Catto, ‘Andrew Horn’, p. 384.

⁷² Barron, ‘The Political Culture of Medieval London’, p. 126; Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, p.10.

⁷³ Nigel Ramsay, ‘Archive Books’ in *Cambridge History of the Book, Vol II: 1100-1400* ed. Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomason (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p. 442.

⁷⁴ Barron, *Medieval Guildhall*, p. 34. For more on the administrative library and the type of texts kept there see Erler, ‘Guildhall Library’, 177.

We have seen use made of these civic records by chroniclers but they also served as a means of resolving disputes. In 1386, John Dilcok was acquitted from his apprenticeship as his master ‘had not enrolled his apprentice within the first year of his term according to custom, as appeared by a scrutiny of the books of the Chamber of Guildhall’.⁷⁵ A close inspection of how the City’s customs were to be correctly overseen according to civic records allowed for Adam Botoner’s bill against John More, Dilcok’s master, to be accepted. Similarly, in 1416 Joan Jurdan was exonerated from her apprenticeship following her father’s claim that she had not been enrolled ‘in accordance with the ordinance of 21 March 1415 ... was borne out by the records’.⁷⁶ From this examination of Guildhall records, Thomas Herford and his wife Joan were reprimanded for contravening rules controlling apprenticeships, as well as ‘unduly [castigating]’ and ‘[governing] the girl’.⁷⁷ Both accounts demonstrated that materials kept within this secular library were used to ensure proper conduct. A note inserted into *Letter Book H* further supports this. On a flyleaf, a note was made in a seventeenth-century hand recording that,

This day Appeared before master Chamberlin the master bonfor willkin and his wife And the Apprentice Thomas Kilbee And itt was Ardered that he should pay back outt Of 12 l 5 s 5 d ob.⁷⁸

This reminder dates from three centuries later, yet the ease with which this notice was left exemplifies the accessible nature of the text; it was a text readily available for ‘working purposes’. The note cited city business, linking directly to the office of chamberlain, an office that grew in importance between the later medieval period and sixteenth century, which was key in controlling the City finances and monetary records.⁷⁹ These extracts

⁷⁵ *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 120. I am grateful to Rhiannon Sandy for this reference.

⁷⁶ *CPMR, 1413-1437*, pp. 42-43. I am grateful to Rhiannon Sandy for this reference.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 43.

⁷⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008.

⁷⁹ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 176-185.

raise interest in the legal status of city records, including the Letter Books. As mentioned earlier, London's civic elite directed what was to be preserved in these manuscripts; by preserving legal precedents, authority figures, like Brembre and Bamme, could use the City's history and law, made openly available, to enforce their authority.

Previous work carried out by Ellis demonstrated that 'the narratives they [the Letter Books constructed ... legitimised] the authority of the civic governing elites', focusing in particular on Cheapside and issues of transparency within this ward.⁸⁰ Demonstrating the authority of civic leaders was a key consideration of the manuscript's assemblage and it is for this reason that the voice of London's leading officials permeated the text. In an examination of trials recorded in *Letter Book H*, Ellis concluded that 'through language and action, the civic authorities thus emphasised the extent of their power, whilst also foregrounding transparency and legibility'.⁸¹ Viewing these prosecutions through the lens of 'deceit and transparency', Ellis was quick to dismiss the findings of C. D. Benson, acknowledging that '[w]hile Benson [provided] some interesting and valid examples of such discursive competitiveness, it is worth stressing that many entries in the letter-books actually resist such a plurality of discourses'.⁸²

This study revisits Benson's ideas, and reconsiders the eight proclamations included in *Letter Book H* as a 'tell-taping contest, a series of competing discourses'.⁸³ While Ellis's ideas are persuasive, this should not ignore the fact that some materials copied into the Letter Books can be interpreted in the way that Benson has suggested.⁸⁴ Benson's theories centred on 'a series of competing discourses', 'alternative [narratives]', and 'contesting voices' and this is helpful when approaching the narrative of proclamations and their place within late medieval London's political culture.⁸⁵ This chapter shows that

⁸⁰ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, pp. 47-48.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 51.

⁸² Ibid, p. 49.

⁸³ Benson, 'Literary Contests', p. 138.

⁸⁴ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 49.

⁸⁵ Benson, 'Literary Contests', pp. 138, 139.

the discourse of common profit was central to the authors of the proclamations who used this ideology to control discourse in the London polity.

Proclamations: Tools of Communication and the Spread of Ideology

Medieval society viewed social interaction in terms of communication ‘between persons in their authorized social roles’.⁸⁶ Town governments enforced their right to rule through multiple interfaces, a customary practice being the act of proclaiming news and circulation of information.⁸⁷ Proclamations were issued for several reasons and announcements accordingly contained a variety of information about records such as charters and statutes, in addition to requesting the presence or attendance of certain persons or groups, who, for example, were summoned to appear before the King. They were also used for more general provisions and preventative measures. Proclamations also functioned as an invitation for those who needed to confirm their charters or those wishing to be pardoned.⁸⁸ Proclamations served as tools which informed the populace of significant measures relating to governance, administration and larger social and military changes like war. These were political devices that London’s civic elite utilised to counteract misbehaviour, malicious group activity and ill speech, as well as an apparatus that prevented the loss of their authority. They ‘[were] a declaration of coercive power’ which ‘[demonstrated] the town government’s ability to act publicly and purposely in the interests of the community’.⁸⁹

These ends were achieved by ensuring that society was informed of wider local and national considerations that affected town and city life. Doing so was particularly important as the auricular dissemination of knowledge allowed for royal authorities to shape and influence public perception. Historians working on the oral distribution of news

⁸⁶ Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing*, p. 58.

⁸⁷ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 146.

⁸⁸ James Doig, ‘Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations in Late Medieval England’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 71, No. 176 (1998), 254.

⁸⁹ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 125.

and the impact that this had on medieval society's understanding of the social, political and local events that they faced, have valued royal proclamations as a means from which the centre communicated with the peripheries.⁹⁰ Royal proclamations continued to be used as a means for royal government to propagate its aims and laws throughout both the late medieval and Tudor period.⁹¹ Both the utility and practicality of royal and civic proclamations, however, has been disputed. Focusing on the usage of proclamations by both Lancastrian and Yorkist kings, medievalists working on fifteenth-century England doubted the impact of these government announcements on the late medieval polity and the responses of rural and urban communities to their issuing.⁹² James Doig, who dubbed them as 'wasted tools', has largely questioned the efficacy of royal and civic proclamations, challenging the sway these held over popular opinion.⁹³

Proclamations, nevertheless, have continued to be seen as an integral form of political communication; the 'principal means' by which royal government announced legislation devised by parliament.⁹⁴ The same attitude has persevered with regards to common and civic proclamations. Common proclamations, for example, were 'comprehensive [in] character', and vital for mayors to establish their rules.⁹⁵ Civic proclamations, carried even more 'legal and political [resonances]' and 'made tangible the idea of a city as an autonomous entity: a public body that had the power to administer its

⁹⁰ H. J. Hewitt, *The Organization of War under Edward III, 1338-62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), pp. 158-160; J. R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924-1327* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), pp. 29-30; J. R. Maddicott, 'The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (1978), 27-43.

⁹¹ For the impact of Tudor proclamations see: *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I The Early Tudors (1485-1553)* ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. II The Later Tudors (1553-87)* ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III The Later Tudors (1588-1603)* ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); *The Proclamations of Tudor Kings* ed. R. W. Heinze (Cambridge: CUP, 2008); *The Proclamations of Tudor Queens* ed. Frederic A. Youngs Jr (Cambridge: CUP, 1976).

⁹² Alison Allan, 'Royal Propaganda and the Proclamations of Edward IV', *Historical Research*, Vol. 59, Iss. 140 (1986), 146-54; W. M. Ormrod, 'The domestic response to the Hundred Years War' in *Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War* ed. A. Curry and M. Hughes (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1994), p. 97.

⁹³ Doig, 'Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations', 275.

⁹⁴ Paul Cavill, *The English Parliaments of Henry VII, 1485-1504* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 175.

⁹⁵ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 147. Rexroth has further explored the utility of common proclamations, outlining that they were 'institutions in themselves'. Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 73.

own laws'.⁹⁶ With this in mind, the following examination demonstrates that similar conclusions can be drawn from studying the way in which leading mayors, notably Brembre, utilised proclamations to achieve parallel outcomes.

Doig's categorisation of proclamations as 'wasted tools', in terms of their efficacy and impact on social behaviour, devalued the thought process that contributed to the construction of these records. The work of Hawes, nevertheless, has shown how proclamations were key in legitimatising authority – proclamations were used as a means of sharing important information to enforce obedience and reinforce the influence of those in positions of power. As Hawes argued, 'once the proclamation had been made correctly, the crown [for example] could claim that the action was common knowledge, and could therefore implement sanctions if individuals ... refused to comply with the law'.⁹⁷ Evaluating the performative nature of proclamations informs scholars of the mentality behind the construction of the proclamation and the political environment from whence it came. Attention to the events following the issuing of proclamations has been acknowledged by Dean Rowland and whilst this aspect of the process concerning proclamations cannot be ignored, the intention here is to understand the considerations and influence of common profit ideology in shaping proclamations in 1380s London.⁹⁸ Having an audience to hear these words was key and, as Emily Steiner has considered, 'certain legal instruments [like proclamations] were public events in themselves involving aural and visual performances as well as active community participation'.⁹⁹ Considering proclamations from this viewpoint allows for a reassessment of medieval political theory,

⁹⁶ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 147.

⁹⁷ Hawes, 'Community and Public Authority in Later Fifteenth-Century Scotland', p. 28.

⁹⁸ Rowland is justified in his viewpoint. See Dean Rowland, 'The Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation in England, 1422–c.1485' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Institute of Historical Research, 2015), p. 30. For example, a proclamation issued in 1387 focused on eliminating vituperative speech that was directed at the King, Queen and his closest advisers was largely ineffective. It was issued only a few months before the confrontation Richard II had with the Lords Appellant and the Merciless Parliament, in which the artisanal guilds were able to condemn Brembre and largely criticize his character. See LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 223; *ABoLE*, pp. 92-93; *Memorials*, 500. The Westminster Chronicler commented on this proclamation and the reasons behind why it was issued. See p. 236 for this.

⁹⁹ Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p. 158.

London's identity and the influence of the idea of common profit on administrative records that were used for communicative purposes.

Civic officials in 1380s London valued political communication as a means of controlling the behaviour of Londoners. Proclamations were a 'two-way channel of communication between Westminster and provincial England', from which people, following the period from 1300 to the eve of the Black Death, were no longer passive participants; they were a unified political force and 'public opinion could be most effectively shaped in response to the government's needs'.¹⁰⁰ Governance in late medieval England, 'was moulded more by pressures from within political society than by the efforts of kings or officials', supporting this notion that it was subjects of the realm who 'shaped the institutions of government, the conventions of governing, and the capacity of kings to govern effectively'.¹⁰¹

Historians of late medieval England are constantly reminded that society between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries was 'highly politicized' and continuously expanding its social awareness of political culture and ideologies.¹⁰² It is for these reasons that this analysis concentrates on the oral interaction between those in power and those who had the capacity to diminish and destroy that power. London's civic officials recognised this crucial aspect of an urban centre's constituent parts and their ability to disrupt social control and public order. As McIntosh noted, regulations designed to battle against wrongdoing '[resolved] conflict and [minimized] forms of social behaviour seen as damaging to the community'.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ J. R. Maddicott, 'Parliament and the People in Medieval England', *PH*, 35 (2016), 342; Maddicott, 'County Community', 33-34.

¹⁰¹ G. L. Harriss, 'Political Society and the Growth of Government in Late Medieval England', *Past & Present*, 138 (1993), 33.

¹⁰² Christopher Fletcher, 'News, Noise, and the Nature of Politics in Late Medieval English Provincial Towns', *Journal of British Studies*, 56 (April, 2017), 250; John Watts, 'Popular Voices in England's Wars of the Roses, c. 1445-c.1485' in *The Voices of the People*, pp. 107-122. For an urban context see Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrer and Vincent Challet, 'Medieval Voices and Popular Politics' in *The Voices of the People*, pp. 1-12, esp. p. 5.

¹⁰³ McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, p. 24.

Several methods were employed to combat social transgressions; within London these ranged from the highest of the King's courts, including the Courts of Chancery, King's Bench and Common Pleas to more public punishments, which, as we have seen, included both the pillory and stocks.¹⁰⁴ This need to maximise control over the activities that occurred in London's streets was seen during Brembre's third to fifth mayoralities. This was reinforced by the fact that from 1383 to 1386 there was a spike in the number of proclamations issued deterring Londoners from forming malicious assemblies; five were issued in quick succession.¹⁰⁵ These measures taken by Brembre not only established socially accepted forms of behaviour but, also, the parameters of acceptable political discourse. The language and ideas employed in proclamations, therefore, needed to be constructed carefully and done in a manner which suggested to listeners that civic leaders could unite the body politic.

The significance of words beyond the page and the circulation of these messages amongst London's citizens must be reconsidered. The presence of 'civic interests', within London literature was 'central to the growth of local London culture'.¹⁰⁶ The importance of the oral propagation of these 'civic interests', in the context of *Letter Book H*, in and the effect they had on political discourse or the reason behind their dissemination in a public space has been neglected. Taking this into account allows for a reconceptualization of who created these narratives and the audiences they were targeting. This key aspect of urban life in medieval England has been recognised by Davis, who affirmed that '[w]hen proclamations and ordinances [asserted] the notion of "common profit" or "common good", it is worth asking who comprised the commonalty'.¹⁰⁷ Audience was key but so too was ensuring that common profit ideology entered the public arena. This analysis thus examines the manner in which the discourse of common profit was used to negotiate

¹⁰⁴ For more on a range of judicial institutions and lesser public courts see McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, pp. 24-45. For the use of the pillory and stocks see Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', pp. 19-21, 26-28.

¹⁰⁵ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, p. 172.

authority and control perceptions of London's rulers. It is helpful to think of proclamations as a palimpsest, which declared the authority of civic officials but in doing so revealed their insecurities.

Focusing on how concerns over slanderous language and misbehaviour affected London's political culture allows for a further exploration of the intricate link between written and spoken language.¹⁰⁸ Delineating a clear distinction between the oral and written word, however, is complex and problematic yet Wallace Chafe and Deborah Tannen have shown that 'different conditions of production as well as different intended uses foster the creation of different kinds of language'.¹⁰⁹ Their hypothesis provides a useful basis from which we can understand how messages of common profit ideology were verbally communicated to a restless and politically fragmented city. Rowland, however, cautioned against relying on the Letter Books alone, noting that it is important to 'distinguish between the proclamation as actually delivered, and its written record'.¹¹⁰

Understanding the performative dimension of proclamations is a vital part of this investigation. We have left what Rowland has termed a 'paper-trail', yet comprehending how the speech-acts embodied within these records were enacted is key to understanding the desired impact that officials intended for proclamations to have.¹¹¹ Fundamentally, proclamations were delivered with the intention of persuading and commanding and, therefore, are excellent sources from which to reveal what the perceived challenges to authority were and what means would be deemed effective deterrents. The Common Crier was responsible for public announcements, and in doing so was a key figure in delivering proclamations – he projected the authority of the most important civic leaders, namely the Mayor and the Aldermen, as well as their right to rule the city of London.¹¹² Ceremony and

¹⁰⁸ Wallace Chafe and Deborah Tannen, 'The Relation Between Written and Spoken Language', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 16 (1987), 383. For more on the relationship between writing and speaking and the context in which this takes place see Tannen's contribution to the article, 391-398.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 390.

¹¹⁰ Rowland, 'Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation', p. 30.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 28-29.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 172.

ritual were at the heart of these public displays of authority. The event included ‘naming the mayor, and possibly aldermen, and the other attributes of the crier, perhaps the use of a horn or musical instrument before speaking’.¹¹³ The Common Crier would have had elaborate robes and would have most likely been raised in height above his audience, perhaps appearing on horseback.¹¹⁴ He needed to fulfil an authoritative role in order to embody the power and rights of London’s civic officials. Rowland focuses on what a proclamation ‘was primarily trying to *be*’ as opposed to how widely listened to it was.¹¹⁵

The Common Crier was instrumental in mediating information to London’s citizenry. In London, the Common Crier (also known as the Common Serjeant-At-Arms) was responsible for ensuring that proclamations were read out, whilst the sheriffs of London confirmed that they had been enacted.¹¹⁶ Whilst Barron has described this bureaucratic role as ‘an altogether much more humble office’, in comparison to other members of the civic bureaucracy such as the Chamberlain, the Common Clerk and the Common-Serjeant-at-Law, this individual was the face of London’s civic officials; he was the ‘pivot of political communication between authority and the wider populace’.¹¹⁷ His role, therefore, raises the key issue of the language in which these records were proclaimed.

Rowland highlighted that ‘orality was constantly backed-up by the written record’, supporting Richardson’s claim concerning the need to preserve documentary culture in late medieval London.¹¹⁸ The eight proclamations that feature in this chapter were written in the administrative languages of Latin and Anglo-Norman, as well as in Middle English. Regardless of the language in which these records were preserved, it was standard practice

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 172; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 146.

¹¹⁴ Rowland, ‘Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation’, p. 172; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 190. Barron places importance on the provision of a horse for the Common Crier. She noted that ‘the sheriffs were expected to provide the common crier with a suitable horse “for the honour of the city”’. For more on the Common Crier see *Liber Albus*, p. 43.

¹¹⁵ Rowland, ‘Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation’, p. 173.

¹¹⁶ See below pp. 206-208.

¹¹⁷ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 176-185, 185-188, 189-190; Rowland, ‘Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation’, p. 33.

¹¹⁸ Rowland, ‘Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation’, p. 178.

for public communication to be in English.¹¹⁹ This was essential for pronouncements of proclamations to be effective and for ‘mass communication’ to be guaranteed.¹²⁰

Proclamations were read out across key areas in the city of London which were of significance to both London officials and the City’s residents. Areas which encapsulated important social events, such as mayoral elections, were ‘official [spaces]’ that were ‘[used] in the legitimization of official power’.¹²¹ Warrants of proclamation offer insights into the customary traditions and protocols surrounding the history and practise of proclamations. These administrative records detailed the types of spaces in which proclamations were read out, providing evidence that ‘[s]uch performative forces may certainly be manifested in physical actions as well as by words ... and by such things as the physical location of the utterance’.¹²² This information was usually provided on endorsements written on the back of writs and were addressed to the sheriffs of London, who would, in turn, ensure that the wishes of royal government were carried out.¹²³ I have chosen examples dating to Richard II’s reign to illustrate this point. In 1388, for example, the sheriffs of London Adam Karlill and Thomas Austyn signified that the writ sent out to them was lawfully read out ‘in Ciuitate london et suburbis eiusdem’.¹²⁴ A warrant of proclamation signed off by the sheriffs William Venour and Hugh Fastolf in 1388 is also revealing of the practices and organisation of where proclamations were made and how to ensure their validity. Venour and Fastolf, like Karlill and Austyn, confirmed that the

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Emily Steiner noted that ‘although few official documents in English were produced before the fifteenth century, royal officials periodically recited proclamations such as the Magna Carta throughout the realm in Latin and both vernaculars, perhaps as many as four times a year’. See Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, p. 157.

¹²⁰ W. M. Ormrod, ‘The Use of English Language: Language, Law, and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England’, *Speculum*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (2003), 787.

¹²¹ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 59.

¹²² Rowland, ‘Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation’, p. 35. The series C 255 (Chancery Files, Tower and Rolls Chapel Series, Miscellaneous Files and Writs), held at The National Archives, was consulted in order to come to these conclusions.

¹²³ Example of this address: ‘Ricardus dei gratia Rex Anglia et ffraunce et Dominus Hibernia vicecomitibus london’ salutem’.

¹²⁴ TNA, C 255/3/5/28 (in the city of London and the very same suburbs). The dating of the writ is illegible but I have drawn these conclusions by examining when John Wodecok and William Askham were sheriffs. See the University of Toronto’s database on sheriffs: <https://masl.library.utoronto.ca/searchresultsfafb.html?office=Sheriff>. It is possible that the year may be 1389.

subject of the writ had been ‘publice proclamari’.¹²⁵ The county of Middlesex was sometimes grouped together with writs which ordered for proclamation to be made in London and the City’s surrounding areas. For example, in an endorsement validated by both John Wodecok and William Askham in 1398, it was recorded that ‘brevi predicto palam et publice proclamari fecimus in Ciuitate london’ et suburbijis eiusdem et in Comitatus Middlesex’.¹²⁶

Whilst writs were generally formulaic, one dated to 1398 was more unusual. The warrant was not addressed to the sheriffs of London but rather resembles the formulaic responses received in endorsements, but is of a far greater length and included more detail. The entry outlined that,

Nos Johannes Wodecok et Willelmus Askham vicecomites London et Middlesex vobis significamus quod virtute brevis domini Regis nobis directi et huic consuti die veneris proxima post festum sancti valentini anno regni Regis Ricardi secundi vicesimo primo statuum viso predicto brevi palam et publice proclamari fecimus in Ciuitate London et in suburbis eiusdem videlicet apud standardum in ffiletstrete London Item apud standardum in Westchepe London Item apud le ledenhalle super cornhill London Item apud ecclesiam sancti magnus in Briggestrete London Item apud ecclesiam sancti martini in vinetria London Item in comitatu Middlesex videlicet apud villam Westmonasterii Item apud Woxebrigge Item apud Stanes.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ TNA, C 255/3/5/15 (publicly proclaimed). The writ named the five appellees: Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford, Michael de la Pole, Chancellor, Alexander Neville, Archbishop of York, Robert Tresilian, Chief Justice of the King’s Bench and Nicholas Brembre. The warrant of proclamation is also dated to the 21st March and so we can conclude that the warrant was issued following the close of the Merciless Parliament.

¹²⁶ TNA, C 255/3/7/29 (the said writ made openly and publicly proclaimed in the city of London, the very same suburbs and the county of Middlesex).

¹²⁷ TNA, C 255/3/7/39 (We the sheriffs of London and Middlesex, John Wodecok and William Askham, signify to you that by the virtue of the writ of our lord the king directed to us and sewn to this the Friday next after the feast of St Valentine in the twenty-first year of the reign of King Richard the second, we, having viewed the aforesaid writ, caused the statute to be openly and publicly proclaimed in the city of London and in the suburbs of the same, namely at the standard in Fleetstreet in London. Also at the standard in Westcheap in London. Also at the Leadenhall above Cornhill in London. Also at the church of St Magnus in

This vivid and revealing textual representation of London and its civic spaces showcased not only the medieval city's topography but also ideologies and political values which were assigned to these spaces in which London's community gathered to be informed of matters that were of mutual concern.¹²⁸

The narratives preserved in the warrants of proclamations 'reveal a sense of spatial order and hierarchy in both city and cosmos, a moral topography of centre and edge, core and periphery' that is reminiscent of Lilley's medieval city.¹²⁹ These were civic spaces that engaged the public and 'worked in concert or in conflict to shape or rule what happened along a city's streets'.¹³⁰ The meanings assigned to these spaces were socially constructed and were of particular meaning to certain groups and individuals.¹³¹ This is seen, for example, in the mustering of militia and gathering of rebels, which William Lambarde, in his *Perambulation of Kent*, drew attention to in the later sixteenth century. Lambarde's exploration of both 'Pinnendene Heath' and 'Blackheathe' outlined these sites as places of assembly which groups returned to repeatedly in times of crisis and revolt.¹³² In particular, Lambarde's description of 'Pinnendene Heath' as a recurring site in which justice and judgement took place, recalled that it 'was the appointed place' where 'not onely the whole number of the moste expert men of this Shyre, but of sundrie other Countries also, came in great frequencie, and spent ... dayes in debate'.¹³³ Gatherings at these sites were also about the co-option of space by rebels, with similar episodes occurring at sites, such as market

Briggstreet in London. Also at the church of St Martin in the Vintry in London. Also in the county of Middlesex, namely in the town of Westminster. Also at Uxbridge. Also at Staines). For more on this record see Doig, 'Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations', 260. Doig informs that this was a response to a proclamation issued in February 1398 'concerning Norfolk's treason'.

¹²⁸ Keith D. Lilley, 'Mapping Cosmopolis: moral topographies of the medieval city', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 22 (2004), 681-698. For more on social and political theories, especially the metaphorical relationship between head and the whole body see 683-684.

¹²⁹ Lilley, 'moral topographies', 686.

¹³⁰ Riita Laitinen and Thomas Cohen, 'Cultural History of Early Modern Streets – An Introduction', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 12 (2008), 195.

¹³¹ Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450*, p. 242.

¹³² For more on this see Montgomery Bona, 'Armed Force and Civic Legitimacy in Jack Cade's Revolt, 1450', *English Historical Research*, 118 (2003), 563-82; William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent containing the description, hystorie, and customs of that shyre. Collected and written (for the most part) in the yeare. 1570. by William Lambarde of Lincolnes Inne Gent.* (1576), pp. 178-180, 340-341. I am grateful to Dr Kat Byrne for providing me with these references.

¹³³ Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent*, p. 179.

areas, within urban centres. These spatial practices structured and informed ideas attached to political and social hubs. Parallel to this, areas in which proclamations were read out maintained similar connotations; these areas carried political implications that promoted good governance, unity and orderly behaviour – all of which would preserve standards of common profit.

The function and ordering of spaces in London supports Lilley's theories more generally. In using proclamations strategically and employing the discourse of common profit, civic officials turned London into an urban landscape which 'was a "map" of social relations and identities forged by regulatory practices'.¹³⁴ These spaces had certain symbolic meanings attached to them, transforming them into areas endowed with political significance and authority. In considering this, we can move beyond Rowland's suggestion on 'what an authority was doing in making a proclamation', and focus instead on the power and influence these sites in London gave to the message proclaimed and to the importance of controlling narratives.¹³⁵

'noman make none congregaciouns conuenticules ne assemblies of poeple in priue ne apert': Insurrection and Malicious Assemblies

Enforcing law and combatting social disobedience was fundamental in medieval England. As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, the threat posed by malicious gatherings, and its impact on social order, was reflected in the documentary culture of the 1380s. Nowhere is this insecurity more apparent, or mentioned with such frequency, than in five proclamations produced between 1383 and 1386, which specifically condemned the formation of 'congregaciouns conuenticules ne assemblies of poeple in priue ne apert'.¹³⁶ Anxieties over 'covins', 'congregations' and 'conventicles' were recurring issues

¹³⁴ Lilley, 'moral topographies', 694.

¹³⁵ Rowland, 'Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation', p. 36; Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, p. xiii.

¹³⁶ I have quoted from LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r. The four other proclamations which include this warning are: LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fols. 180r, 180v, 196r and 204v.

throughout Brembre's mayoralty following his re-election in 1383, becoming an inherent grievance during the conflict that took place between Brembre and Northampton. Ellis interrogated Brembre's word choices within these proclamations, concluding that 'covins', 'congregations', and 'conventicles' 'were a familiar set of synonyms for "assembly"', which shared linguistic and structural qualities, yet did not have 'pejorative denotations'.¹³⁷ Ellis argued that 'Brembre [used] expansive terms as part of an all-encompassing rhetoric which [defined] as iniquitous in the popular consciousness anything that might resemble an assembly', noting that only the term 'covina' carried negative connotations.¹³⁸

'Covines', 'conventicles' and 'confederacies' were a dominant feature of political culture in 1380s London.¹³⁹ These were deeply nuanced terms which were associated with rebellion and conspiracy, increasing the anxieties of leading London officials. For example, the term 'covyne [was] a deeply nuanced word, the kind of word used at this period ... to denote insurgent confederacy and conspiracy – it [was] an English synonym for the Latin *conventicula* and *congregations* used in official documents about the 1381 Rising'.¹⁴⁰ The term 'conventicle' also carried notions of scheming and iniquity, challenging 'due custom and service'.¹⁴¹ As seen in chapter two, these were terms used to describe the malicious gatherings and types of behaviour that formed against Brembre at his mayoral election in October 1384. Heretical meanings were also attached to 'conventicle'; the term was ascribed to Lollard groups that met in secret within households

¹³⁷ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, pp. 59-60. Ellis pointed out that there were several parallels between these texts. For example 'tricolons which frequently alliterate' were utilised across these records as a means of emphasising his [being Brembre] concern over 'associational forms' and challenge to his authority. Ellis has also given attention to the reiteration of these phrases and the use of English and Anglo-Norman to confer these points; J. D. Burnley, 'Curial Prose in England', *Speculum*, 61, 3 (1986), 596; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, pp. 61-62.

¹³⁸ s.v. 'congreg/atio' and s.v. 'conven/ticulum' in *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources with Supplement*, prepared by R. E. Latham (London: Oxford University Press, 1980); s.v. 'congregacioun (n.)' and s.v. 'conventicle (n.)', *The Middle English Dictionary* ed. by Hans Kurath, et al (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954-99), online edn as cited in Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, pp. 61-62.

¹³⁹ Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp. 119 n. 39, 196 n. 38.

¹⁴¹ Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Peasant Resistance to Royal and Seigniorial Impositions' in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 39.

to engage in discussions and pastoral teaching.¹⁴² A Middle English text, produced during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, adopted discourse traditionally associated with Wycliffite rhetoric to present Lollards as ‘speiken euer and rownen in hidlis, [whisper in secret] and neuer in þe temple. In þis úe ben contrarie to Crist, and so be disipulis of antecrist’.¹⁴³ These were illicit gatherings that not only went against Christ, but also the social order. ‘Conventicle’ and ‘covin’ paired with ‘congregation’ imbued this latter term with political connotations which indicated clandestine and illegal meetings. Used together, ‘congregation’, ‘conventicle’ and ‘covin’ transformed into terms permeated with political significance.

These terms also reappear later during the 1380s, notably in the 1388 Guild Petitions, examined in chapter four, and during the Cambridge Parliament in September 1388 in which Richard II ‘rose to the challenge, promising to set a good example by putting a stop to his own practice of retaining, which served to appease the parliamentary commons and put the Lords in a more than compromising position’.¹⁴⁴ Ellis’s work has been key in showing that the proclamations had ‘a distinctly Brembresque’ dimension and that it was he who was ‘the directing presence’ for their creation and proliferation of texts addressing this grievance.¹⁴⁵ By expanding on existing literature examining ‘anti-associational rhetoric’, he demonstrated that criticisms raised following the indictment of Northampton, and his co-conspirators, the mercers Richard Norbury and John More in

¹⁴² Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 47; S. Royal, ‘Reforming Household Piety: John Foxe and the Lollard Conventicle Tradition’, *Religion and the Household*, Vol. 40 (2014), 188-98; P. Szittyá, ‘Illicit Conventicles and the Public Order’ (paper presented at the New Chaucer Society Congress, Paris 1998).

¹⁴³ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. 154. Originally sourced by Hudson in University College Oxford MS. 123, fol. 77v; Geographies of Orthodoxy project, description of Oxford, University Library MS 123 by Ryan Perry <<http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/?section=corpus&id=10>>.

¹⁴⁴ Strohm, ‘The Textual Environment Environment of Chaucer’s “Lak of Steadfastness”’ in *Hochon’s Arrow*, p. 59; Malte Urban, *Fragments: Past and Present in Chaucer and Gower* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2009), p. 34.

¹⁴⁵ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 60.

1384 were directly linked to Brembre.¹⁴⁶ These phrases recurred repeatedly throughout the indictment process against Northampton, More and Norbury as a result of ‘the riots and dissensions which had arisen and continued in the city’ by their hands.¹⁴⁷

The indictment against Northampton, More and Norbury, copied into *Letter Book H*, repeatedly referred to the disastrous nature of ‘plures conuenticlas congregaciones et Couinas’.¹⁴⁸ The phrase, or a variant of it, appeared five times throughout the document, stressing that this incitement and rising had a detrimental impact on the streets of London. Similar rhetoric was found in the entry recorded in the patent roll for 1384 outlining the collusions between Northampton, More and Norbury.¹⁴⁹ The entry recorded that ‘[f]or the strengthening of good government in the city and for the punishment of rioters and those who are guilty of such assemblies, congregations, covins or insurrections, this grant [that being the preservation of ‘peace and tranquillity in the city’ of London] is to remain in force without revocation’.¹⁵⁰ The formation of ‘plures conuenticlas congregaciones et Couinas’ was a particularly political matter that disrupted and subverted the good governance of London.

The indictment also named several specific locations where the impact of insurrection was felt. These included ‘Westchepe’, ‘Bugerowe’, ‘ffletestrete’ and ‘alibi in Ciuitate et suburbiis’ – areas which we saw earlier in this chapter were typical sites in which proclamations were read out.¹⁵¹ Northampton, More and Norbury served as scapegoats in the indictment, yet the phrase ‘plures conuenticlas congregaciones et

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 55. He opposed Turner and Strohm’s view that anti-‘associational rhetoric’ was non-authored. Turner and Strohm considered it part of the ‘textual’ world of the 1380s; a ‘[buzzword] and key [symbol]’ that was cultivated following the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. See Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 18-19, 127-31 and Strohm, “‘Lad with revel’”, pp. 165-167. For scholarship that Ellis drew upon to reach these conclusions see: Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, p.171; Hanrahan, ‘London’, pp. 266-80.

¹⁴⁷ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, pp. 55-; *CPR Richard II: 1381-85*, p. 470; *WC*, p. 95.

¹⁴⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 190r (many conventicles, congregations and covins); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 347, 351; *LBH*, p. 264.

¹⁴⁹ Whilst Ellis focused primarily on archival records produced in 1384 demonstrating concern for ‘congregations, covins and confederacies’, he neglected this criticism within the Patent Rolls. Parallels can be drawn with the practice of rural sixteenth-century rebels meeting at particular sites associated with rebellion. This was for practical reasons and to co-opt spaces of authority. See above, pp. 210.

¹⁵⁰ *CPR, Richard II: 1381-1385*, p. 464.

¹⁵¹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 190r; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 347, 353; *LBH*, pp. 264-265.

Couinas' implied that others formed part of their uprising – the potential for rioting by large congregations of individuals was presented as a collective threat that went against maintaining harmony in London's streets and the communal benefit of the City's inhabitants.

These terms became staple phrases for Brembre and his followers, and were especially reflected in the writings of Usk, who described the formation of unruly gatherings formed by Northampton. As we saw in chapter two, Northampton, 'on the accusation of Usk, "scryvein", citizen of London, was convicted, judicially deprived by the king of the freedom of the city and sentenced to perpetual imprisonment'.¹⁵² Usk wrote that Northampton, alongside More, Norbury and William Essex 'was euer-more an excitation to the pore poeple to make hem be the more feruent & rebel a-yeins he grete men of the town, & ayeins the officers'.¹⁵³ Usk grouped together the 'pore poeple', 'the grete men of the town' and 'the officers' as victims of Northampton's seditious activities. In doing so, he drew attention to the sufferance of the body politic, a united entity whose shared well-being Northampton overturned.

Later in his testimony, Usk repeatedly mentioned the dangers associated with 'confederacie, congregacion & couyne'.¹⁵⁴ Within this passage, Usk narrated that these 'confederacies & excitacions' caused 'the debates & the grete stryf, that is regnyng in the cite', thereby making these grievances specific to London and current political events.¹⁵⁵ He asked for mercy for himself and Adam Bamme, who 'was noght so comunly, ne so bysy on thys purpos [& confederacy]es as [wer] the tother [being Northampton, More, Norbury and Essex]'.¹⁵⁶ In seeking forgiveness, Usk removed responsibility from himself and Bamme and shifted culpability to Northampton and his closest allies. Similar concerns also manifested in Usk's *Testament of Love*, written between 1385 and 1386. The narrator

¹⁵² CPR, *Richard II: 1381-85*, p. 470.

¹⁵³ "Appeal", p. 24.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 30.

informed Lady Love that ‘the felonous thoughtes of this people and covyns of wicked men conspyren ayen my southfast trouth?’ (Book I, ch 6, 149-150). For Usk, those who formed ‘covyns’ were deceitful, in contrast to his character who was honest. They were upstarts dedicated to initiating turmoil and duplicity within society.

Usk’s *Appeal and Testament of Love* thus reflected Brembre’s fears of the current political conflicts in London. The proclamations produced in Brembre’s third mayoralty, targeted mischievous affinities, whose words Strohm described were a ‘blizzard of terminology stirred up ... by Nicholas Brembre in his 1383 mayoral term, [used] in order to discourage John Northampton and his crafts guildsmen by forbidding “congregaciouns, conuenticles ... assembles ... alliances, confederacies, conspiracies ... [and] obligaciouns, forto bynde men to gidre, for systene quereles in lyuinngge and deyenngge to gidre”’.¹⁵⁷ Concern over the scandalous nature of ‘congregations, covins and confederacies’, however, was found beyond the political commentary.

Social anxieties about the formation of ‘covins’, for example, recurred in Chaucer’s portrayal of the Reeve in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Literary scholars studying the ideological setting which Chaucer established in the General Prologue, argued that the Reeve represented ‘the austere control of rebellion’ in contrast to the Miller, his foe, who ‘simply [*was*] the “revolting peasant”’.¹⁵⁸ Chaucer’s Reeve was an agent of order whose duty was ‘onerous and unpopular’.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, he was ‘an upstart, whose omniscient eye [terrified] manorial servants, who [extracted] every possible penny from them and hence [ingratiated] himself with the landlord, while privately making a substantial personal profit’.¹⁶⁰ The Reeve stood in opposition to rustic servants and embodied the iniquities associated with those who policed the activities of provincial servants and who imposed ruthless fiscal policies. Readers, however, learned that ‘[t]her

¹⁵⁷ Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p. 24; *Memorials*, pp. 480-481.

¹⁵⁸ Alcuin Blamires, ‘Chaucer the Reactionary: Ideology and the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*’, *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 204 (2000), 531.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 531-32.

nas bailiff, ne hierde, nor oother hyne, / That he ne knew his sleighte and his covyne;
 They were adrad of hym as of the deeth' (I 602-605).¹⁶¹ These verses epitomised contemporary alarms and worries over traitorous and conspiratorial actions. Readers were made aware of 'stratagems and conspiracy' which the Reeve imagined were a potential threat to his administration.¹⁶² The terms 'sleighte' and 'covyne' in the portrayal of the Reeve has been considered by Blamires to represent ideological nuances associated with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. This scenario provided a dichotomy in which 'the Reeve's desire to nip their "covyne" in the bud through comprehensive surveillance, form an analogue for concerted peasant conspiracy on the one hand, and an intolerably oppressive all-seeing authority on the other'.¹⁶³ Chaucer's use of 'covyne' to evoke distress and alarm demonstrated that this anxiety was widespread within late medieval society over the fears of malicious group activities. Chaucer was a part of this environment, witnessing Brembre's reactions to political events and misfortunes and thus would have been familiar with rhetoric employed and its resonances within political society.¹⁶⁴

The objection to 'plures conuenticulas congregaciones et Couinas', however, did not emerge as a result of the troubles of 1380s London. It was a concern that was traced back to the *De Antiquis Legibus Liber seu Cronica Maiorum et Vicecomitum Londoniarum*, written during the late thirteenth century and attributed to Arnold Fitz Thedmar. Fitz Thedmar's text included a proclamation that prohibited 'conuenticulas per se, seu congregaciones'.¹⁶⁵ This grievance also had an earlier history in the fourteenth century and can be seen within a Parliament Roll produced following the 1381 revolt and in an earlier proclamation issued during Brembre's first mayoralty on 6th June 1378.¹⁶⁶ The

¹⁶¹ All quotations for Chaucer's work are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer* 3rd edn. ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

¹⁶² Blamires, 'Chaucer the Reactionary', 532.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ See Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, esp. pp. 90-183.

¹⁶⁵ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 58; *De Antiquis Legibus Liber seu Cronica Maiorum et Vicecomitum Londoniarum* ed. Thomas Stapleton, Camden society, OS 34 (London: Camden Society, 1846), p. 98. Ellis pointed out that Fitz Thedmar's manuscript contains other proclamations which targeted the same issue.

¹⁶⁶ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 59; PROME, III, 105; LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 86r; *LBH*, p. 92.

latter was the earliest of Brembre's six proclamations which focused on these gatherings, demonstrating Brembre's 'long-standing concern about associational forms'.¹⁶⁷

Strohm and Ellis, however, seem to have lifted out the phrase from these records rather than examining how 'congregaciouns', 'conuenticules', 'confederacies', 'covins' and 'conspiracies' related to the rest of the proclamations or each other. The five proclamations issued after Brembre's re-election as mayor are all dated between 1383 and 1386. One of Brembre's proclamations preceded Northampton, More and Norbury's rising against Brembre and four succeeded the event of 11th February 1384. The latest proclamation was dated October 1386.¹⁶⁸ Even after the condemnation of Northampton, More and Norbury, Brembre still felt a need to remind the commonalty of who had authority in the City. As will be seen in chapter four, this was a real concern and in 1388 Brembre still faced opposition from London's artisanal guilds who had supported Northampton even after his exile from London in September 1384; Brembre, therefore, was a man who seemingly felt the constant threat of Northampton's shadow over him.

The terms 'congregaciouns', 'conuenticules', 'assembles', 'couynes', 'confederacies' and 'conspiracies' were repeatedly employed throughout Brembre's five proclamations. The authority of the Mayor and Aldermen was asserted from the start. For example, in a proclamation written in Middle English and issued between 1383 and 1384, the Common Crier reminded those listening that '[t]he Mair, shirreues and aldermen and alle other' wyse wyth hem that habbeth the gouernaille of the Citee vnder oure lige lord the kyng by vertue of the chartre of oure fraunchise'.¹⁶⁹ The opening lines of a proclamation pronounced on 20th September 1384, written in French, mirrored these ideas, reminding the public that '[n]ous comandons depar nostre seigneur le Roy'.¹⁷⁰ This was a clear

¹⁶⁷ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 60, fn. 102. For Ellis, the delivery of this proclamation indicates that the following five proclamations distributed by Brembre in 1383-4, 1384, 1385 and 1386, which the present author discusses, were not circulated as a response to the 1381 revolt.

¹⁶⁸ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 365.

¹⁶⁹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 226; *Memorials*, p. 480.

¹⁷⁰ LMA, COL/AD/01/08, fol. 180v (We command on behalf of our lord the king); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 361, 362; *LBH*, p. 249.

reminder of where the Mayor's, as well as his colleagues', power came from and their privileges as civic officials. It was also indicative of a direct connection between king and civic officials, which we have seen, were intrinsically linked through powers of authority. A clear concern was demonstrated that this relationship and notions of hierarchy, as well as civic governance more generally, were being disrupted by those who caused social nuisance.

The Mayor, as well as his close associates the Sheriffs and Aldermen of London, legally had the authority and power to rule London according to the charter issued by the King, whose supremacy was unquestionable. Through the Common Crier, he established his dominance and position as defender of community values and civic governance. The proclamation is suggestive of the early threat that Brembre felt from Northampton, preempting his revolt against him and this technique was used to reinforce Brembre's message and ingrain a sense of loyalty amongst those listening. The point of the proclamation was to act as a deterrent against those who sought to destroy Brembre's power and reputation, focusing specifically on the illegality of these malevolent groups.

Throughout these five public pronouncements, Brembre reinforced the notion that any attempts to bring men together for malicious purposes were unlawful under any circumstances. This had certainly been the case during Northampton's rising against Brembre. As outlined in the introduction to chapter two, we know that Northampton 'congregated' alongside several artisanal guilds in the tavern of John Willingham to scheme against Brembre.¹⁷¹ This kind of criminal activity was recorded in proclamations disseminated between late 1383 and 1384, possibly in response to this episode. These three proclamations were declared within months of each other. We do not have an exact date for the first of these proclamations, which was issued between late 1383 and 1384 but the other two were issued on 15th August 1384 and the 20th September 1384, a mere month apart, demonstrating the rapidly rising insecurities of Brembre and his allies. All three

¹⁷¹ *The Peasants' Rising and the Lollards* ed. Edgar Powell and G. M. Trevelayn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), pp. 27-38.

proclamations stated that ‘null manere des gentz de quel condicioun qils soient nient plus gentz dascun mister que autres ne fassent congregacioun couyne ne assemble en priue ne apert’.¹⁷² Whether conducted in private or publicly within the streets of London, a seditious gathering was a heinous crime.¹⁷³

The formation of ‘congregacioun couyne [and] assemble’ was prohibited to all men within the community of London. A proclamation made on 20th September 1384, however, extended this warning to women in London.¹⁷⁴ The proclamation informed that ‘[n]ous comandoms depar nostre seignour le Roy que nulles maneres des gentz nient plus hommes que femmes de quele condicioun qils soient ne facent congregacioun couine ne conuenticle quelconque en priue ne en apert’.¹⁷⁵ Women, as well as men, had public responsibilities in keeping order. Traditionally, women married to freemen of London were able to share the privileges of her husband due to his status. Likewise, women were also able to pursue the same careers as freemen of the City, practising certain crafts and employing apprentices – both boys and girls – to follow their trade.¹⁷⁶ It follows, then, that this economic independence and practice in city conduct meant that women too had a role in abiding by city custom and law. These women were known as *femme soles* and were usually married

¹⁷² Extract is taken from LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 180r (no manner of men of whatever condition that they should be, neither the great men of any mystery nor others, should make a congregation, covin, nor assembly, in private or openly). On fol. 180v the excerpt read: ‘qe nulles maneres des gentz nient plus hommes qe femmes de quele condicioun qils soient ne facent congregacioun couine ne conuenticle quelcon qe en priue ne en apert’. On fol. 172r the proclamation read: ‘no man can make none congregaciouns conuenticules ne assemblies of poeple in priue nen apert’.

¹⁷³ Several of the proclamations which touch on this matter note that these actions should not be done ‘in priue or apert’.

¹⁷⁴ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 180v; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 361; *LBH*, p. 249.

¹⁷⁵ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 180v (we command on behalf of our lord the king that no manner of people - no more men than women, of whatever condition that they might be - should make a congregation, covine or conventicle whatsoever, privately or openly); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 361, 362; *LBH*, p. 249.

¹⁷⁶ This information was originally preserved in Darcy’s custumal, compiled during the 1340s, but is now lost. John Carpenter copied sections of this source for the *Liber Albus*. See Caroline M. Barron, ‘The Golden Age of Women in Medieval London’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, Vol. 15 (1989), 39-40. For more on the economic opportunities that women had and the work they engaged in see M. F. Stevens, ‘London Women, the Courts and the ‘Golden Age’: A Quantitative Analysis of Female Litigants in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries’, *The London Journal*, Vol. 37, Iss. 2 (2017), 67-77. See also *CPMR 1381-1412*, p. 19 for women’s legal rights in a dispute and their recognition as ‘[freewomen] of the city’ and *CPMR, 1381-1412*, p. 20 for evidence that ‘contracts made by married women engaged in a mercantile art were as effectual as contracts made by their husbands’. For more on the customs of the City in relation to freewomen of London and liberties they enjoyed see *CPMR, 1381-1412*, pp. 142-143.

women instead of widows.¹⁷⁷ By participating in London practices and contributing economically to the City, women, therefore, were bound by the same principles that governed their husbands or male kin and were responsible for contributing towards the common good of the City and others within the polity. Notions of common profit do not seem to have been gendered and all parts of society were considered to be component within this conceptual framework. All members of the London community, therefore, were held accountable if they participated in this criminal act. These proclamations thus accentuated the importance of unity and collaboration from all parts of the body politic.

A prominent message within these records was the preservation of peace. Two proclamations which promulgated this view were delivered well after Northampton, More and Norbury's uprising and arrest. The first was distributed prior to Brembre's election in 1385 and announced that '[n]e que null ne face congregacioun assemble signe ne continance que puisse soner en destourbanche de la peas de la dite eleccioun ne encontre la gouernance de la dite Citee'.¹⁷⁸ The timing and wording of the second proclamation paralleled the first and was issued shortly before the mayoral election of 1386, in which Nicholas Exton was chosen. Like its predecessor, this proclamation warned that '[ne] que null ne face congregacioun assemble signe ne continance qe puisse soner en destourbanche de la pees ne de la dite eleccioun encontre la gouernance de la dite Citee'.¹⁷⁹ Forming a congregation was considered to be a direct affront to the Mayor.¹⁸⁰ This was an attempt to safeguard and legitimate the authority of both Brembre and his soon to be successor and close political ally, Nicholas Exton. These were ideas that recurred across multiple

¹⁷⁷ Barron, 'The Golden Age of Women in Medieval London', 39.

¹⁷⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 196r (And that none should make a congregation, assembly in sign or appearance that might resound to the disturbance of the peace of the said election, or against the governance of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 363, 364; *LBH*, p. 274.

¹⁷⁹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 204v (And that none should make a congregation, assembly in sign or appearance that might resound to the disturbance of the peace or of the said election, against the governance of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 263, 264, 265, 266; *LBH*, p. 274, 289.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Arnold, *The customs of London, otherwise called Arnold's chronicle; containing among divers other matters, the original celebrated poem of the Nut Maid* ed. F. Douce (London: F. C. and J. Rimmington etc, 1811), p. 96.

proclamations and demonstrates how language was utilised by Brembre's party to justify their political conduct.

The wording of both proclamations was identical. This was characteristic of proclamations produced in medieval England which were often reused and repeated.¹⁸¹ The act of reading proclamations, therefore, was itself ephemeral; the re-reading of these materials indicated their continuing usage, as well as their active life in the public and political domain. Inhabitants of the City were reminded of their immediate history and of the dangers of 'des gentz que ne sont pas somons ... venantz ala Gihalle grant cry et clamour ount este en tielx elecciouns sibien en grant affray des seignours et autres repeirantz ala dite Citee come des bones gentz dicele'.¹⁸² Both proclamations drew on past elections during the early 1380s to illustrate this point. On noting that 'la pees' and 'la gouernance de la dite Cite' were vital aspects of medieval life, London's civic leaders drew on notions of community and mutual benefit, ideas resonating with common profit ideology, in their attempt to ensure that nothing stood in their way from retaining the upper political hand in the City. The use of the term 'clamour' is especially interesting and the proclamation reveals something of Brembre's anxieties about his position at the time. As outlined in chapter two, public clamour had the potential to ruin those in positions of power and, therefore, needed to be suppressed. They needed to be seen as the dominant hierarchy within London. Preserving the peace also ensured that electoral protocol would run smoothly and urban government could continue as normal. The way these issues were dealt with is demonstrative of the phenomenon which Lilley has observed: ideas of 'urban law', '[instilling] social order' and 'reinforcing internal hierarchies' were inherent in these

¹⁸¹ Doig, 'Political Proclamations and Royal Propaganda', 257.

¹⁸² Wording used is the same on both folios. See LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 196r and LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 204v (of men that were not summoned ... coming to the Guildhall for such elections [with] great cry and clamour, as well to the great fear of the lords and others repairing to the said city, as to the good men of the same); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 265, 266; *LBH*, pp. 289.

London texts.¹⁸³ No evil assemblies, malicious congregation or treacherous covin would hinder Brembre's, and his allies', authority.

'kepe wel thy tonge': Slander, rumour and opinion in the public domain

The formation of 'congregaciouns' was usually followed by 'gossipy discussion' according to Turner.¹⁸⁴ An ordinance passed under Brembre in 1384, before the annual election of the sheriffs of London, in which both John Fresshe and Nicholas Exton were elected, narrated that 'pur nient due ne covenable manere fount diuerses maneres seutes a nostre seignour le Roi la royne et aultres roialx et nobles du roialme en destourbanche de due gouernance de la dite Cite et lour gouernaille' shows that Turner's gossip could be dangerous.¹⁸⁵ Continuing on from this, the point was made that 'grauntz murmur et males parlances de iour en autre auiegnent entre les bones gentz de mesme la Citee et par queux rumour et debatz de legier purroient sourdre en icele si remedie ne feusse mys et ordeine'.¹⁸⁶ The ordinance criticised the complaints and ill-speech between men of London and warned that rumour and debate would arise if remedy was not found. The second of these points follows directly on from the first, addressing congregations. Phrases warning about 'grauntz murmur et males parlan' and 'rumour et debatz' reverted to a criticism or 'congregacioun, couine, couenticle', emphasising the point that 'est ordeigne et establi pur ouster tielx congregaciouns et couignes ... pur vnite pes et tranquillite'.¹⁸⁷ The negative

¹⁸³ Lilley, *City and the Cosmos*, p. 153.

¹⁸⁴ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁵ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 181r. The entry read: 'Et auxint mesme le iour feurent eslieux les viscountes pur lan ensuant cestassauoir John ffresshe pur le mair et Nichol Exton pur la comunialte'. From this we learn that John Fresshe was selected by Brembre and Nicholas Exton by the commonalty. LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 181r (to the effect that no one shall cause an assembly or conventicle to be made for the purpose of petitioning the King, Queen, or lords, to the disturbance of the government of the City or their governance). These are my own translations.

¹⁸⁶ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 181r (great murmurs and evil speeches from one day to the next among the good men of the said city and by which rumour and debates could easily arise here if remedy is not made and ordained). This is my own translation.

¹⁸⁷ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 181r (it is ordained and established to eliminate such congregations and covins ... for unity, peace and tranquility). This is my own translation.

impact of illegal and illicit gatherings was interconnected to murmurings and disputes within this civic ordinance; both jeopardised unity and good governance within the City.¹⁸⁸

Chaucer in *The House of Fame* described concerns over similar misdemeanours amongst a ‘congregacioun/ Of folk’ (Book III, 2034-35) who were unruly characters who spoke ‘[a] newe tydyngge prively, / Or ells tolde al openly’ (Book III, 2045-2046). Chaucer addressed degrees of discretion in the way that these ‘[tydynges]’ spread, presenting the fluidity of ill-speech and the capability of wicked words to penetrate these domains. These characters exhibited no unease or trepidation over who may have heard their thoughtless words, spreading their tidings ‘north to south ... fro mouth to mouth’ (Book III, 2075-76). Nonchalant about ‘[w]ere the tydyngge soth or fals,/ Yit wolde he telle hyt natheles’ (Book III, 2072-73), the ‘congregacioun’ spread falsehood. The theme was developed as the poem progressed and readers were made aware that the characters’ cavalier words affected urban environments, for like ‘fyr’, words had the capability of ‘encresyng’ rapidly and ‘ys wont to quyke and go’ (Book III, 2077-78). Parallel to ‘fyr’, words had the ability to ‘sparke spronge amys, / Til al a cite brent up ys’ (Book III, 2079-2080). Libel and verbal slights had the power to consume a city, as well as the reputation and dignity of those in power.¹⁸⁹ Chaucer presented an urban environment in which a ‘congregacioun’ diverged from expected social norms; their incendiary words had the power to disrupt order and communal harmony. Their recklessness over the authenticity of ‘tydynges’ exposed their own agenda as opposed to upholding peace and serving the common good, mirroring the political situation on London’s streets in the 1380s.

Moreover, ideas expressed in the *House of Fame* were reflected in the *Westminster Chronicle’s* account of Northampton’s rising against Brembre in 1384. The monk of Westminster wrote that,

¹⁸⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 181r.

¹⁸⁹ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, pp. 132-34.

[o]n the other side [Brembre and his followers] there were angry suggestions that his [Northampton] real purpose in attaching to himself persons of such a type and in such numbers at this time was to stir up riot and disaffection among the populace. This led, through the agency of disorderly elements, to the outbreak of a quarrel, and despite the numbers with him Northampton would have been killed on the spot if the mayor had not been quick to arrest him.¹⁹⁰

These ‘angry suggestions’ potentially indicated false information surrounding Northampton’s reasons for provoking insurgency against political rivals which led to violence within the City. These words were intended to cause trouble, infiltrating the very spaces that were used to stabilise disorder and which, simultaneously, were used as sites in which warnings against this boisterous and intractable behaviour were heard. The indictment against Northampton, More and Norbury provided evidence of this, naming ‘Westcheap’ as an area in which havoc was caused.¹⁹¹ As we saw earlier in the writ of proclamation, ‘Westcheap’ was a regular area in which proclamations were read out but also, it seems, an area characterised by crisis. The episode also demonstrates that spaces of public discourse had the potential for being volatile sites even if government intervened. The Westminster Chronicler evidently believed that disorder, paradoxically, caused distress for those who started it.

Within the context of late fourteenth-century London, Strohm defined ‘[a] rumour, in medieval terms, ... as something widely and stridently vocalized, a publicly known matter that [swept] a constituency and [had] the power to effect change’.¹⁹² However, it was not only Brembre’s reputation that was at risk during the 1380s but also, the King’s. We see that ‘Richard’s own unpopularity and that of Brembre as his principal operative in the city of London converged to create a rumour that swept through Parliament and

¹⁹⁰ *WC*, p. 63.

¹⁹¹ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 57.

¹⁹² Strohm, *The Poet’s Tale*, pp. 175-176.

beyond'.¹⁹³ This *occultus rumour*, was best summarised by Knighton, who identified Brembre as Richard's co-conspirator in an attempt to cause the destruction of forty shire knights through the pretence of a dinner invitation.¹⁹⁴ Maintaining a good reputation was key in consolidating status and political influence, yet this could not be secured if in the eyes of the public one was viewed as morally reprehensible and corrupt. These sentiments were deeply felt by medieval contemporaries and deviant and slanderous speech accordingly made a frequent appearance in contemporary literature. Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* highlighted the dangerous implications of gossip and libellous words through the frightening influence of the astrological god Saturn. In a conversation with his daughter Venus, the god listed heinous crimes that happen under his astrological influence, such as strangling, murder and assassination. Saturn also ominously mentioned '[t]he murmure and the cherles rebellyng' (I (A) 2459). The verse directly linked 'murmure', gossip, with rebellious behaviour.

The King and Mayor made multiple attempts to regulate who could speak and participate in everyday political life so it is not surprising to see that these fears over careless talk were echoed in London texts.¹⁹⁵ Turner brought to our attention how contemporary legislation issued under Richard II reflected the detrimental impact that slander had on political culture in late fourteenth-century London. For example, the redrafting of the *Scandalum Magnatum*, both in 1378 and 1388, coincided with a time when the King's authority was most threatened. This legislation was originally compiled during the reign of Edward I in 1275, prohibiting the growth of slander and discord between 'the King, his People and the Great Men of the Realm'.¹⁹⁶ By 1388, however, the content of the statute was expanded, covering the bodies of the King's closest advisers,

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 175.

¹⁹⁴ *KC*, pp. 354-55; Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, p. 175; Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 164-65.

¹⁹⁵ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 8, 12. For more on slander and idle talk in late medieval England see. Susan E. Philips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007).

¹⁹⁶ Stat. 3 Edw I c. 15.

including ‘the Chancellor, Treasurer, Clerk of the Privy Seal, the Steward of the King’s House, Justices of the one Bench and the other, and other Great officers of the Realm’.¹⁹⁷

Idle speech plagued the minds of those who dictated city politics yet it raises the question of how they negotiated this situation and attempted to turn political debate in their favour. Exploring the theme of slander and idle words in literature produced in Richard II’s London provides a context for the verbal arena in which proclamations were issued and how officials linked the issue of slander to common profit as a means of controlling conflict and authority. For example, issues of immorality and the sinfulness of slander within society were addressed in *Piers Plowman*. This dimension of the poem has been explored by Sarah Wood, who examined Langland’s criticism of deviant speech in the debate between the allegorical figures of Lady Meed and Conscience in Passus III of the B-Text.¹⁹⁸ In the exchange between Meed and Conscience, Langland assessed the nefarious nature of defamatory words narrating that ‘[w]ho may scape the sclaundre, the scathe is soone amended; / It is the synne of the sevene sonnest relessed’ (B-Text, Passus III. 57-58). Langland categorised ‘sclaundre’ as one of the Seven Deadly Sins, the capital vices which informed moralistic and Christian teaching during the Middle Ages. This was significant as, by the thirteenth century, ‘sclaundre’ had become synonymous with the sin of envy.¹⁹⁹ Ralph Hanna summarised this ideological understanding of slander within medieval London, observing that ‘slanderous confrontationalism [was] perceived as besetting an urban sin’.²⁰⁰ In acknowledging that slander was a cardinal vice which was ‘sonnest relessed’, Langland insinuated that remedies were available to purge slanderous

¹⁹⁷ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 10; Stat. 12 Ric II c. 11. For a further discussion of the *Scandalum Magnatum*’s redrafting see Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth*, p. 244.

¹⁹⁸ Sarah Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 23.

¹⁹⁹ Gregory the Great determined that slander was a vice that accompanied envy in the *Moralia in Job*. The meaning of the term ‘envie’ in Old French had developed into slander by the thirteenth century. See Mireille Vincent-Cassy, ‘L’Envie en France du Moyen Age’, *Annales: E. S. C.*, 35 (1980), 258 cited in Bridget K. Balint, ‘Envy in the Intellectual Discourse of the High Middle Ages’ in *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals* ed. Richard Newhauser (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 47, fn. 21.

²⁰⁰ Hanna, *London Literature*, p. 33.

speech from the soul. In remitting the vice of slander, moral standard within the polity could be maintained and this was seen through the attempts of London's highest-ranking officers to control it.

It was typical of pastoral works to treat vices and virtues together and a similar treatment of slander was employed in Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*.²⁰¹ *The Parson's Tale* took the form of a penitential manual, providing a comprehensive analysis of vices and the virtues that remedied them.²⁰² For the Parson, the sins of the tongue crossed over several of the Deadly Sins, suggesting a more fluid and flexible model of sin in which we can place slander. Slander thus went beyond the sin of Envy, infiltrating the deadly vices of Pride and Ire also.²⁰³ The Parson's principal concern was man's spiritual welfare and the redemption of the soul – correcting the sin of slander in man's soul was no exception to this. Instructing on how to achieve penitence, therefore, the Parson stressed the morally corruptible nature of 'wikkede wordes' (662), claiming that it was as necessary for man to show contrition for indecent speech as it was for 'his wikkede dedes' (299). For each of these deadly sins, the Parson delivered pedagogical responses that would inspire remorse in his audience. Envy was, perhaps, the most interesting in terms of the subject matter of this thesis, for the Parson considered '[e]nvye is against alle vertues and agayns all goodneses. For it is sory of all the bountees of his neighebor, and in this manere it is divers from alle othere synnes' (488). This was a Deadly Sin that was distinct in that it contradicted communal values and, thus, worked against the mutual benefits of an individual's 'neighebor'.

Similar notions about backbiting are located in late medieval sermons, such as *Mirk's Festial*, a series of sermons produced during the fifteenth century. An outline of the

²⁰¹ Eva Kimminich, 'The Way of Vice and Virtue: A Medieval Psychology', *Iconographic and Comparative Studies in Medieval Drama*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 1991), 77-86.

²⁰² Beryl Rowland, 'Sermon and Penitential in *The Parson's Tale* and their effect on style', *Florilegium*, Vol. 9 (1987), 125.

²⁰³ *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth-Century English Translation of the Somme Le Roi of Lorens D'Orleans* ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS, Original Series, No. 217, (London: Oxford University Press, 1942, reprinted 1968); Albrecht Diem, 'Virtues and Vices in Early Texts on Pastoral Care', *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 62 (2004), 193-223.

Pater Noster informed audiences that those ‘wythout any simylacyon’ were ‘redy to bakbyte all þat well don’.²⁰⁴ In doing so, the backbiter disrupted the social order by the ‘hyndryng of his neghtbur’. Communitarian notions were transferred on to slander as a fundamental ‘speces of Envye’ (490) made particularly apparent in the Parson’s critique of ‘bakbityng’. For the Parson, ‘this syne of bakbityng or detractcion hath certeine speces, as thus: Som man preiseth his neighebor by a wikked entente, / for he maketh alwey a wikked knotte atte laste ende’ (492-493). Furthermore, ‘the bakbitere wol turne al thilke goodnesse up-so-doun to his shrewed en-tente’ (494). ‘Bakbityng’ was understood as subverting ‘goodnesse’ and was usually followed by ‘gruch-chyng’ or ‘murmuracioun’ (498), which impeded ‘agayns God, and som-tyme agayns man’ (498). ‘Bakbityng’ had a corrosive impact on medieval society, which considered this to be a serious social issue.²⁰⁵ Theological undertones characterised these passages and it is clear that the Parson’s sermon and the description in *Mirk’s Festial* of the sin of ‘bakbityng’ carried with it distinct notions related to community values, for both of these extracts focused on the prosperity of the backbiter’s neighbours and the impacts of these actions on communal goodness as opposed to the ‘shrewed en-tente’ of the backbiter.

In *The Manciple’s Tale*, moreover, Chaucer referred to the theme of slander, questioning the use and abuse of language.²⁰⁶ Phebus, after discovering his wife’s adultery, dedicated the rest of his speech at the end of the tale to condemning ‘A wikked tonge’, explaining that:

Daun Salomon, as wise clerkes seyn,

Techeth a man to kepen his tonge weel.

²⁰⁴ *John Mirk’s Festial*, ed. by Susan Powell (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 2009), p. 284 as cited in Alexander William Holland, ‘The Cultural Significance of Backbiting in Late-Medieval England’ (unpublished MA thesis, University of Kent, 2012), p. 32. Backbiting was a prominent feature of sermons produced during the medieval period. For sermons that addressed this sin see G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1933), pp. 450-458.

²⁰⁵ Holland, ‘The Cultural Significance of Backbiting’, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ Louise Fradenburg, ‘The Manciple’s Servant Tongue: Politics and Poetry in *The Canterbury Tales*’, *Journal of English Literary History*, 52 (1985), 88.

But, as I seyde, I am noght textueel.

But natheless, thus taught me my dame:

“My sone, thenk on the crowe, a Goddes name!

My sone, keep wel thy tonge, and keep thy

freend. (IX 309-319)

Although not being learned in books himself, Phebus recognised the value of true words and the value of teaching others ‘to kepen his tonge weel’. The lesson is repeated twice, stressing the importance of controlling words, as well as the impact of words on ‘thy freend’, which he contrasted against eschewing despicable words.

For Phebus ‘[a] wikked tonge [was] worse than a feend’ (IX 320), which, in this context, he ascribed negative qualities and human features to, like ‘teeth and lippes eke’ (IX 321). In advising his son, Phebus’s narration, much like *The Parson’s Tale*, served a didactic purpose. Educating his progeny on the nature of ‘spekyng’, Phebus warned that ‘thy tonge sholdestow restreyne/ At all tymes’ (IX 329-330). The importance of needing to ‘restreyne and kepe wel thy tonge’ is stressed throughout these stanzas (IX 333). It was a ‘firste vertu’ that was learnt from a young age and which Phebus considered in this passage should be incorporated into an individual’s education (IX 332). Chaucer’s proposition that restrained speech is a ‘firste vertu’ complemented the content of *The Parson’s Tale*, as well as Langland’s insistence that ‘sclaundre’ was a capital vice.

For the protagonist of *The Manciple’s Tale*, ‘a jangler’ – an individual who gossiped incessantly – was ‘abominable’.²⁰⁷ Janglers were alleged to ‘speke of perilous mateere’ and had the capacity to ‘kutteth freendshipe al a-two’ (IX 342), thereby causing danger and, consequently, disturbing social relationships and peace within a ‘freendshipe’ or, in the case of 1380s London, different factions. As Susan E. Philips postulated, jangling

²⁰⁷ ‘jangler (n.)’, *MED*.

caused alarm for both civil and ecclesiastical authorities during the late Middle Ages.²⁰⁸ An analysis of unproductive speech in *The Manciple's Tale* was undertaken by Craig E. Bertolet, who argued that the dangers of 'unrestricted tongues and dangerous language' were unparalleled in medieval England.²⁰⁹

These anxieties were reinforced in Phebus's last line: '[w]hereso thou come, amonges hie or lowe, Kepe wel thy tonge and thenk upon the crowe' (IX 361-362). The crow played a significant role within this moralistic fabliau; this creature was 'a verbal icon, a point of meditation for the reader', an exemplum who admonished and served as a reminder of the evils of gossip.²¹⁰ The crow functioned as a didactic character, one who Philips determined served a moralising purpose; revealing 'idle talk as a morally corrosive force, declaring that gossip's idle words turn a trusted servant into a traitor and a miraculous voice into harsh noise'.²¹¹ Philips takes this further, speculating that 'the crow appears not as corrupted virtue, but as the social subordinate whose idle talk has the power to undo his superiors'.²¹² The crow's words undo the traditional relationship between superior and inferior – the collective good of Phebus's household has been turned upside down.

Slander and defamation were not only concerns for Richard II and the poets who witnessed the precarious political difficulties of the 1380s. Contemporaries who featured prominently in the factional conflicts of the 1380s, such as Usk, drew upon these social apprehensions to demonstrate the importance of monitoring popular opinion and idle talk. In his *Appeal*, Usk accused Northampton of removing 'al the elde officers'.²¹³ In Usk's opinion, Northampton did so 'for the elde officers of the town loued noht the opinions of

²⁰⁸ Philips, *Transforming Talk*, p. 7; Hanrahan, 'Defamation as Political Contest', 261.

²⁰⁹ Craig E. Bertolet, 'The Anxiety of Exclusion: Speech, Power and Chaucer's Manciple', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, Vol. 3 (2011), 183.

²¹⁰ Jamie C. Fumo, 'Thinking upon the Crow: *The Manciple's Tale* and Ovidian Mythography', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2004 357, 365; David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 256-59.

²¹¹ Philips, *Transforming Talk*, p. 1.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹³ "Appeal", p. 24.

the forseide mair'.²¹⁴ Northampton resolved to 'sette in her place suche as wolden haue meightened & loued hise opinions, for they seyden that thilk persones that hielden the contrarie of hys menyng wer Enemyes to alle gode menyng'.²¹⁵ Usk was insistent that Northampton sought to control any form of public speech that might contradict his demands and intent. Whilst Usk's account was parochial, it does provide an insight into the mentalities of political parties; factional leaders recognised the importance of dominating public opinion and guaranteeing that opposing forces could not contradict or slander the 'gode menyng' of one's aims and words. Like the King, who attempted to suppress differing opinions, London's civic elite also felt the need to suppress multiple voices and 'pluralized discourse'.²¹⁶

Parallel themes peppered Usk's other allegorical work the *Testament of Love*. Like the *Appeal*, it was produced within the context of Usk abjuring his ties to Northampton and changing his factional affiliation; he became a loyal servant of Brembre. Both Hanrahan and Gary W. Shawver acknowledged that there were autobiographical elements to the text, dimensions which gave an insight into concerns Usk had when deciding his fate.²¹⁷ Usk's *Testament* is a lens through which we can see a particular perspective of the events of 1384 and who had a voice in these matters.²¹⁸ In Book I, Usk was quick to portray his narrator as truthful and honest to the Lady Love (Book I, Ch VI. 54-55), claiming that he was a man who was 'lytel of any hate of the mighty senatours in thilke cyte, ne of comunes malyce' (Book I, Ch VI. 55-56).

Usk's allegorical testimony provided a one-sided perspective in which maintaining the common profit was the concern of those who strove for justice against Northampton. Usk wrote '[a]nother [comfort to himself] was for [commen profyte]. Commen profyte in comynaltie is not but peace and tranquylite, with just governaunce proceden from thylke

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ Fradenburg, 'The Manciple's Servant Tongue', 89.

²¹⁷ *Testament of Love*, p. 23.

²¹⁸ Shawver dates the text to somewhere between December 1384 and June 1385, *Testament of Love*, p. 26.

profit' (Book I, Ch VI. 57-59). Those whom the narrator previously associated himself with, however, undermined these values and disrupted the 'peace', 'tranquylite' and '[c]ommen profyte' of his own society. They achieved this through 'paynted thynges malice and yvel meanyng' which was 'withouten any good avalyng to any people' (Book I, Ch VI. 60-61). His associates 'yvel meanyng', was described by their use of slanderous words for they too subverted tranquillity and peacefulness for the wider community. In this text, Usk directly linked issues pertaining to ideas of common profit to evil words.

Those who betrayed and slighted Usk, instigated 'debate and stryfe', causing 'distruction on that othe syde' (Book I, Ch VI. 83-84). Like Chaucer, Usk also brought attention to the deviant impact and effect of 'jangling'. Usk described his negative experience of the affair concerning Northampton, outlining that 'it greveth me to remembre these dyvers sentences in janglyng of these shepy people' (Book I, Ch VI. 143-144). Remembering the false words and idle talk of his former associates caused Usk emotional pain – it was a memory he dreaded revisiting. He narrated that,

[n]owe both tho peoples turned the goode into bade, and bade into good, ...
 And they alleged nothyng me to ben false or untrew, save thilke mater knowleged by the parties hemselfe; and, God wote, other mater us none (Book I, Ch VI. 160-166)

The excerpt reflected the aptitude of both sides to turn lies into truth and truth into lies. Usk created a persona for himself in this text for which 'sothe' mattered above all else. The narrator is appalled and shocked that his opponents 'sayne openly that I false have sayd many thynges' (Book I, Ch VI, 163-164). Their words were idle and false whilst he exposed the truth. Usk's argument utilised rhetoric 'shewyng that peace most is necessarye to comunalties and cytes' (Book I, Ch VI. 101-102). Usk's text was an ideal example of how opposing political players could use slander to their private advantage and

against the collective good. It is for this exact reason that addressing this matter in a public environment and space was so important during the 1380s. Whoever controlled public opinion simultaneously controlled authority and the ability to define and codify politico-moral rules that would ensure the common profit of London.

Defamatory words attacking individuals or groups of course produced oppositional discourse and debate; ‘slander [tended] to proliferate political discourse because it [was] based on a “model of power that [was] reversible rather than hierarchical”’.²¹⁹ This is especially seen in chapter four, in which, for example, London’s artisanal guilds reproached Brembre for his slanderous words against them, tarnishing their reputation within the City.²²⁰ As Hanawalt noted, ‘a person’s reputation could make or break his or her chances in society’.²²¹ Slander and rumour, therefore, posed a threat to the dignity of urban officers, as well as established hierarchies and systems of governance. Civic elites, however, knew the value of charging their foes with the offence of slander as a means to undermine them, and it became standard practice. Northampton repeatedly made use of this accusation as a means of counteracting the animosity of the fishmongers. For example, in 1382, following Northampton’s plea to Parliament to allow alien fishmongers to sell fish in London, Nicholas Exton spoke out against Northampton, criticising this economic reform. Exton was indicted ‘for using “opprobrious words” against the mayor’ and was temporarily divested of his citizenship as a result.²²² By the time that Brembre re-ascended to the mayoralty, he was aware of the potency that this offence carried with it and of the way in which it would be used to control public opinion and discredit those who dared challenge his power. By disseminating ideas revolving around slander into a public atmosphere, Brembre intended to heed his warning and, instead, act for the collective good by respecting the seat of the mayor and the responsibilities of an urban citizen.

²¹⁹ Hanrahan, ‘Defamation as Political Contest’, 259.

²²⁰ Hanawalt, ‘*Of Good and Ill Repute*’, p. 14.

²²¹ Ibid p. ix; Carl Lindahl, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 73-95.

²²² Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 274; *LBH*, p. 196; Hanrahan, ‘Defamation as Political Contest’, 262.

From early on in his mayoralty, Brembre re-established the trading rights of city victuallers, reversing several of Northampton's economic policies and usually severely diminishing the rights of alien merchants and artisans. A proclamation issued in 1383 ordered that the trading practices of alien fishmongers, however, were not to be disturbed. Hostility to alien merchants and craftsmen was commonplace; alongside the sale of fish within the City, it was a dominant dispute of the 1380s.²²³ The proclamation delivered the circumstances under which non-residents within London could sell fish: 'no maner straunge vitailler bryngynge fissh or eny other vitalise by land or by water to the Citee to selle wher by eny swych vitailler stranger be destourbed that he ne mowe nought selle his fissh or other vitaille freliche to whom he mowe vp'.²²⁴ In this instance, Brembre took a similar stance to his predecessor.²²⁵

The proclamation was designed to ease anxieties and tensions over selling practices and dominance within the marketplace. From the start, this proclamation aimed to clarify unsubstantiated reports and hearsay regarding protocols on the selling of victuals and rights of non-resident victuallers to sell in the City. The proclamation stated that '[f]or as moche as rumour and spekyngge is amonges some men of the Citee', indicating that misinformation was circulating regarding the official state of trading practices.²²⁶ The use of the term 'spekyngge', is especially suggestive. Whilst literally meaning to speak and converse, the term carried connotations of backbiting and ill-speech when paired with and preceded by the word 'rumour'.²²⁷ Furthermore, the proclamation stressed that 'ne greue in dede ne in word ne in non other manere' – no forms of miscommunication or common talk regarding this practice was allowed.²²⁸ Brembre aimed to silence those who acted in

²²³ *CPMR, 1364-1381*, p. 215 and *LBH*, pp. 95, 135 as cited in Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 142.

²²⁴ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, pp. 32-33; *Memorials*, p. 481.

²²⁵ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, pp. 32-33; *Memorials*, p. 481; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 18; Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 142.

²²⁶ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, p. 32; *Memorials*, p. 481.

²²⁷ 'speking(e) (ger.)', *MED*; 'rumour (n.)', *MED*.

²²⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, p. 32; *Memorials*, p. 481.

contradiction to this. From Turner's work on slander, we know that this proclamation is key in providing an insight into the anxieties and apprehensions over the power of gossip during Brembre's mayoralty.²²⁹

Viewed through the prism of slander and sedition, the proclamation is useful in understanding conceptions of social unity and Brembre's desire to quell social distress, potentially to stifle any threat or unrest that would make its way to him. Richard II, as noted by Barron, felt that regardless of whether alien merchants were 'Flemish clothworkers or Italian or Hanseatic merchants', they should be permitted to practise their trade peacefully.²³⁰ This was a king who saw the value of unification and it is possible that Brembre, one of Richard's closest allies, continued Northampton's policies towards alien merchants to placate his ruler. Brembre may have also recognised the value of unity himself as a means of consolidating his own authority. Issues pertaining to the morality of the marketplace were dominant features of medieval trading practices, yet here Brembre sought to create cohesive harmony by dispelling rumours and uncertainties which hindered the mutual profit of both alien fishmongers and citizens of London.²³¹ They were all part of a regime that contributed towards the economic and communal good of the city of London.

Alien merchants within London were usually regarded with contempt and suspicion; Londoners were protective over their trading rights and 'fought bitterly to maintain the exclusive rights of citizens to trade retail in the City which had been established by the Statute of York in 1335'.²³² Regardless of one's 'condicioun or degre', however, these were individuals who participated in market life and victualing practices. The proclamation outlined how this motion not only affected those participating in trade but also included individuals across estates in society, including the 'comunnes', 'lordes' and 'alle other'. The marketplace was "public", not only because of [its] spatial quality, but because of [its] social complexion. The openness of [this] space encouraged interaction and socially

²²⁹ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 18; Marion Turner, 'Greater London' in *Chaucer and the City*, p. 35.

²³⁰ Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 142.

²³¹ Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, pp. 1-33.

²³² Barron, 'Richard II and London', p. 141.

promiscuous speech'.²³³ Open criticism of trading and selling policies, therefore, was prevalent in these spaces. Authority and the control of opinion and information was necessary to restrain common talk, which could lead to unrest and disagreements. In including members that spanned the different estates within medieval society, the message of the proclamation aimed to remind Londoners of collective participation and the way in which market practices, namely the selling of fish, was to be carried out. Cooperation from the differing parts of the body politic was needed if stability was to be ensured and trading malpractices avoided.

The Mayor and Aldermen were key components to guaranteeing that these aims were to be achieved. Throughout, the proclamation made reference to the authority these individuals carried. Those listening were informed that 'the Mair and aldermen comandeth on the kyngges half hire owene half' and that it was their 'wille' and 'entente' that dictated London political and social conduct.²³⁴ It was made transparent that they publicly expounded civic conduct and codes to reinforce public order, which, resultantly, worked towards preserving the common good. The proclamation was formulated in a way in which ideas of common profit were defined as protecting the interests of the wider community, as well as the victualing community. The proclamation also defined how involved individuals would be within the London community and distinct day-to-day practices that contributed to the economic prosperity of the City. Simultaneously, however, the proclamation paradoxically protected the interests of individuals who had competing interests to those being restrained. Although the proclamation was used to portray Brembre as acting in the interests of the City, the notion of common profit present in the proclamation established how fish could be sold in order to establish political control and limit opportunities.

Rumour and slander had a lasting impact for the duration of Brembre's mayoralty, culminating in politically dangerous circumstances for him and his allies. A royal

²³³ Liddy, *Contesting the City*, p. 133.

²³⁴ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, p. 32; *Memorials*, p. 481.

proclamation penned on the eve of the Merciless Parliament in 1387 confirmed this.²³⁵

The *Westminster Chronicle* recorded the pronouncement of this proclamation as a timely event. The author noted,

Just before the end of November, royal proclamation was made in London that nobody whatever was to speak ill of the members of the king's entourage or of the persons who had lately been impeached or, as some might perhaps say, slandered, by the lords temporal.²³⁶

Major themes in this extract include the '[f]ear of rumour, and aspirations towards arbitrary rule'.²³⁷ Whilst the person of the King took centre-stage in this proclamation, Brembre, as well as his factional affiliate Nicholas Exton, cannot be separated from this proclamation. Although a royal proclamation, the preservation of this text in *Letter Book H* is indicative of its continued utility for London's civic authorities who wished to not only follow the King's instructions but, also, safeguard their own authority and command communal loyalty. It was proclaimed that,

þat non be so hardy to speke ne mouen ne publish' en priue ne appert oni thyng' þat might soune in euel or dishoneste of oure lige lord þe kyng' ne of our' ladi þe quene or ony lordes þat haue bien duellyng' with þe kyng' bi for þis time or of hem þat duellen about his persone nowe.²³⁸

Brembre's political fears had become a reality and there is almost a tone of desperation to the last order; it was a last attempt for the dominant political party to assert their power in the wake of the Lords Appellant's vehemence. Turner, especially, has emphasised the

²³⁵ For the events culminating in the Merciless Parliament see chapter four.

²³⁶ *WC*, pp. 215-217.

²³⁷ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 9; *LBH*, p. 321.

²³⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 223r; *Memorials*, p. 500.

seriousness of this document and its emphasis on those who surrounded the King. No form of slander was to be tolerated against those listed in this document, including the King, Queen, and ‘ony lordes þat haue bien duellyng with þe kyng’. Turner highlighted that ‘[a] throwaway comment, as much as a rousing speech, could be punished according to this proclamation’, stressing the need for control amongst those in power. She did not, however, forge a link between public debate and the discourse of common profit. From a closer reading, the text reinforced the relationship between the King, Lords and subjects, and drew upon ideas of social ordering and status to solidify ingrained political values amongst London’s community.²³⁹

The tone of the proclamation revolved around public order and the relationship between Richard and ‘alle his trewe lieges’. This communitarian value and idea of love between ruler and ruled extended beyond the King; it was made applicable to the Queen and those who counselled the King, which would have extended to civic officials like Brembre. The proclamation drew upon notions of social harmony and mutual amity of the political community in order to justify its message. Despite the dissention caused by Richard II’s failings as king and the warring factions that brought turmoil to London’s streets, these leading figures used the proclamation as a tool in which to hold the wider London community accountable for preserving custom, ceremony and loyalty in the City. The proclamation considered the constituent parts of the body politic, drawing upon ideas related to the connection between individual parties and the wider London populace.

This proclamation was constructed with not just the current threat of the Lords Appellant in mind but with the events succeeding Brembre’s election as mayor in 1383. Turner was correct in assuming that Richard’s desire for absolute rule was present in the record yet the proclamation also very much reflected the events within London and the

²³⁹ Black discussed ‘that society was naturally divided into ranks; this was so deeply built in as hardly to need explicit statement ... different persons should perform different tasks; it tended to sanctify the division of labour in its existing form; people should be content with their “station in life”’. In the case of this proclamation, ‘þe kyng’ ne of our’ ladi þe quene or ony lordes þat haue bien duellyng with þe kyng’ are at the top of the social hierarchy, from where they can control and order those serve them. Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250-1450*, p. 16.

civic elites' struggle for authority. The proclamation cautioned those who publicly spoke out or spread inaccurate information about the King and those closest to him. The issue of 'euil' and 'dishoneste' words in both private and public spaces was raised, with the author of the proclamation cautioning that malicious words against the King were not to be revealed or tolerated. Like Chaucer's *House of Fame*, the proclamation highlighted the dangers and disgrace of publicly shaming and denouncing individuals. This proclamation was a desperate attempt by the King and, by association, London's civic leaders, to defend and consolidate their power, repute and dignity. The author and disseminators of this proclamation manipulated ideals of common profit and political discourse as a means to an end. This proclamation reminded Londoners of their oaths and responsibilities to King, civic officials and the City – speaking out or disrupting social norms breached this contract. Not only were rulers to be guided by tenets of the common good but so too were subjects.

The focus placed on slanderous speech, which we saw embodied Usk's *Testament of Love* and *Appeal*, substantiated that these fears were very real for Brembre. His attempts at control, however, did not allow him to escape execution in 1388. Following Brembre's demise, rumour, gossip and murmurs continued to characterise London political atmosphere. As outlined in chapter two, at his trial in 1384, John of Northampton was banished from the city of London in perpetuity, yet in 1386 he received royal permission to return to the City, although not to reside there permanently, following a plea made by Gaunt.²⁴⁰ Northampton was officially pardoned on 2nd December 1390 and, as recorded in the *Westminster Chronicle*, 'Northampton, at the instance of the duke of Lancaster, [was given] freedom to enter and leave London at will [provided that he did not take up residence there or in any way maintain, either in person or by an agent, any establishment

²⁴⁰ Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 83-85; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 140-141. As examined in chapter two, this was not without its problems and Gaunt faced challenges from Brembre, the Aldermen and Common Council in securing this pardon.

in the City; but his position there was to be just such as is permitted to a stranger]’.²⁴¹

Even Northampton’s ‘associates were allowed to live in the City after making amends, in particular to those they had most seriously offended’ – this, in a manner of speaking, was a triumph for all those who had considered themselves curtailed by Brembre’s efforts.²⁴² His acquittal, however, remained contentious and his return to London stirred controversy.²⁴³

Disputes continued right up to the loss of the City’s liberties in 1392 and during this time malicious words proved to be a perennial problem for city government. Adam Bamme, mayor of London in 1391, issued a proclamation confronting the unrest which Northampton’s reappearance instigated.²⁴⁴ This proclamation has featured in scholarly literature, such as work by Hanrahan and Rexroth, exploring the rivalry between Northampton and Brembre and its impact on London’s history yet, despite its significance on detailing the legacies of two of London’s most notorious figures, it has to date been mentioned in passing or as an additional anecdote.²⁴⁵ This analysis of Bamme’s proclamations formulates a better idea about how concerns related to common profit and the rhetoric of this discourse continued to be used to suppress murmurings and disputes regarding both Northampton and Brembre.

Like Brembre’s proclamation which aimed to correct ideas and inaccuracies about the rights and nature of alien fishmongers, Bamme’s proclamation has a sense of immediacy to it. The text stated that ‘pur ceo qe plusours discencions debatz et rumours ont este en la Citee de londres’.²⁴⁶ These ‘discencions debatz et rumours’ typified London political culture throughout the terms that both Northampton and Brembre served. ‘[O]nt este’ implied that these were difficulties that had prevailed despite attempts to subdue conflict within London. The proclamation recounted that ‘a cause de diuerses controuersies

²⁴¹ *WC*, pp. 440-43.

²⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 442-43.

²⁴³ *CPR, Richard II: 1388-1392*, p. 335.

²⁴⁴ For dating of Adam Bamme’s mayoralty see the database provided by the University of Toronto on Mayors and Sheriffs of London <<https://masl.library.utoronto.ca/searchresultsbdc.html?office=Mayor>>

²⁴⁵ Hanrahan, ‘Defamation as Political Contest’; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*.

²⁴⁶ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (Many dissensions, debates and rumours have prevailed in the city of London); *Memorials*, p. 526; McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 263.

... entre Nichol Brembre chiualer et John Norhampton ore tarde mairs de mesme la Citee ... les discensions debatz et de rumours souzdirent en grant peril de mesme la Citee et semblablement de tut le Roialme', equating the polemics of conflict during the 1380s within London and, indeed, the Kingdom.²⁴⁷

The phrase 'discensions debatz et de rumours' was reiterated, stressing the nature of these ills and the perils of provocative and false words. Concern for the City pervaded the nature of the proclamation and it is not surprising that particular aspects of the proclamation were emphasised when read out to the public; the proclamation explained that it was *their* city that was at risk. This misbehaviour attacked social norms, particularly established hierarchies within medieval society. It was not only good men of the City who would be irked by these malicious verbal acts but God, the omniscient presence whose divinity ordered the world. London might not have been God's heavenly city, yet in drawing upon divine order, the authors of this record presented a landscape and narrative in which morality and good conscience dictated political and everyday life. To echo Lilley, officials in London '[reified] and [legitimized] the authority and jurisdiction of the civic body'.²⁴⁸

Bamme, the Mayor, and the Aldermen of London 'considerantz le meschief et grauntz damages qe pur cele cause ... ount ordeignez et establiz qe nul homme graunt ne petit de quel estat ou condicion' qil soit enauint ne parle ne moeue ascun des opinions dascun des ditz Nicol et John nepar signe rien autre manere ascunement monstre ascun homme soit del vn oppinion ou dautre' thus incorporating rhetoric and values inherent in community ideology.²⁴⁹ These civic officials took this action as a result of 'desirantz le

²⁴⁷ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (because of the various controversies which recently took place between Nicholas Brembre, knight, and John Northampton, both former mayors of the same city ... the dissensions, debates and rumours abovesaid caused the peril of the city and, likewise, of the whole realm); *Memorials*, p. 526; McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, pp. 263-264.

²⁴⁸ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 23.

²⁴⁹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (By this assent, Adam Bamme, the mayor, and Aldermen of the said city, considering the mischief and great damage that has resulted from this cause ... have ordained and established that no man, great or small of whatever estate or condition he may be, will not speak from henceforth or agitate upon any of the opinions of each of the said Nicholas or John nor by signs nor in any

peas nostre seignour le Roi et tranquillitee et prosperite de la dice Citee principalment al honour de dieu nosre dit seignour le Roi et de tut le Royaume pur comune profit'.²⁵⁰ The City and the well-being of the broader London community were the central focus, affirming that peace and tranquillity needed to be restored to the streets of London in order to achieve the common profit of not only the City, but God, the King, and the wider realm. In addressing men of all social ranking, estate and condition, Bamme gave all men a role in the body politic and focused on the interests of the political community as a whole. This was a strategic ploy in which Bamme aligned the aims of the King, City and Londoners as part of a unified system that worked collaboratively in order to maintain common profit ideals. The authors of this record presented themselves as caring for the wider kingdom of which London was a part.

In focusing on the legacy of Northampton and Brembre, Bamme used common profit rhetoric in a more sophisticated way than Northampton or Brembre. He addressed men of all social ranking – ‘nul homme graunt ne petit de quel estat ou condicion’ qil soit’ – and in doing so Bamme gave all men a role to play in the body politic.²⁵¹ As we saw earlier in this chapter, proclamations issued by civic leaders were aimed at London society as a whole, including women. This proclamation and its direct evocation of the term ‘comune profit’ was used as a way of quelling and stifling persistent rivalries. The words spoken on London’s streets continued to subvert the social order throughout the turbulent 1380s and early 1390s. Slander, gossip and rumour was a powerful social force and one in which common profit ideology had the potential to regulate, yet it failed to do so in the wake of factional fighting and no formal unified body.

‘or elles to Neugate in to tyme’: Imprisonment, punishment and public unity

other way show each man that they are of one opinion of the other); *Memorials*, p. 526; McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264.

²⁵⁰ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (desiring the peace of our Lord the King, and the tranquility and prosperity of the said city, principally in honour of God, our Lord the king, and all of the realm for the common profit); *Memorials*, p. 536; McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264.

²⁵¹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (that no man, great or small, of whatever estate of condition he be); *Memorials*, p. 526; McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264.

This chapter began with the narrative of William Mildenhale of London. Key to this account was Mildenhale's punishment for failing to report his father's subversive and rebellious words against Richard II. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, a crime against the King was an offence against the realm. The fate of those who transgressed against the rights of the civic elite, especially the Mayor, was viewed in a similar way. Misdemeanours infringing on the Mayor's rights '[were] not simply against his personal dignity but against that of the City'.²⁵² An extract from *Gregory's Chronicle*, recording a confrontation between the Earl of Worcester and the Mayor of London in 1464 epitomised this conception. In this account, the Earl invaded the Mayor's ceremonial and official space, taking the Mayor's seat at a banquet held by the Bishop of Ely. The chronicle recounted that the Mayor gathered the Aldermen and other civic officials and hosted a banquet just as lavish and extravagant as that held by the Bishop of Ely. Doing this 'rewarded him he dyd as dygnyte requyryd of the citte', demonstrating that the Mayor took this action as a result of the close link between his personal self-worth and the dignity of the City.²⁵³ The Bishop of Ely attempted to resolve the situation, sending a messenger to show concern but the Mayor insisted that under no circumstances was 'a mere earl going to ruin his dignity by invading his official, social space'. By hosting his own ostentatious event, the Mayor acquired his revenge against this slight. The chronicler of this episode praised the Mayor, narrating that 'thys the worshippe of the citte was kepte, and not loste for hym'.²⁵⁴ This established that, although it was a moderate form of chastisement, the Mayor held his reputation and the City's in high regard.

It is of no surprise that these proclamations, with the exception of the proclamation pronounced in 1387, issued at the request of the Mayor, used punishment as both a warning and deterrent against those who undermined authority in the capital. There were

²⁵² Hanawalt, 'Of Good and Ill Repute', p. 23.

²⁵³ Ibid, pp. 22-23.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

ways to impose corporal punishment, as outlined earlier in this chapter, some of which Langland explored, highlighting that it was the duty of,

Maires and maceres, that menes ben bitwene

The kyng and the comunes to kepe the lawes,

To punysshē on pillories and on pynynge stooles

Brewesters and baksters, bochiers and cokes (B-Text, Passus III. 76-79)

Langland's commentary on the duties of civic leaders portrayed the importance of efficiently carrying out these punishments in order to maintain order specifically within the context of civic government. We will now consider another particular form of punishment for those who confronted, disagreed or rose up against civic officials: imprisonment. Imprisonment, while not a form of public punishment, was used for punitive purposes and enforced stability within communities, especially against individuals who denounced civic leaders.²⁵⁵ In 1378, for example, those who participated in an affray at Westcheap involving the Pepperers and Goldsmiths of London were sent to prison for their rebellious actions.²⁵⁶ This conflict 'arose throughout the whole city' and was therefore not only an inconvenience to Brembre, who was mayor then, but also to the City. This was a solution to maintain peace and public order, of which Brembre took seriously, having gone to Westchepe to deal with the disturbance himself.²⁵⁷

Incarceration as a form of punishment against invectives directed at London's civic officers was seen in 1388 when John Walcote, Alderman of the Ward of Walbrok,

²⁵⁵ Ralph B. Pugh, *Imprisonment in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 8; Helen Carrel, 'The Ideology of Punishment in Late Medieval English Towns', *Social History*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2009), 304.

²⁵⁶ *Memorials*, pp. 415-417. In this entry we learn that those who were arrested in 'the lower part of Frydaystret' were 'delivered to the Sheriffs' mace-bearers, to take to the Prison of Neugate'. From this we can ascertain the type of punishment and place of imprisonment for those who committed crimes against civic officials and the city of London.

²⁵⁷ Following this disturbance Brembre held a meeting of the Common Council, who he 'related how that he had gone to quell the affray in Westchepe, adding also, that some who had been arrested by him, and handed over to the mace-bearers to take to prison, had been rescued by persons to him unknown'.

requested for the bedel, Robert Parker, to summon all the important men of that Ward to appear before him ‘in order to advise with him as to divers matters touching our Lord the King, and the city aforesaid’.²⁵⁸ This included Robert Staffertone, who refused to appear before Walcote, despite the efforts of Parker. Instead, Staffertone informed Parker ‘that he wished the Alderman himself had come to him, and he might then have kissed his rearward’.²⁵⁹ For Walcote these words were used ‘unadvisedly and without thought’, yet he sent his bedel to Staffertone a second time to summon him. Staffertone, however, responded ‘rebelliously’ and, as a result, was sent to prison. Following this imprisonment, Staffertone appeared before the Mayor and the Aldermen at the Guildhall and he ‘was questioned before them as to his words and misprisions’.²⁶⁰ His words were viewed as an insult not just against civic officials but the King and city of London also. His actions violated the terms of the oath taken when sworn into the freedom of the City; freemen were to pay allegiance to Mayor, Sheriffs and Aldermen, as well as prioritise the good of the City as a whole.²⁶¹ The only appropriate punishment for Staffertone was forty days imprisonment at Newgate prison. Staffertone, however, was shown favour by Walcote and only endured imprisonment until the following day. He paid his recompense through public retribution instead, processing from Walbrok to the chapel of the Guildhall with a lighted candle weighing two pounds.²⁶² Although Staffertone’s sentence was shortened, the episode illustrated that individuals who offended officials who represented the commonalty and spirit of the city of London were firmly dealt with.

²⁵⁸ *Memorials*, p. 500.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ The extract outlined that ‘every freeman of the said city, when admitted to the freedom, has been sworn that he will pay due obedience to the Mayor, Sheriffs, Aldermen, and all other officers’. If this bond was broken it was to the ‘disparagement’, ‘scandal’ and ‘dishonour’ of these individuals. See chapter one for more on the expectations established between freemen of London and civic officials. Oaths taken by freemen and civic officials in London were also recorded in civic customals. For example see *Liber Albus*, p. 21 for the Mayor’s oath. ‘The othe of eury Freman made in the Cite’ within *Arnold’s Chronicle* also outlined the promises made not only to the King but also to London leaders. The oath instructed that ‘[y]e shall swere that ye shall be good and trewe to our souerayn Lord the Kyng and to his heirs Kyngs of England and ye shall be obediente to the Mayr of the Cite of London and ye shall maynteyne the franchises fredom and custume of the cite to your power’, *Liber, Albus*, p. 96.

²⁶² *Memorials*, pp. 501-502;

Likewise, another episode of 1388 demonstrates similar circumstances and reprimand for insults against an Alderman. Richard Bole, a butcher, insulted William Wottone, Alderman of the Ward of Douegate. Bole, like Staffertone, was committed to Newgate prison by the Mayor, Nicholas Exton, for indecent words and a lack of due respect against the Alderman.²⁶³ Bole's abusive and critical words against Wottone were regarded 'after due consideration ... expressly uttered in disparagement of [their] Lord the King, as well as to the scandal and dishonour of the said Mayor, Sheriffs, and Aldermen, and all other the officers of the city aforesaid'.²⁶⁴ Initially Bole was to face both public penance and imprisonment at Newgate prison for six months but, following the mediation of Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of Ireland, who entreated the civic officers of the City, Bole's imprisonment was remitted. They arranged an agreement based 'on the understanding that on the same day he was to be taken back to Neugate aforesaid etc., and there make offering of the same [that being public retribution]; which done, he was to be released'.²⁶⁵ A crime against the King and urban officials was an offence against London and the City's inhabitants. Detention in one of London's most notorious prisons, Newgate, was appropriate for deviant behaviour that threatened the communal prosperity of the King, civic officials and Londoners.

Imprisonment has traditionally been considered to be a principal form of punishment, yet this historiographical argument was challenged by Winter, who provided an alternative theory. In emending these past assumptions, Winter has shown that incarceration was often short lived. This examination of imprisonment focuses instead on the verbal threat of imprisonment and punishment within the proclamations, arguing that fear of imprisonment, especially at Newgate, was very real amongst late medieval contemporaries and used as a device by civic authorities to enforce order and stability,

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 502.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 503.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

ideas associated with common profit rhetoric.²⁶⁶ Newgate and other prisons across London, such as the Tun at Cornhill, Fleet prison and Ludgate prison, were spaces which functioned as sites of justice in which retribution and reprimand were enacted; the well-being of the city of London was maintained as long as appropriate punishment was enforced. Newgate prison, which was one of the oldest and most important prisons of late medieval London carried an unsavoury taste.²⁶⁷ Built under Henry II early in the twelfth century, Newgate was a place of incarceration and corporal and capital punishment, such as executions. It garnered for itself an unpopular repute, to the extent that in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt, Wat Tyler and his followers attacked Newgate.²⁶⁸ Newgate was thus a key institution in preserving the peace of the City. A proclamation issued in 1382 – when Northampton was mayor – was concerned with further increasing security in the City, especially within Newgate; the prison was vital in ensuring stability and order – attributes interconnected with the common good.²⁶⁹

An ordinance issued in 1419, during the third mayoralty of Richard Whittington, described Newgate as having a 'fetid and corrupt atmosphere', which was documented as 'the hateful gaol of Neugate'.²⁷⁰ The ordinance focused on the pernicious conditions of Newgate to justify the reinstatement of Ludgate prison, which had previously been closed under Whittington's predecessor, William Sevenoke. Whilst this ordinance was delivered in 1419, thirty years after the eight proclamations examined in this chapter, we can reconstruct how citizens of medieval London, upon hearing these proclamations,

²⁶⁶ Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', pp. 11-12. Winter draws her ideas from Guy Geltner's study *The Medieval Prison: a social history* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) which demonstrated that imprisonment was used punitively in the Middle Ages and that conditions were better than had previously been thought, which helped to confirm the same conclusions drawn from the, much more meagre, London sources for [her] thesis'.

²⁶⁷ Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments in Late Medieval London', p. 11. Newgate prison's counterpart was Fleet prison. For more on these two prominent medieval prisons see the work of Margery Bassett, 'Newgate Prison in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, XVIII (1943), 233-246, Margery Bassett, 'The Fleet Prison in the Middle Ages', *University of Toronto Law Journal*, XV, 2 (1944), 383-402 and Marjorie Honeybourne, 'The Fleet and its Neighbourhood', *London Topographical Record*, XIX (1947), pp. 13-87; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 164, 244.

²⁶⁸ Halliday, *Newgate*, p. 6.

²⁶⁹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 137r.

²⁷⁰ *Memorials*, p. 677. The original word given in Anglo-Norman, which 'hateful' has replaced, was 'heynouse'. Connotations attached to the word 'heynouse' in the entry emphasised Newgate's hated and malicious reputation in both an emotional and legal sense. See entry for 'hainous', *AND*.

potentially felt at the mention of Newgate and imprisonment there more generally. The threat of captivity in the context of this study provided a form of punishment for those who infringed upon ideals relating to ideas of common profit, notably public order, civic authority and the dignity of London's urban leaders.

Confinement in prison was a form of 'punishment, a threat, or a means of coercion', castigating those who 'upset judicial decisions already taken or [impeded] the course of justice'.²⁷¹ By hindering the course of justice and proper conduct, the common interests, benefit and morality of a community could not be maintained.²⁷² The statutory legislation *Scandalum Magnatum*, explored earlier in this chapter, confirmed this, outlining 'that he that doth so shall be taken and imprisoned'.²⁷³ This royal statute went beyond the warning offered by Phebus in *The Manciple's Tale*; the statute saw authors and those who spread 'tidynges' as equally culpable.²⁷⁴

From Stephen Halliday's research on Newgate, we learn that '[t]he crimes for which people were sent to Newgate reflected, then as now, public anxieties'.²⁷⁵ The ideas which permeated the proclamations studied in this chapter reflected social practice and concerns over power, public opinion and public order in late fourteenth-century London. The proclamations echoed how reasons for imprisonment were directly linked to anxieties over the public ideals and, thus, could be linked to notions of the common good in London. This concern over moral communities was reflected in the work of Helen Carrel, who noted 'that imprisonment and public corporal punishment had an ideological and practical purpose in urban society', suggesting that it was a desire to exhibit Christian morals

²⁷¹ Pugh, *Imprisonment in Medieval England*, pp. 11, 27-28.

²⁷² See above fn. 2 for the example of the parish clerk Thomas Knappet who was imprisoned at Newgate for speaking ill of John of Gaunt.

²⁷³ Stat. 12 Ric II c. 11. In the Statute of Westminster issued by Edward I in 1272, from which the *Scandalum Magnatum* is based, the king also imprisons those who have spoken ill of 'Great Men of the Realm'. The wording between these two statutes is almost identical: 'and he that doth so, shall be taken and kept in Prison'. See Stat. 3 Edw I c 14.

²⁷⁴ Stat. 12 Ric II c. 11.

²⁷⁵ Halliday, *Newgate*, p. 8.

towards the preservation of the commonweal that drove these actions forward.²⁷⁶ The eight proclamations reviewed made it clear that those who defied social conduct, law and order, as set out by civic officials, would face severe punishment, be it in the form of a fine, forfeiture or imprisonment in a London prison. For example, in a proclamation dated between 1383 and 1384, individuals were informed that ‘ache persone of hem and brynge hem als blyue to fore the Mair yef he is at leiser or elles to Neugate in to tyme that the Mayr may attende ther to’.²⁷⁷ Another, announced between September and October 1385, made audiences aware that those who ‘puisse soner en destourbanche de la peas ... encontre la gouernance de la dite Cite sur peyne de forfaiture de qanque ils purront forfaire a nostre dit seignour le Roi’.²⁷⁸ These disciplinary measures were frequently mentioned at the end of the proclamation as a bittersweet reminder to those who disturbed the peace. We see the threat of imprisonment in 1380s London was certainly motivated by both ‘ideological and practical purposes’ which was shaped by common interests, motives and purposes. London society was controlled by reinforcing social values and harmony which, when broken, resulted in imprisonment as a means of protecting the well being of the body politic. Repeatedly making the threat of imprisonment in a short space of time public knowledge was a strategic political apparatus for controlling public behaviour. Drawing upon matters related to the well being of the broader community legitimated the threat of imprisonment, as well as portrayed civic officers as protecting notions of common profit.

Two of these proclamations specifically mentioned Newgate. The first touched upon the formation of congregations, conventicles and conspiracies under Brembre.²⁷⁹ The proclamation read that,

²⁷⁶ Carrel, ‘Ideology of Punishment’, 320, 304, 305.

²⁷⁷ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, pp. 32-33

²⁷⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 196r (upon the pentalty of foreiture of all that they might forfeit to our said lord the King); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 363, 364; *LBH*, p. 274.

²⁷⁹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, pp. 32-33.

the Mair shirreues and aldermen willet and graunteth power to euery are man of the Citee as wel as to officers that yef eny man of hem may asprie eny switch congregaciouns or couynes in gaderyng or ygadred to areste hem and ache persone of hem and brynge hem als blyue to fore the Mair yef he is at leiser or elles to Neugate in to tyme that the Mayr may attende ther to.²⁸⁰

As discussed previously, the formation of congregations, conventicles and conspiracies was a criminal offence in the eyes of Brembre, emphasised particularly by the ruthlessness with which these actions would be dealt. The term ‘blyue’, meaning to act rapidly or without delay, stressed the gravity of these offences, as well as the urgency with which punishment was to be enacted.²⁸¹ In this instance, imprisonment at Newgate was used as an alternative in the event that the Mayor was not available to deal with the perpetrator of the peace. The threat of imprisonment at Newgate served a double function; not only was it a form of punishment but, also, a remedy to removing those from the streets who had the potential to disrupt Brembre’s authority and position. It was a tactical ploy utilised by Brembre to swiftly counteract the actions of his opponents who were depicted as disrupting stability and causing strife within the City. In ‘[arresting] hem and ache persone of hem’ who formed a malicious grouping and sending them ‘to fore the Mair’ or ‘elles to Neugate’, ‘the Mair shirreues and aldermen’, were depicted as holding the interests of London and the City’s citizens as a major priority. They were portrayed as fulfilling their duties to the King, Londoners and the City. In this way, harmony could be achieved and, as a result, the good of those who made up the body politic.

A second proclamation that threatened imprisonment at Newgate was decreed under Bamme in 1391.²⁸² Bamme’s proclamation established the most direct link between imprisonment at Newgate and disrupting community values. It was proclaimed that ‘ount

²⁸⁰ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, pp. 32-33.

²⁸¹ ‘blive (adv.)’, *MED*.

²⁸² LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r; McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264; *Memorials*, p. 527.

ordeignez et establiz qe nul homme graunt ne petit de quel estat ou condicioun qil soit' would face equal punishment, applying to men of different statuses within London.²⁸³ This avowal was directly followed by Bamme's wish that the following of his commands would maintain 'le peas nostre seignour le Roi et tranquillitee et prospirite de la dite Citee principalment al honour de dieu nostre dit seignour le Roi et de tut le Royaume pur comune profit'.²⁸⁴ It was the various 'discencions debate et rumours' which had brought the affluence and equanimity of the City into question and which was responsible for the detriment of common profit values. Through this proclamation, Bamme perhaps attempted to create an image of himself as the restorer of these principles following a decade of betrayal and carnage, a figure who would shame those who destroyed the reputation and greatness of London and his fellow citizens. The penalty for not protecting the common profit, therefore, was incarceration in London's most ruthless prison, 'Neugate'. The inclusion of common profit within the body of the proclamation is revealing of how, ideologically, notions of common profit shaped attitudes and the behaviour of those traversing the tumult and uncertainty following the uproar caused by both Northampton and Brembre. The proclamation asserted that those who acted against Bamme's instructions would face consequences. It was this consideration for the discourse of common profit, and the fundamental values linked to this abstract idea and social harmony, that would force the Mayor's hand against those who troubled life on the streets of London.

Punishments such as 'fyn faire solonc lauys du mair' and what the culprit 'purra forfaire deuers nostre seignour le Roi et Cite' were also incorporated.²⁸⁵ Both extracts reveal the importance and authority bestowed upon the mayor of London and the King –

²⁸³ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (ordained and established that no man, great or small, of whatever estate or condition he be); McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264; *Memorials*, p. 527.

²⁸⁴ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 269r (the peace of our Lord the King and the tranquility and prosperity of the said city principally for the honour of God, our said Lord the King and all of the realm for the common profit); McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264; *Memorials*, p. 527.

²⁸⁵ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 86r (make a fine according to the laws of the mayor) and (would forfeit to our lord the king and the city); *LBH*, p. 92.

Londoners were subject to their will, power and laws. London was imagined as an ordered city in which the King, the Mayor and the culture of the City determined what was acceptable behaviour and what was deserving of punishment. Parallel to this proclamation, another proclamation disseminated on 15th August 1384 described that ‘qi que face acontrarie soit pris maintenant et mys en prisone tanque nostre dit seignour le Roi en eit fait sa volente de lui’.²⁸⁶ The dominant theme in this case was the enforcement of the King’s power, his link to the City and his role in deciding prison sentences. Whilst the Mayor was the King’s representative, it was he who administered law and order and he who, as head of the body politic, must be obeyed.²⁸⁷ The threat of ‘prisone’ and the King’s role in this process was a reminder of the way that a political community functioned and reinforced the expectations between different members of society.

Forms of punishment and imprisonment were implemented to maintain the heart of the City and its parts. Two proclamations dated between 1383 and 1384 based their justification for incarceration on the relationship between members of the corporate body of London. The first, addressing the question about rumours surrounding the selling of victuals, embodied this. The proclamation outlined that those who contravened the laws would suffer ‘on peyne of enprisonement at the Maires wille and forfeiture of al that he may forfaite a yens the kyng’.²⁸⁸ The Mayor had control over the fate of the criminal whose behaviour breached and infringed upon moral standards in the City. The King benefitted from this punishment, for he was due to receive the criminal’s forfeited goods as recompense for actions which were against himself and the realm.

The second proclamation issued in the same year expressed similar ideas. The proclamation declared that those who committed the crime of nightwalking would ‘on peyne of al that hij mowe forfaite a yens oure lord the kyng and a yens the Citee in body’

²⁸⁶ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 180r (anyone who should act to the contrary should immediately taken and put in prison until our said lord the king should have delivered his intention to them); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 359, 360; *LBH*, p. 247.

²⁸⁷ Black, *Political Thought in Europe*, p. 15.

²⁸⁸ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172r; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 358; *LBH*, p. 481; *ABoLE*, pp. 32-33.

outside books of medieval political theory.²⁸⁹ Moving beyond the main themes of this chapter, this proclamation shows how medieval society equated the King and the City as a unified body. Yet again, we see that the relationship outlined between the King, the Mayor and the City, as well as those lower down the social scale, not only gives an idea about who issued orders and controlled the body politic but also that the civic elites constructing these documents were aware of the importance of hierarchical ordering in society and who had power. The Mayor recognised that stressing his authority and legitimacy amongst Londoners was key to maintaining social status and his position as ruling overlord in London. In presenting imprisonment as the solution to those who wronged the King, the Mayor and the City, the urban rulers of London made it clear that they were following rules associated with social hierarchy and, thus, were issues closely pertaining to the discourse of common profit.

Evidently, punishment, as a form of governance and control, was a means of protecting the body politic and how an 'urban body' functioned.²⁹⁰ Urban rulers perceived this as a world in which the need for common profit ideals dictated protocol within a city. Informing the populace of punishment and imprisonment was necessary if the common good was to be maintained; all parts needed to be analogous with one another and there was no room for those who threatened the relationship between rulers and ruled, thereby distorting the status quo. The need to remove reprobates and transgressors reflected not only the awareness of the civic elites to safeguard their authority but also the very fact that 1380s London was a space devoid of common profit principles.

By orally circulating these ideas, civic leaders reminded and warned Londoners and the political opponents of those holding civic power of the measures that would be enforced against them if they challenged authority. As a man of royal interests who had consolidated his position in London as from the mid-1370s, Brembre needed to fortify his command and bolster the obedience owed to him by those whom he ruled over. Perhaps

²⁸⁹ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 172v.

²⁹⁰ Lilley, *City and Cosmos*, p. 131.

the frequency with which he issued proclamations on these matters, and the reminder of imprisonment and punishment reflected his awareness that his time was running short.²⁹¹ In using the discourse of common profit as a guise to punish those who contravened London custom and life, Brembre attempted to strengthen his position within a city that was growing increasingly unmanageable.

There was a necessity to link community values with justifications behind imprisonment and we see that those who offended the City and its political body received severe treatment. This was mirrored in the time scale of imprisonment which the proclamations outlined. Both Pugh and Winter have commented on the duration of incarceration, concluding that the length of imprisonment was a manifestation of the gravity of the crime committed.²⁹² Several of the proclamations examined do not give a definite amount of time for the duration of imprisonment, yet Bamme's proclamation of 1391 provided a window into the severity of the offence that the proclamation addresses. Those hearing this proclamation would have been aware that the penalty for speaking about Northampton and Brembre would have led to incarceration at Newgate 'pur vn an et vn iour sanz redempcion'.²⁹³

Imprisoning a criminal for the period of a year and a day seems to be conventional in late medieval London.²⁹⁴ There is no specified reasoning behind this duration of time for imprisonment but Winter has shown that there is some apparent pattern. It is especially significant that this particular length of confinement was decided upon for public enemies whose transgressions disrupted the 'comune profit' of the entire realm.²⁹⁵ This sentencing, therefore, appears to have been reserved for those who had carried out the most ghastly

²⁹¹ Paul Strohm is meticulous in recounting Brembre's fall from power. He notes that one by one, Brembre slowly lost his own allies on the run up to the Merciless Parliament in 1388, even Nicholas Exton who in 1386 had won the mayoralty with the help of Brembre. See Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, pp. 173-179.

²⁹² Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', p. 19.

²⁹³ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259r (a year and a day without redemption); McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264; *Memorials*, p. 527.

²⁹⁴ Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', pp. 19-20.

²⁹⁵ LMA, COL/AD/01/008, fol. 259 (common profit); McHardy, *Reign of Richard II*, p. 264; *Memorials*, p. 527.

and dreadful misdemeanours against the body politic.²⁹⁶ This underlines the importance that this ideology played in political culture in London, in addition to its importance in managing the political situation that plagued the 1380s and which continued to haunt London politics up to the loss of the City's liberties in 1392.

Medieval prisons were used as a temporary location for those awaiting further trial and we have seen that imprisonment served as a means of controlling miscreants on the street who threatened the common good. As explained in Carpenter's *Liber Albus*, those whom the Mayor and Aldermen found guilty 'shall be punished by imprisonment or other punishment at the mayor and aldermen's discretion'.²⁹⁷ As Winter emphasised, medieval prisons in London did serve a punitive purpose.²⁹⁸ For civic elites, affirming their power and right to rule was paramount and the harshest of punishments needed to be administered if this was to be realised. The realities of detention were just as clear in the imagination of those whose ears these proclamations reached.

Conclusion

Proclamations were an integral part of public life and were a deeply ingrained form of civic tradition and ceremony in London. The proclamations examined here were products of the social climate they were distributed within, echoing contemporary concerns. Parallel to town rulers across medieval England, London's civic leaders were able to dismiss those who acted unlawfully, worked against their interests, and rejected their form of governance.²⁹⁹ Thus, within a London which was threatened from all sides by growing instability amongst its factional rivals, utilising common profit rhetoric in an oral context was a strategic move to traverse the political stage.

²⁹⁶ Winter, 'Prisons and Punishments', p. 20.

²⁹⁷ *Liber Albus*, p. 241.

²⁹⁸ Winter, p. 18. Winter builds on the work of Pugh, Bassett, Jean Dunbabin and Trevor Dean to reach these conclusions.

²⁹⁹ Rigby and Ewan, 'Government, power and authority 1300-1540', p. 310.

The auricular dissemination and construction of these proclamations tell us not only about contemporary ideas that were familiar to those on the streets, but the functionality and purpose behind the issues raised and threats employed in these records. Rowland questioned whether proclamations were actually seeking to inform audiences or whether their content served to protect jurisdiction and authority.³⁰⁰ An analysis of proclamations recorded in *Letter Book H* has focused on city conduct, speech and malicious gatherings within 1380s London, demonstrating that circumstances shaped the content of these records and the frequency with which they were deployed, particularly under Brembre between 1383 and 1386. They were part of a wider programme to protect the authority of civic leaders, who faced threat from their rivals and were in constant fear of social subversion.

The issuing of these texts has also shed light on the power of public opinion and the impact of social misconduct on civic leadership and power. It reinforces the importance of the relationship between those in power and those being ruled, who had the ability to destabilise and disrupt the political advancement of leading figures. The tone of the proclamations hinted that this notion was very much kept in mind when structuring the content of these materials. It is of no wonder then, that knowledge of communal values and rhetoric associated with common profit ideology drove the proclamations forward. Brembre and, later, Bamme, drew upon traditional notions of the common good to present an administration who shared the concerns of the wider polity and who strove to preserve order above all else.

The proclamations recorded in *Letter Book H* stressed that authority and power rested in the figure of the Mayor. It was he who determined the conduct of Londoners to ensure that the authority of those who held civic power was not jeopardised by using ideas of common profit as a rhetorical tool. Proclamations not only encapsulated the authority of

³⁰⁰ Rowland, 'Publication and Reception of Local and Parliamentary Legislation', p. 179.

the King but, also, the power of the Mayor.³⁰¹ By recording proclamations within the folios of *Letter Book H*, these rules, laws and civic expectations could be drawn upon to remind law-breakers who had the power and acted as a device for those wishing to enforce public order. Proclamations were imbued with illocutionary force – it was a persuasive tool that was a key ingredient for controlling communities and disseminating messages to a broader audience.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 174.

Chapter 4. Petitionary Culture and Political Strife: The 1388 Guild

Petitions and the Merciless Parliament

Chapters two and three have largely explored Brembre's attempts to keep power. In the end, though, all of this came to nothing: on 20th February 1388 he was executed at Tyburn following his trial during the Merciless Parliament.¹ By the time of his trial, Brembre was viewed as a man who participated in 'hyperpartisan chicanery'; an individual without scruples whose unpopularity increased even amongst his closest supporters.² In his final months, Brembre was isolated, 'shunned by former friends as well as longtime foes ... virtually all of whom deserted him in the end'.³ Brembre's demise has been well documented in contemporary chronicles, including the *Westminster Chronicle*, *Knighton's Chronicle* and Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora*. His fall from grace was also narrated by Thomas Favent in his *Historia Mirabilis Parliamenti*, a political pamphlet written shortly after the Merciless Parliament occurred, which offered a detailed, albeit partisan, narrative of the treason trials that took place against five of Richard II's favourites, including Brembre, at the hands of the Lords Appellant.⁴ All of these sources describe the story of a man who reached the pinnacle of power yet, ultimately, lost his authority and fell from grace following accusations of corruption, misgovernance and treason against the Crown.

¹ Prescott, 'Brembre, Nicholas'.

² Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, p. 175.

³ Ibid, p. 177.

⁴ *WC*, pp. 234-315; *KC*, pp. 452-501; *Chronica Maiora*, p. 262; Thomas Favent, 'History or Narration Concerning the Manner and Form of the Miraculous Parliament at Westminster in the Year 1386, in the Tenth Year of the Reign of King Richard the Second after the Conquest, Declared by Thomas Favent, Clerk' trans. by Andrew Galloway in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England* ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp 231-252. In the eyes of May McKisack, Thomas Favent's text was distinct from chronicle accounts narrating what had occurred in the Merciless Parliament, for it was written 'more in the nature of a political pamphlet than a chronicle', see May McKisack, *Historia Mirabilis Parliamenti*, pp. v-vi. On Thomas Favent's partisanship see Clementine Oliver, 'A Political Pamphleteer in Late Medieval England: Thomas Fovent, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Usk, and the Merciless Parliament of 1388', *New Medieval Literatures*, 6 (2003), 168-176; Gwilym Dodd, 'Was Thomas Favent a political pamphleteer? Faction and politics in Later Fourteenth-Century London', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37, 4 (2011), 397-418.

The precariousness of Brembre's situation and the desperate circumstances in which he found himself in late 1387 and early 1388 are evident in an entry written into the Coram Rege Roll for the Hilary term of 1388 which, with various alterations, reiterated Usk's *Appeal* against Northampton written in 1384.⁵ The Hilary term began shortly after the feast of St Hilary, on 20th January, and thus the entry must have been created only weeks before Brembre's execution.⁶ The circumstances surrounding this entry are not clear, but Strohm has suggested that it was written as a response to the difficulties caused by Northampton's supporters who wished for redress for the penalties given to them following the political turmoil that occurred in 1384.⁷ Brembre's actions within the city of London were also extremely telling – in 1387, for example, Brembre and Exton produced an oath of loyalty which repudiated any sort of allegiance to Northampton. Moreover, as we saw in chapter three, a royal proclamation was issued under Exton which forbade slanderous speech about the King, the Queen and their supporters – this would have also included Brembre.⁸ Even Richard II was wary of the pro-Northampton pressure felt in the late 1380s, issuing a letter in 1387 which, as well as selecting Usk as the undersheriff of Middlesex, made it clear to London's aldermen that they were to refrain from sending petitions from Northampton's party.⁹

The above sources all give an insight into how political personalities involved in the disputes of the 1380s navigated and were victim to the political landscape of Ricardian London.¹⁰ The chronicles, Coram Rege Roll and Favent's *Historia Mirabilis Parlamenti*, are useful in extracting information about the dominant political players yet, whilst London was mentioned, the perspective and experience of those who suffered during Brembre's

⁵ For these variations see Paul Strohm, 'The Textual Vicissitudes of Usk's "Appeal"' in *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 155-157.

⁶ *Handbook of Dates*, pp. 98-100.

⁷ Strohm, 'The Textual Vicissitudes of Usk's "Appeal"', pp. 155-156, fn. 13.

⁸ *LBH*, pp. 314-315 as cited in *ibid*, p. 156.

⁹ *LBH*, pp. 316-317 as cited in *ibid*.

¹⁰ For an example of the utility of sources like Favent's *Historia Mirabilis Parlamenti* to narrate the story of 1380s London see Clementine Oliver, *Political Pamphleteering in Fourteenth-Century England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2010), p. 3.

mayoralty is lacking. This chapter draws its conclusions, instead, from fifteen petitions produced by London's artisanal guilds following a meeting with the Lords Appellant – Thomas Woodstock, duke of Gloucester; Henry Bolingbroke, earl of Derby; Richard FitzAlan, earl of Arundel; Thomas Beauchamp, earl of Warwick; and Thomas Mowbray, earl of Nottingham – on 18th January 1388.¹¹ These petitions, in contrast to the sources discussed above, offer an insight into the personal circumstances of those who felt that they had been slighted following Northampton's arrest and exile in 1384. In chapter two, we saw how Brembre treated the artisans who dared to threaten his authority at the election of October 1384, justifying the action he took against them by appealing to notions of common profit and good governance. In this final chapter, however, we see how guilds that were associated with supporting Northampton were able to manipulate this same discourse for their own purposes.

This chapter moves away from those placed at the apex of civic authority and demonstrates the way that common profit rhetoric could be used more widely and adapted to counteract one's rivals. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, not all groups within the same communities expressed ideas of the common good in the same way. This study shows the conceptual importance of common profit ideology in engaging with public debate, particularly when facing such a precarious political situation. This chapter establishes that the guildsmen tacitly and diplomatically presented their point of view to the King and Lords in Parliament. This chapter also builds on existing literature that has

¹¹ There are fifteen petitions that accused Nicholas Brembre of corrupting governance and the law in London. Fourteen of the fifteen 1388 Guild Petitions form part of the SC 8 Ancient Petitions at The National Archives. For a detailed analysis of the provenance of this collection see Gwilym Dodd, 'Parliamentary Petitions? The Origins and Provenance of the 'Ancient Petitions' (SC 8) in the National Archives' in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* ed. W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 12-46. These include SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*); SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*); SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); SC 8/20/1000 (*The Embroiderers' Petition*); SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*); SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinner's Petition*); SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*); SC 8/94/4664 (*The Drapers' Petition*); SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>sters' Petition*); SC 8/277/13829 (*The Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition*). The fifteenth petition can be found in the Chancery records: C 49/10/3 (*The Tailors' Petition*). Transcriptions and translation of petitions have been taken from Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 367-461. Wendy Scase has incorrectly stated that there are only twelve petitions that form the group of documents that were presented to the Merciless Parliament in 1388 by London's artisanal guilds see Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 67.

examined the agency of guilds in civic governance, showing that individual Guildhalls acted as political spaces.

Whilst the 1388 Guild Petitions have featured in the historiography on this period, the scholarship on this group of petitions has only considered these records on an individual level rather than as a whole. Ellis's research on these records is the only work to date that has analysed the petitions in their entirety.¹² The most famous of the 1388 Guild Petitions, the *Mercers' Petition*, has been studied in isolation by scholars such as Lindenbaum, Turner, Richard Firth Green, Matthew Giancarlo and Gwilym Dodd, receiving this treatment due to its status as one of only two petitions written in Middle English produced pre-1400.¹³ Turner, especially, has applauded the Mercers for '[manipulating] documentary culture for their own ends ... [doing so] most dramatically and daringly as they used English to voice their complaints'.¹⁴ Whilst we do see a growing use of English in the political arena in this period – we saw from chapter three, for example, that Brembre realised the value of doing so –, Turner's statement undervalues the petitions written in French and what researchers interested in language and social practice can learn from these materials. Like the *Mercers' Petition*, the other fourteen guild petitions presented at the Merciless Parliament were also 'dramatically and daringly' constructed, written with the intention of convincing those in parliament that they had been gravely wronged by Brembre. Moreover, Scase is also guilty of prioritising the *Mercers' Petition* in her work. She recognised that work on the petitions as a whole has been lacking yet in her analysis of the 1388 Guild Petitions she focused on the linguistic overlap between the *Mercers' Petition* and the *Cordwainers' Petition* rather than the entire

¹² Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol I, pp. 95-155.

¹³ Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practices', pp. 290-291; Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, pp. 8-30; Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth*, p. 1; Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England*, pp. 69-76; Gwilym Dodd, 'Thomas Paunfield, the "heye Court of Rightwysnesse" and the Language of Petitioning in the Fifteenth Century' in *Medieval Petitions*, pp. 233-234. Also see W. Mark Ormrod, 'The Language of Complaint: Multilingualism and Petitioning in Later Medieval England' in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c.1150-c.1500* ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), p. 38.

¹⁴ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 11.

corpus.¹⁵ By looking at all the petitions together, this study will therefore fill this gap in the literature and explore the significance of these sources to our understanding of common profit ideology in a more comprehensive manner.

Before delving further into the role that the artisanal guilds played in Brembre's downfall during the Merciless Parliament, it is important to understand the context from which the 1388 Guild Petitions were produced. As has been made clear from the previous three chapters, London was a city divided by factional politics and we see that political rivalries reached far beyond the walls of the City. Parallel to Northampton's followers who viewed London as a centre of vice and misgovernance, the Appellants considered that the realm was badly governed during the 1380s.¹⁶ These events began with the impeachment of Michael de la Pole, earl of Suffolk and Chancellor, who was accused by the Commons in parliament in 1386 of having abused his office and engaged in corrupt practices, such as embezzlement.¹⁷ During the Wonderful Parliament of 1386, de la Pole's suggestion to raise taxes to aid coastal defences against a possible French invasion was also rejected by the Commons, who demanded the impeachment and removal of de la Pole.

Despite Richard's complaints and his initial refusal to attend Parliament, the charge against de la Pole went ahead and, as a result, a group of commissioners was established on 19th November 1386 to manage Richard's household and government.¹⁸ This was a direct affront to the King's authority and sparked a chain reaction that would lead to the Merciless Parliament. Richard spent the next year away from London to avoid submitting to the commissioners. He also took the advice of his judges, particularly Chief Justice Robert Tresilian, about the legality of what had occurred in the Wonderful Parliament. The commissioners' term of power was to expire on 19th November 1387 and knowing this,

¹⁵ Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 67-77. Scase in her discussion raises points about the other petitions, highlighting some of their grievances yet the main discussion falls on a contrast between the *Cordwainers' Petition* (TNA, SC 8/20/998) and the *Mercers' Petition* (TNA, SC 8/20/997) which she uses to illustrate overlaps in wording amongst the wider group of these petitions.

¹⁶ PROME, 'Introduction February 1388'.

¹⁷ Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 65.

¹⁸ For an outline of these events see *WC*, pp. 166-343; Favent, 'History or Narration', pp. 231-52; Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 157-204; Bird, *Turbulent London*, pp. 86-101.

Richard returned to London on 10th November. Those who had supported the commissioners acted quickly and soon accused Richard's five allies, including Brembre, of 'accroaching to themselves royal power'.¹⁹ Richard II was left with no choice but to agree that these appeals of treason should be heard in Parliament, which commenced on 3rd February 1388.²⁰

Favent wrote that the reason for Parliament gathering was that the King's 'governors and close councillors ... [lived] in vice, [deluded] the said king, were concerned neither with the king's nor the kingdom's business but embracing the mammon of iniquity for themselves through much wickedness'.²¹ Under the influence and immoral conduct of the Appellees the 'king [was] made a pauper'.²² The claims made by Favent mirrored the Appeal for Treason, which contained the thirty-nine articles detailing the misdeeds of the Appellees.²³ Brembre's crimes against the realm included, but were not limited to: 'preventing the great men and the good counsellors of the king from showing their good will towards their liege lord'; '[taking] great bribes'; and fraudulently advising 'the king to turn against [the Lords Appellant]'.²⁴ Other charges included the unjust release of prisoners, cheating the King into passing ordinances, statutes and commissions that went against the prerogative and regality of the King's person.²⁵

It is from the Appeal for Treason, Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora* and *Knighton's Chronicle*, that we see Brembre described as 'the false knight of London', revealing that his persona was widely viewed as being intrinsically linked with his position as a leading figure in London. In the Merciless Parliament, Brembre was not only accused of misdemeanours against the realm but also against the City of London. He was especially

¹⁹ PROME, III, 230. The complaint 'accroaching to themselves royal power' will be discussed in more detail below, pp. 272-284.

²⁰ For the start date of the Merciless Parliament see PROME, III 228 and III, 230.

²¹ Favent, 'History or Narrative', p. 232.

²² Ibid.

²³ PROME, 'Introduction February 1388'.

²⁴ PROME, III-230.

²⁵ PROME, III-232, III-233.

unlucky and was the only one of the five Appellees to be found and placed on trial.²⁶

Yet again, one of London's most prominent civic leaders was held accountable. It is from this context that the 1388 Guild Petitions were created, for they constructed a portrayal of Brembre's misconduct and abuse of power that specifically caused detriment to London civic governance.

The *Westminster Chronicle* gave minimal importance to the role of the artisanal guilds in orchestrating Brembre's defeat, outlining that it was the Mayor, Exton, the Recorder, Cheyne, and London Aldermen who confirmed that Brembre was guilty of concealing treason, thus sealing his fate.²⁷ The author of the *Westminster Chronicle*, especially, seems to have held a negative view of the craft guilds, expounding that they were 'trouble-makers', 'wrong-headed' and 'ill-natured' beings 'who [applied] their efforts rather to the city's undoing than to letting it enjoy its liberties'; they were determined on destroying one another.²⁸ Favent, however, took a completely different view of the artisanal guilds' role in causing Brembre's destruction. He wrote that 'nonetheless on the next day, as an even heavier matter, appeared many of the crafts of the city of London complaining about many injuries and extortions torturously committed and carried forward against them elsewhere by the same Nicholas Brembre'.²⁹ Favent continued, informing readers that 'the crafts themselves swore on their souls that they were not corrupted by hatred, fear or favour of anyone or any reward, nor were they declaring these things maliciously but rather were accusing him concerning the truth'.³⁰ The role of London's artisanal guilds, from Favent's perspective, was vital in causing Brembre to be 'undone at last'.³¹

²⁶ Whilst Brembre, along with Tresilian, lost his life we know that the others – Alexander Neville, archbishop of York, Michael de la Pole, duke of Suffolk and Chancellor, and Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford – were punished for their crimes and their possessions given to the King. See *CPR, Richard II 1385-89*, p. 469.

²⁷ *WC*, pp. 234-37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Favent, 'History or Narrative', p. 245.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

What had occurred in London during the 1380s was key to understanding Brembre's downfall. The Lords Appellant may have framed their grievances within a national setting but, in contrast, the 1388 Guild Petitions provided a window into how urban communities could unite together, placing their protests within a more personal and urban context. Their petitions were drawn up some time after their meeting with the Lords Appellant on 18th January 1388, leading Ellis to have narrowed the dating of the petitions to sometime between the 18th January and 17th February 1388.³² The 'neglect' of these petitions is 'regrettable', and they deserve a more prominent place within the historiography on late fourteenth-century London and the events pertaining to the Merciless Parliament of 1388.³³ Regardless of the impact they had in parliament, the creation of these petitions allows for us to gain a deeper insight into the guilds' socio-political outlook, how they understood medieval urban governance, and the way in which they employed common profit rhetoric to reinforce their viewpoint according to their circumstances.

Late Medieval Petitionary Culture

The 1388 Guild Petitions were thus created as a way of presenting grievances against Brembre's style of civic leadership and showed how civic governance had decayed during his mayoralty. Petitionary culture was, then, an important way of presenting complaints and has been a prominent feature of late medieval historiography.³⁴ Petitions have a long history dating back to the thirteenth century, which witnessed a "bill

³² Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 106.

³³ Ibid, p. 98.

³⁴ This was especially the case following the AHRC-funded project 'Medieval Petitions: A Catalogue of the "Ancient Petitions" in the Public Record Office' led by W. Mark Ormrod and Gwilym Dodd. See the collections of essays in *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* ed. W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York: York Medieval Press, 2009); Paul Brand, 'Petitions and Parliament in the Reign of Edward I' in *Parchment and People: Parliament in the Middle Ages* ed. Linda Clark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 14-38; Gwilym Dodd, 'The Hidden Presence: Private Parliament and the Private Petition in the Fourteenth Century' in *Expectations of the Law in the Middle Ages* ed. Anthony Musson (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), pp. 135-149; Gwilym Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); W. Mark Ormrod, 'The Language of Complaint', pp. 31-43.

revolution”, and studies on late medieval petitions have revealed what the development of these texts can tell us about the mechanics of late medieval government, highlighting in particular ‘parliament’s role as a provider of discretionary justice’.³⁵ Examining late medieval petitions has also helped scholars understand how individuals and communities were able to communicate with the King and Council through various channels – not only were supplicants able to present their grievances before Parliament but they were also able to utilise central courts, such as the Exchequer of Pleas and Court of Chancery, as a forum where they could seek redress. Not only do we learn about how these judicial institutions functioned but, also, the type of plaint that individuals or communities, whose interests were distinct from the Crown’s, could make.³⁶ As Ormrod has explained, petitions ‘provide a particularly rich ‘worm’s eye’ view both of social conditions and political expectations in the later Middle Ages’.³⁷ Moreover, petitions also constituted a form of clamour literature in the sense that petitions, like politically charged literary works, had the potential to represent widespread complaint.³⁸

Dodd has demonstrated that medieval petitions were a useful interface for medieval people to communicate with the King.³⁹ Nevertheless, Dodd has cautioned against viewing petitions as reflections of ‘the authentic voice of the petitioner’, suggesting that due to the formulaic structure of the petition, scholars cannot reconstruct their narrative.⁴⁰ Not only did political culture shape and create a standardised body of language in petitions but experts, like ‘a clerk, lawyer, or professional scribe’, also determined the finished product.⁴¹ As a result, we may not be able to ‘capture the unmediated, authentic voices of the king’s subjects’.⁴² Rather than originate with the guildsmen themselves the petitions were created under a different context. Rather than form the idea themselves, the petitions

³⁵ Ormrod, ‘The Language of Complaint’, pp. 32-33; Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, pp. 12, 14.

³⁶ Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 15; Ormrod, ‘The Language of Complaint’, p. 32.

³⁷ Ormrod, ‘The Language of Complaint’, p. 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-136.

³⁹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 279.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* See also Ormrod, ‘The Language of Complaint’, p. 32.

⁴¹ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 314.

⁴² Ormrod, ‘The Language of Complaint’, p. 32.

which they created stemmed from their meeting with the Lords Appellant. Scase and Ellis have picked up on this, arguing that these sources were created within the guilds' own halls.⁴³ Whilst Scase has established that differences in script show that the petitions were not written as a part of a single effort, codicological evidence suggests that the petitions were either posted within the guilds' individual halls or presented together within the Guildhall as a way of inciting clamour. Scase goes as far as to suggest that the petitions may have even been posted in Westminster Hall, '[serving] the Appellants' purposes, and [providing] a basis for summoning the guildsmen to have their complaints heard'.⁴⁴ This may be speculative but it gives an alternative setting from which the petitions emerged, particularly given their unusual nature.

Ellis and Scase agree that the petitions were produced within individual guild halls yet Ellis' focus lay on which petition provided a model that the rest could be based on.⁴⁵ He had three main contenders: the Saddlers, the Tailors and the Goldsmiths, with the latter two being some of the 'companies most implicated in the civic upheavals of the 1380s', having aligned themselves closely with Northampton following Brembre's election in 1383.⁴⁶ Moreover, 'the Tailors and Goldsmiths had their own halls within which their textual strategies could have been discussed'.⁴⁷ Turner, especially, has shown that the Goldsmiths' hall in the later fourteenth century was 'a locus of political agitation' and a meeting place for those who wished to gather and discuss Northampton's politics.⁴⁸ For these reasons, of the three possible contenders that Ellis had to choose from, he speculated that the *Goldsmiths' Petition* is the most likely candidate and that it was Nicholas Twyford, the wealthiest Goldsmith within, who orchestrated the production of the petitions.

⁴³ Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 71; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁵ Ellis showed that eight of the petitions followed the model religiously, whilst the Leathersellers and Whittawyers and Cutlers, Bowyers, Spurriers, Fletchers and Bladesmiths deviated from the common model. The *Mercers' Petition*, of course, was written in English and, thus, there are obvious differences.

⁴⁶ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 142; Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', 148-149, 171. I have quoted from 149.

⁴⁷ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 142; Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', 145-146.

⁴⁸ Turner, 'Usk and the Goldsmiths', 171.

Despite there being no overt statement within the petitions of a single figure who directed their production, Ellis provided four reasons as to why Twyford is a convincing candidate. Firstly, in 1384 Twyford had stood against Brembre for the position of mayor of London yet his own supporters ‘were violently intimidated’, losing him the election.⁴⁹ Secondly, Brembre was responsible for his removal as sheriff of London in 1378. Thirdly, Twyford vouched for moderate measures and was not radical in his outlook. In very few of these petitions do we see the demonization of Brembre’s supporters, such as Nicholas Exton – the focus is always on Brembre.⁵⁰ Twyford, clearly, had the most to gain from the shift in political power. Lastly, drawing from Dodd’s scholarship on Favent’s *Historia Mirabilis Parliamenti*, Ellis contended that Twyford was the ‘intended audience’ of this work.⁵¹ This is because of the textual overlap between Favent’s text and the petitions, which both examined ‘the divisions within the city in terms of personalities rather than policies or factions’.⁵²

There are elements within the 1388 Guild Petitions, therefore, that were particular to themselves and their circumstances. As Ellis has posited, ‘while the petitions were produced for the ascendant side, it would be wrong to consequently read them as self-assured or triumphalist documents’.⁵³ The guildsmen were not complacent in producing these materials and ensured that they presented their points justly and fairly. They referenced aspects of how civic governance had been managed in London to show how governance had become corrupted. Moreover, as will be seen further into this chapter, the guildsmen were careful in how they addressed the King, treating him with due respect and presenting themselves as concerned for his profit and that of the Kingdom, as well as that of London.

⁴⁹ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 143.

⁵⁰ Ibid. An exception to this is the *Cutlers, Bowyers, Spurriers, Fletchers and Bladesmiths’ Petition* (TNA, SC 8/21/1006) that requested that Nicholas Exton be removed from his position as mayor.

⁵¹ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 143.

⁵² Ibid; Dodd, ‘Thomas Favent’, 415.

⁵³ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 106.

Key to discussions about the 1388 Guild Petitions is whether this group of records should be dubbed petitions or appeals. Both Scase and Dodd have agreed that the petitions did not resemble the common form of private petitions presented to parliament and thus it is more appropriate to label this set of petitions as ‘appeals’ because of the physical similarities that they shared with these type of records.⁵⁴ Dodd, especially, has compared the *Mercers’ Petition* to Usk’s *Appeal* and a fifteenth-century petition written in Middle English by Thomas Paunfield. He concluded that the similarities these texts shared between them - each employed ‘the first-person tense [sic]; each subdivided its narrative into separate paragraphs; and each document provided full, rather than summarised, details of the accusations’ – categorise them as appeals.⁵⁵ In contrast to these sources, typical petitions were written in the third-person when representing the views of petitioners.⁵⁶ Whilst the Mercers certainly used the first-person in their petition as a tool to present their complaints, the text, as stressed earlier, should not be examined in isolation. As Ellis acknowledged, the *Mercers’ Petition* was influenced by its French counterparts that did not incorporate the use of the first-person.⁵⁷ Several of these petitions, therefore, do not share the same characteristics which Dodd determined are seen in appeals.

Moreover, Dodd’s five-stage formula for the petitionary diplomatic can be applied to the 1388 Guild Petitions. Private petitions to parliament were formatted in a five-stage division, including the address, identification of the petitioner(s), statement of grievance, request for redress and appeal for remedy.⁵⁸ In the initial address made in the 1388 Guild Petitions, we see that the guildsmen used terms typical of other late medieval private petitions – including *trespuissant*, *tresredoute*, *tresexcellent*, *tresgracieuse*, *tressage* – to

⁵⁴ Gwilym Dodd, ‘Thomas Paunfield, the “heye Court of Rightwisnesse” and the Language of Petitioning in the Fifteenth Century’ in *Medieval Petitions*, pp. 222-241; Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 72.

⁵⁵ Dodd, ‘Thomas Paunfield’, pp. 233-234.

⁵⁶ Ormrod, ‘Murmur, Clamour and Noise’, 137; Dodd, ‘Thomas Paunfield’, p. 228; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 131.

⁵⁷ Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. I, p. 107.

⁵⁸ Dodd, *Justice and Grace*, p. 281; Gwilym Dodd, ‘Writing Wrongs: The Drafting of Supplications to the Crown in Late Fourteenth-Century England’, *Medium Aevum*, 80, 2 (2011), 223-226.

describe the King, as well as the lords in parliament.⁵⁹ Significantly, the use of the prefix *tres-* in vocabulary utilised to address the King and his ministers increased within private petitions towards the end of the fourteenth century. The use of this terminology was also essential in defining their relationship with the King. Parallel to their contemporary supplicants, the guilds employed terms such as *treshumblement* to remind their king that they were his humble subjects and that he was the head of the body politic.⁶⁰ The utilisation of this parliamentary lexicon further supports that the 1388 Guild Petitions were structured according to petitionary diplomatic, for they appear to be following trends in parliamentary vocabulary that were contemporaneous with the production of the texts. It is also important to remember that the clerks who wrote these petitions were well versed in the nature of governmental documents.⁶¹ The significance of scribes in drafting such documents has been recognised by Helen Killick, for example, who posited that ‘scribal analysis can contribute to our understanding of how common petitions, and parliamentary petitions in general were drafted’ at London’s Guildhall.⁶² This idea is helpful in reimagining how, in the case of the 1388 Guild Petitions, the scribes producing these texts knew what phrasing to employ, applying a deeply ingrained ideology to persuade and convince parliament of their plight.⁶³

What is striking about the 1388 Guild Petitions, however, is their length and the use of multiple paragraphs. Typical late medieval private petitions were usually restricted to one paragraph, but what we see in these texts is a hybrid form of this; an attempt at experimenting with petitionary diplomatic to suit their circumstances and context. They are an excellent example of ‘the fluidity of the petitionary form’, and whilst maintaining the formulaic structure of the petitions, as well as some key terms, the language employed in

⁵⁹ Giancarlo, *Literature and Parliament*, p.142; Dodd, ‘Kingship, Parliament and the Court’, 515-548.

⁶⁰ Dodd, ‘Kingship, Parliament and the Court’, 516. On how the hierarchical nature of this language and the King as the head of the body politic see 534.

⁶¹ See Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*.

⁶² Helen Killick, ‘Treason, felony and Lollardy: a common petition in the hand of Richard Osborn, clerk of the chamber of the Guildhall, 1400–c.1437’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 89, No. 244 (2016), 228. I am grateful to Dr Gwilym Dodd for this reference.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 244.

the 1388 Guild Petitions was infused with ideals of common profit to show that Brembre had failed the City, its inhabitants, and the King in his role as the Mayor of London.⁶⁴ This examination of the 1388 Guild Petitions shows that documentary culture could be utilised to navigate political turmoil and work to one's advantage.

What we have then is a coordinated effort by London's artisans to experiment with the traditional form of a legal document in order to explain how London civic governance had been abused by Brembre and how, in the process, they had suffered as a collective. That guilds utilised petitionary culture to their advantage is not new. Matthew Davies has shown how the guild companies of fifteenth-century London petitioned Parliament, and, in so doing, equated concerns related to the interests of the city of London with issues pertaining to the notion of common weal.⁶⁵ Davies' study is helpful in understanding how ideology related to how the communal good could be employed in petitions from guild companies, yet his study paid little attention to the language used in relation to political life and did not explore behavioural trends and reasoning behind why particular ideas or phrases relating to medieval political theory were expressed. Like the guilds of fifteenth-century London, the guilds petitioning against Brembre related their grievances directly to city politics and presented these documents to the highest authority: Parliament.⁶⁶ Although the culture of litigation and petitioning by London's guilds became more established in the fifteenth century, earlier petitions must still be considered as significant insights into urban politics.⁶⁷ This study builds on this work, yet considers, in contrast, how the political language employed in the 1388 Guild Petitions was infused with common profit rhetoric as a way of articulating values that pertained to the benefit of urban communities and showed that civic governance had been corrupted. It is especially important to note that many of London's artisanal guilds who submitted petitions to the

⁶⁴ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, pp. 108-109.

⁶⁵ Matthew Davies, 'Lobbying Parliament: The London Companies in the Fifteenth Century' in *Parchment and People: Parliament in the Middle Ages* ed. Linda Clark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), pp. 136-137.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 139.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 137.

Merciless Parliament were those not considered the more prominent guilds, like the Goldsmiths, Saddlers and Tailors who had been convicted by Brembre in 1384, but were poorer, lesser guilds, like the Painters and Pinners, whose cause Northampton had championed.⁶⁸ Their efforts to produce petitions alongside the more powerful guilds is a comment upon their ability to have a voice in urban politics and their engagement with broader concepts relating to good governance. Like Davies' guilds, then, London's artisanal guilds petitioned corporately to articulate the common wrongs committed against them.

Guilds in late medieval England were active participants in London governance and ceremony, taking on an increasingly important role within civic governance by 'assuming many of its roles of regulation, dispute settlement, and entrance into the freedom of the city'; the petitions thus reveal the intellectual tools with which they approached these tasks.⁶⁹ In late medieval London, guilds were 'valuable tools of urban government' and we see how, in the 1388 Guild Petitions, London's artisans demonstrated how their ability to participate in civic governance and be part of the wider urban community, acting as vehicles of economic, political and social prosperity, had been reduced by Brembre. In producing these petitions, then, London's artisanal guilds used the written word strategically as a way of entering 'the political arena within their communities' and engaging with contemporary discourse in order to legitimise their arguments.⁷⁰ Like the oaths examined in chapter one and the proclamations analysed in chapter three, petitions were oral in nature, yet the focus here is on the language employed by London's artisanal guilds and the way that this vocabulary was utilised to counteract a political enemy.

⁶⁸ For an outline of Northampton's supporters outside of the major guilds, who have traditionally been seen as Northampton's greatest allies, see Kirkland, 'The Life Records of John Northampton', pp. 38-40.

⁶⁹ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 106. Also see Gervase Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of work in the Medieval Town', *Past & Present*, 154, (1997), 1-31; Davies, 'Artisans, Guilds and Government in London', pp. 125-150; Matthew Davies, 'Crown, city and guild in late medieval London' in *London and beyond: Essays in honour of Derek Keene* ed. Matthew Davies and James A. Galloway (London: Institute of Historical Research), pp. 247-268.

⁷⁰ Barron, 'Afterword: Negotiating the Political', p. 213.

The Lords Appellant and the Guild Petitions

That the 1388 Guild Petitions were the product of a meeting between the Lords Appellant and London's artisans has caused Turner to conclude that the petitions were written for 'the dominant political power'.⁷¹ In particular, she has argued that the grievances presented by the guilds mirrored the accusations deployed by the Lords Appellant and thus served the latter's interests. She took this idea one step further and posited that it was, probably, only with the help of the Lords Appellant that London's artisanal guilds were able to vilify and destroy Brembre.⁷² A royal proclamation, which was issued in October 1387, and was examined in chapter three, reinforces Turner's argument, for it curtailed those who wished to speak ill of those within the royal circle.⁷³

Given the circumstances towards the end of 1387, it is reasonable to conclude that the motivation to raise accusations against Brembre originated with the Lords Appellant. Ellis has further explored this line of argument, highlighting that the guildsmen '[followed] a localised political discourse through their use of a single model' which reflected the wishes of the Lords Appellant.⁷⁴ The conclusions drawn by both Turner and Ellis lies with the distinct, linguistic overlap between the records produced for the Merciless Parliament and the emphasis placed on how Brembre accroached the King's power in both the Appeal for Treason and the 1388 Guild Petitions.⁷⁵ In the Appeal for Treason, presented by the Lords Appellant, there were a total of thirty-nine articles outlining the 'high treasons committed by them [the five Appellees] against our lord the king and his kingdom, as traitors to and enemies of the king and kingdom'.⁷⁶ Repeated throughout the Appeal for Treason was the accusation that the Appellees had '[accroached] to themselves royal

⁷¹ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 28; Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, pp. 73-76.

⁷² Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 28.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

⁷⁴ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 117.

⁷⁵ With the exception of the *Mercers' Petition*, the *Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition* and the *Tailors' Petition*, the petitions repeatedly echoed this accusation used by the Lords Appellant. Nowhere in the *Mercers' Petition* is the Middle English equivalent of the verb 'acrocher' used and in the *Tailors' Petition* all we have left is an excerpt outlining a charter that Brembre requisitioned from them. I suspect that the phrase may have been included in the *Anglo-Norman Mercers' Petition*, however the petition is in an extremely fragile and fragmented state thus making it difficult to reconstruct the text.

⁷⁶ PROME, III, 230.

power' – meaning that they had diminished the royal prerogative and the King's regality.⁷⁷ Twenty-eight of the charges included were brought against Brembre and of these charges, fourteen focused on the treasonous actions of Richard's closest supporters, of which eight specifically framed their crimes within the context of accroaching the King's power.⁷⁸ In the medieval polity, accroaching the King's power was considered to be a form of damaging the good of the realm and usurping the King's power and was, therefore, equated with treason.⁷⁹

Considering the accroachment of royal power within the context of the Merciless Parliament is also significant when bearing in mind that this parliament was the first instance in which the phrase 'hautes tresons par eux faite encountre le roy et son realme' was recorded, emphasising that treason was an offence of the highest order; it was a gross violation of a subject's duty to both the realm and the Crown.⁸⁰ Moreover, in adding the word 'hautes' before 'treson', the Lords Appellant were both dramatizing and enhancing the seriousness of this act in order to highlight that the actions of the Appellees were unnatural and subverted the traditional relationship between the King and those who served him.⁸¹ These crimes, however, could not be dealt with in courts of law such as the Court of King's Bench and Court of Common Pleas but, instead, were to be judged by a parliamentary trial as there was no law in place to suitably judge these wrongs.⁸² The act of accroaching royal power was excluded from the 1352 treason statute, and it is possible that this is another potential reason why the case was dealt with in parliament.⁸³ There were, therefore, no formal structures in place to deal with this offence.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ J. G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), p. 210.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 96.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 29.

⁸¹ 'haltesce (s.)', *AND*.

⁸² See PROME, Richard II, 'February 1388', Part 3 (Attainders), for the reasons the Lords Appellant provide for why this trial took place in parliament.

⁸³ Bellamy, *Law of Treason*, p. 14. Moreover, by the fourteenth century, parliament was 'the primary political and legislative institution in the kingdom', Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 67. It is reasonable, then, to assume that this is another reason for why this case was dealt with within parliament. See Ormrod and Musson, *The Evolution of English Justice*, p. 159.

The idiom to accroach royal power, however, was not a phrase used frequently throughout the parliament rolls. Ellis, for example, has shown that in the parliament rolls written during Richard II's reign there were only fifty-five uses of the term 'acrocher' or some variation of this verb.⁸⁴ Thirty-five of these usages were found in the parliament roll reflecting the proceedings of the Merciless Parliament.⁸⁵ The verb 'acrocher' was also used later in the Parliament which took place in 1397, during which Richard accused three of the Lords Appellant, Gloucester, Warwick and Arundel, of 'accrochantz a eux roial poair'.⁸⁶ This mirrored the Lords Appellants' rhetoric and, as argued by Alan Rogers, was likely a form of revenge for the political upheaval caused in 1388.⁸⁷ There is also an earlier example of the term's usage in 1383 against Thomas Trivet, who was accused of 'acrochez poair roial' for '[issuing] letters of safe conduct under the king's seal without his authority'.⁸⁸ The idea of usurping the King's power harks back to the early fourteenth century under Edward II. In both 1302 and 1321, this was a political debate that surfaced in which the barons threatened to overthrow Edward II should he not act in accordance with customary law, justice of the land and their counsel. For the barons, their fealty was not due to the person of the King but the crown alone.⁸⁹ The same charge was brought against Roger Mortimer in 1330, for which he was deemed a traitor for subverting the natural order; his crimes were against the King and Kingdom.⁹⁰

Traditionally, therefore, the allegation of accroaching royal power was a royal or baronial accusation.⁹¹ Nevertheless, whilst the concerns of the Lords Appellant were key in the initial negotiations with the guild leaders, the artisanal guilds adopted and reshaped this conventional baronial complaint to suit their purposes. In a vein similar to the Lords

⁸⁴ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 56.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 106; PROME, III, 377 (accroaching to themselves royal power).

⁸⁷ Alan Rogers, 'Parliamentary Appeals of Treason in the Reign of Richard II', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 8 (1964), 118.

⁸⁸ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 106; Bellamy, *Law of Treason*, p. 97.

⁸⁹ I am grateful to Dr Paul Dryburgh for providing me with this example. Also see Bellamy, *Law of Treason*, p. 98 for proceedings in Parliament against Piers Gaveston in which this issue was raised.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 207.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 97.

Appellant, the guilds removed any sense of accountability from the King and adopted, instead, the medieval *topos* of the ‘evil counsellor’, focusing on how the misrule of one individual had a detrimental effect on the communal well being of the King’s subjects.⁹² The petitions marked a new direction and adapted the phrase to accroach royal power to present their views. In the petitions the phrase ‘accrocha sur luy roial poair’ or a variant of this consistently preceded an act that was committed against the guildsmen or the city of London more generally.⁹³ Later in this chapter, it is shown how the guildsmen considered themselves to be the King’s true ‘lieges’ – ‘les bones gentz’ – creating a sophisticated relationship with the monarch in which they articulated that they were loyal to *him* and not to Brembre. To accroach royal power was no longer an idiom associated with those who dominated parliament, but encompassed the wider political community who wished to maintain their sacral relationship with the King.⁹⁴

London’s artisanal guilds thus repackaged this rhetoric and styled Brembre’s treasonous actions within a specifically London setting, equating the accroachment of royal power with the ruin of ‘le bone gouvernaile’ and ‘la distruccioun des bones vsages profitables gouvernances et reules’ of the city of London.⁹⁵ Their perception of Brembre as a civic ruler was the antithesis of how Brembre represented himself in his, and the Aldermen and Common Council’s letters to Gaunt which were examined in chapter two. In stark contrast, Brembre, in the eyes of the guildsmen, left London bereft of any form of moral conduct and virtuous government. The guild petitions departed from the content of the Appeal for Treason, in that protecting ideals of common profit was very much viewed in an urban rather than national context – Brembre was specifically framed as a traitor

⁹² Matthews, *Writing to the King*, pp. 5-6.

⁹³ All the petitions in the group examined in this chapter, except the *Tailors’ Petition*, contained this phrase. (accroached to himself royal power).

⁹⁴ By ‘political community’ I mean those who engaged with public debate outside of Parliament. See ‘Introduction’ for more on defining the ‘political community’ and who the political community was.

⁹⁵ For the first phrase see TNA, SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinners’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers’ Petition*) (the good governance); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana, Vol.II’, pp. 367, 369, 383, 387, 411, 415. For the second phrase see TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*Leathersellers and Whittawyers Petition*) (destruction of the good usages, profitable governance and rules); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 450, 452.

against the communal prosperity of the City. The guild petitions thus portrayed an alternative reality, one in which good governance within the City did not flourish as a result of Brembre's unscrupulous leadership.

This aspect of Brembre's leadership featured, for example, in discussions of how, by accroaching royal power, Brembre had impinged upon the way of civic life in certain areas. Cheapside, for instance, figured prominently in this kind of dialogue between the guilds and we see from the *Goldsmiths' Petition* that,

le dit monseignour Nicholl de ceo quil oue lassent des autres ses accomplices
 <ac>crocha sur l<uy> {roial poair enceo quil venoit en Chepe oue} <graun>t
 mul<titude d>es {gentz armez a} graunt do<ute> d<e> {tous les} bones
 {gentz} du> dite Cite.⁹⁶

Similar phraseology was employed in the majority of these petitions, albeit with some alteration. In the *Painters' Petition*, for example, the charge was embellished further, detailing that,

le dite seignour Nichol deceo quil oue lassent des autres sez acomplices
 accrocha sur luy Roial poair enceo quil venoit en chepe oue graunt multitude
 des gentz armez a graunt doute et affray des toutz bones gentz du dite Citee et

⁹⁶ Variations of this phrase appeared in TNA, SC 8/94/4664 (*The Drapers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>sters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*) (the said Nicholas thereof: that he, with the agreement of the others, his accomplices, accroached to himself royal power in that he came into Cheapside with a great multitude of armed men to the great fear of all the good men of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 377, 379, 382, 385, 389, 392, 396, 398, 401, 405, 409, 413, 417, 420, 436, 442, 447, 452.

moultz autres gentz de mesme Citee emprisona a graunt doute de lour vies et perde de lour biens saunz response de ley.⁹⁷

The term ‘affray’, meaning, in this context, ‘fright’, was added in to emphasise the impact that these actions have had on the inhabitants of London.⁹⁸ The Leathersellers and Whittawyers made the charge more specific by supplying a date for the event – ‘le dit an septisme’ – in addition to offering additional details about who was involved and suffered as a result of this event.⁹⁹ From their petition readers learnt the additional details that, Brembre caused ‘plusours <ge>ntz des ditz mestiers et les emprisona en moult graunt duress a graunt doute de lour vies et a grauntz perde de lour biens <et da>mage de lour corps san<z> les soeffrer venir pour estere a lour response’.¹⁰⁰ Whilst individuals are not specifically named here, the message which the Leathersellers and Whittawyers wished to make was clear: in accroaching to himself royal power, Brembre impeded upon the rights of those – the men belonging to the guilds in London who had the freedom of the City – in particular taking away their right to respond to what had occurred.

Moreover, in using the phrase ‘plusours <gen>tz des ditz mestiers’, referring to guilds across the City, the Leathersellers and Whittawyers extended this grievance on to other artisans within London, representing themselves as part of a wider body of people who collectively suffered as a result of Brembre’s severe treatment towards them; for the guilds, Brembre was the antithesis of community values. The guildsmen also expressed that Brembre had acted illegally and this was highlighted in the petitions, which stated that,

⁹⁷ TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*) (the said Sir Nicholas thereof: that he, with the agreement of the others, his accomplices, accroached to himself royal power in that he came into Cheapside with a great multitude of armed men to the great fear and fright of all the good men of the said city; and he imprisoned many other men of the same city to the great fear for their lives and loss of their goods, without the judgement of law); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 382, 385-386.

⁹⁸ ‘effrei (s.)’, *AND*.

⁹⁹ TNA, SC 8/20/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers’ Petition*) (in the seventh year); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 446, 451. The year being referred to is 1384, see *Handbook of Dates*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* (many men of the said mysteries, and imprisoned them to the very great harshness, to the great fear for their lives and great loss of their goods and damage to their bodies without the permit to come to make their response); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 447, 451-452.

in accroaching royal power, Brembre had acted ‘sannz response de ley’.¹⁰¹ As mayor, Brembre was meant to uphold the rule of law, yet the artisanal guilds constructed an alternative narrative in which the Mayor was a lawbreaker with no regard for proper justice. Brembre was thus depicted as having no interest in maintaining common profit values and, instead, was a despot who compromised these crucial standards and principles of urban life in order to impose his will.

The *Saddlers’ Petition* and the *Cordwainers’ Petition* also illustrate how the language of the Lords Appellant could be tailored to suit their experiences. Like the above petitions, both the Saddlers and the Cordwainers recounted the events that had occurred at Cheapside, including the murder of John Constantyn, a cordwainer who was executed in 1384 as a result of rising up against Brembre on 11th February 1384 following Northampton’s arrest on 7th February 1384. From a royal sanction given to Brembre in 1384, we learn that the reasons for Constantyn’s execution was for ‘counselling, comforting, and inciting the people of the said city to close their shops, and through his iniquitous contrivances, in the way of rumour, commotion, disturbance, and insurrection ... [acted] against [the] peace and the sound governance of the said city’.¹⁰² Brembre portrayed himself as acting to ‘[strengthen] from henceforth the governance of the said city, and of repressing and checking conspirators and contrivers of such covins and congregations, all other misdoers through whom aught might ... ensue against our peace in the said city’.¹⁰³ Despite this both guilds presented an alternative narrative, agreeing that this had been possible because Brembre had ‘acrochant sur luy roial poaire’.¹⁰⁴ The *Saddlers’ Petition* and *Cordwainers’ Petition*, whilst discussing the same tragic event, are excellent examples of how a particular rhetoric could be modified to suit a certain identity

¹⁰¹ This particular criticism is included in the following petitions: TNA, SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinners’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/94/4664 (*The Drapers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*) (had acted without the judgement of the law); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 367, 369, 372, 374, 377, 379, 382, 386, 389, 393.

¹⁰² *Memorials*, p. 482. Also see *WC*, pp. 64-65 for an outline of Constantyn’s riot and execution.

¹⁰³ *Memorials*, pp. 482-483.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 416, 420. The phrasing used in TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers’ Petition*) differs slightly: ‘acrocha sur luy Roial poair’; Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 408, 412.

and set of circumstances. In the *Saddlers' Petition*, readers are only informed that 'admys a mort John Costantyn Cordewaner' before continuing on to argue how they were personally affected by Brembre's tyrannous behaviour in Cheapside.¹⁰⁵ The Cordwainers, however, provided a more thorough description of Constantyn's end, reporting that 'et illeques sodeynement sanz droit ioustice et proces du ley fist coper la teste dun Johan Costantyn Cordewaner du dite Citee'.¹⁰⁶ In their gruesome retelling of Constantyn's death, the Cordwainers argued that their colleague had met his death due to a lack of justice and the proper implementation of law.

Constantyn was not the only individual to be treated indecently and we see across the 1388 Guild Petitions that the 'bones gentz de loundres' suffered because Brembre had accroached the King's royal power.¹⁰⁷ Terms such as 'conspirerent' and 'ymaginerent', especially, evoked that this had been a premeditated plan which only came to fruition as the result of Richard's power being accroached by Brembre.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the *Embroiderers' Petition* highlighted the extent of Brembre's authority as a result of accroaching to himself royal power. The Embroiderers detailed that even those who were 'par la grace de dieu ... si hardy de offerer la proeve pur sa loialtee' were 'comanda a prisoun nemye convut et sanz response issint que ascuns murrissent et mesme la prisone'.¹⁰⁹ Even those offering their loyalty to Brembre were treated with contempt and ruthlessness. He was portrayed as an individual bereft of any obligation to the London polity and who

¹⁰⁵ TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*) (and there he has put to death John Constantyn, Cordwainer). We learn from this petition that following Constantyn's murder, Brembre and his allies 'vient as schopes des diuerses gentz de sell<ers> & eux manasa dauoire <...> en mesme la manere pour quel ascun de eux f<uwy>erent hors de la dite Cite & ne cosoient illeques venir pour doute de perdre lour vies' (they went to the shops of various men of the Saddlers, and threatened them to have <...> in the same manner, because of which some of them fled outside of the said city and would not come there for fear of the losing their lives); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 409, 413.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*) (and there, suddenly, without rightful justice and the process of law, he cut off the head of one John Constantyn, Cordwainer, of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 417, 420.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/94/4664 (*The Drapers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/ 9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 372, 374-375, 377, 380, 389, 397, 393, 399, 410, 413.

¹⁰⁸ 'conspirer (v.n.)', *AND*; 'ymaginer (v.n.)', *AND*.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, SC 8/20/1000 (*The Embroiderers' Petition*) (by the grace of God ... was so bold as to offer the proof for his loyalty); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 426, 429.

had, instead, wrongfully used the King's power. The guildsmen thus forged an image of Brembre as a man far removed from having the accepted principles and behaviours of a mayor of London. He was viewed as having abused his rights and powers as mayor, subverting the traditional power dynamic between mayor and king as a way of enforcing his authority – Brembre was not the steadfast civic leader described in chapter one but, rather, a tyrant; a figure who acted for his own benefit rather than the welfare of those whom he ruled over. Moreover, he subverted the traditional relationship between the King and his subjects – as the 'bones gentz' his subjects were his lieges yet they could not be ruled properly as a result of Brembre's actions.

The guildsmen, therefore, forged a scenario in which by accroaching the King's power, Brembre silenced his opponents, with the implication being that Brembre used the King's powers to serve his own self-interest. The figure of the King and his rights as monarch were prominent features of these petitions. The artisanal guilds, like the Lords Appellant, certainly removed blame from the King for what had occurred in 1380s London, and their petitions almost serve as a piece of advice literature in that the guilds reminded Richard of the traditional relationship that was to be maintained between civic officers and the King. A strong medieval king was to '[c]herish thy folk and hate extorcioun. / Suffre nothing that may be reprevable/ To thyn estat don in thy regioun' (23-25). Whilst Chaucer's *Lak of Steadfastness* was neither pro- nor anti-Richard, what the poem demonstrates was that a king was not to tolerate any behaviour that could be damaging to the realm.¹¹⁰ This message shone through the guild petitions and was made applicable to Brembre's misdemeanours against the King. The content of the 1388 Guild Petitions also mirrored literary works such as Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, in which extended sections of the poem are dedicated to scrutinising the type of ministers the King should surround himself with.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Turner, 'Politics and London Life', p. 15.

¹¹¹ *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, pp. 235-237.

Whilst writing to and advising the King was a characteristic feature of the late medieval literature, the same tactics and rhetoric were used by London's artisanal guilds to address their belief that Brembre had exploited the King's authority. From this we see that the guildsmen engaged with discursive practices to propagate ideas relating to public order, thus '[drawing] upon current language and concepts [used in late fourteenth-century London] to address a current situation of abuse of power'.¹¹² Unlike Chaucer and Gower, however, the guilds did not explicitly state what a medieval king should do to curb such abuse of power from his followers. The main focus, instead, was on the way that the power of the Crown had been abused and, as a result, how this had caused the conventional relationship between rulers and ruled to be subverted. Moreover, we know from the *Westminster Chronicle* that Richard II was close with Brembre, for the chronicle reported that once the charges had been read out against Brembre and the other Appellees, the King came to Brembre's defence. Richard 'protested, he had never known [Brembre] to be a traitor or to be, as far as he himself was aware, guilty or chargeable in terms of the articles'.¹¹³ The guildsmen, like the Lords Appellant, needed to artfully and tacitly negotiate the monarch-subject relationship in order to not offend the King when accusing one of his most trusted and closest allies.¹¹⁴

As has been made clear in the previous three chapters, maintaining customary, hierarchical relationships in late medieval society was a key facet of common profit rhetoric and was one particular idea which ensured social standards and harmony were kept. As freemen of the city of London, the guildsmen were bound by oath to both the Mayor and the King yet, in this instance, we see that their loyalty lay completely with their

¹¹² Strohm, 'The Textual Environment of Chaucer's "Lak of Steadfastness"' in *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 66-68.

¹¹³ *WC*, pp. 310-311.

¹¹⁴ Brembre was 'a representative of royal interests within the city of London' and was thus close with the King. Moreover, by the late 1380s, 'Brembre was plunging headlong into a personal policy of support for the beleaguered king ... That Brembre was a king's man was unexceptional, but the extent of his partisanship and reliance upon royal favour were liabilities in a conflictual climate in which London interests would be best served by a reasonable amount of political latitude'. See Strohm, *The Poet's Tale*, pp. 92-93, 173-174.

king and concern over safeguarding his rights.¹¹⁵ Not only had Brembre undermined the traditional relationship between monarch and civic ruler but, also, the relationship held between civic ruler and London's inhabitants – theirs was not a relationship defined by cooperation and concord but rather betrayal and violence.

The guildsmen, therefore, diplomatically reinforced their allegiance to Richard by repeatedly reminding him, and the lords in Parliament, that Brembre's actions were disadvantageous and unfavourable to the 'auauntage du Roy', requesting the King to provide redress.¹¹⁶ The rhetoric used throughout the petitions thus removed liability from the King for Brembre's misdeeds, yet Richard was reminded of his own duty in honouring and preserving 'le ley de terre' and of 'puniz solonc ceo quil ad deseruy'.¹¹⁷ This meant controlling Brembre, a reminder that was reiterated throughout these petitions and mirrored Chaucer's advice that a king should suffer nothing that was despicable and wicked. The emphasis, nevertheless, was placed on the injustices committed against the King, the Crown, and the governance of London. The language utilised by the guilds reflected these concerns, with the phrases 'encontre la corone' and 'encontre ley et la corone' being repeated frequently to emphasise that Brembre had slighted the institution of the Crown.

Brembre was not considered by the guildsmen as cooperating with the King but rather as acting against his and, as a result, the institution of kingship's interests. The petitioners affirmed that '[i]ssint quil et les autres accrocherent sur eux Roial pair

¹¹⁵ See Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 115 for more on who freemen of London were bound to by oath.

¹¹⁶ TNA, SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinners' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/94/4664 (*The Drapers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*); (advantage of the King); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 368, 370, 372, 375, 377, 380, 382, 386, 389, 393, 397, 399, 402, 405, 410, 414, 417, 421, 437, 442.

¹¹⁷ First phrase: TNA, SC 9/94/4664 (*The Drapers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*); TNA, C 49/10/3 (*The Tailors' Petition*) (law of the land) and (be punished according to that which it has deserved); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 377, 380, 382, 386, 389, 393, 396, 399, 402, 406, 410, 413, 416, 420, 447, 452, 457, 459.

encountre la Corone nostre dite seignour le Roy’, stressing that the crime of accroaching royal power went beyond the King’s physical body – the institution of the Crown was just as much at risk.¹¹⁸ Their commentary on the way in which the institution of kingship was adversely affected by Brembre’s misdeeds is significant and demonstrates an awareness of aspects of medieval political theology. Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s monumental work *The King’s Two Bodies* has shown how the body of the King and the body of the realm were synonymous – a king’s office was thus intrinsically linked with the needs of his subjects.¹¹⁹ In the words of Watts, late medieval kings were the ‘limbs of the body politic’ and anything done against the King was done against the body of people who were subject to him.¹²⁰ The guildsmen certainly engaged with this concept that was put forward by medieval political theorists and demonstrates that they had a nuanced understanding of how urban life could be disturbed if the Crown had been wronged.

The importance placed upon the King’s advantage and the Crown is particularly interesting given the discussion of the Jubilee Book within the 1388 Guild Petitions. As we saw in chapter one, the Mayor was bound by oath to serve the individual profit of the King, which was seen as distinct to the communal good of the London body politic, yet within the 1388 Guild Petitions the very opposite is experienced. Rather than work towards the benefit of the King, Brembre was viewed by London’s artisanal guilds as working against the Crown and the King’s interests. In aligning the crime of accroaching royal power with Brembre’s actions against the City, the guildsmen provided an understanding of Brembre’s mayoralty during which he used royal power in order to rule in a manner that suited his own interests. Moreover, there is a consciousness amongst the guildsmen of what was detrimental to the monarchy.

¹¹⁸ TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/ 21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*) ([i]n that way he and the others accroached to themselves royal power against the crown of our said lord the king); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 382, 386, 389, 393.

¹¹⁹ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). For a more recent work on this see Watts, *Henry VI*. Watts, in particular, has argued that ‘[i]t was through the king’s rule that the community of the realm achieved its definition and, in particular, the satisfaction of its interests’, p. 22.

¹²⁰ Watts, *Henry VI*, pp. 29-30.

The accroachment of royal power, therefore, was a key theme in the 1388 Guild Petitions, which emphasised, from their point of view, how the King's power had been seized from him as a way for Brembre to rule London tyrannically. Brembre had not only damaged the relationship between the Lords Appellant and the King but, also, between the City and the King. Bellamy has shown how the accroachment of royal power was an offence which caused a deterioration in the bond between a king and his magnates.¹²¹ This examination of the 1388 Guild Petitions, instead, demonstrates how London's artisanal community appropriated the language of the Appellants to show that the wider political community of London had been adversely affected as the result of, what the guildsmen considered to be, Brembre's megalomaniac actions. The crime to accroach royal power was no longer reserved for the realm of baronial complaint but, in the 1388 Guild Petitions, became a complaint that would be adapted to civic and guild interests. In recounting the tribulations experienced in 1380s London, the guildsmen argued that it was the abuse of the King's royal power, the disrespect towards the institution of the Crown, and the subversion of socially accepted hierarchies within the London polity that caused the loss of common profit principles in the governance of London.

Political Agency and Adapting Rhetoric: Exposing Brembre as a Bad Mayor

As we have seen in the above section, London's artisanal guilds were able to adapt rhetoric traditionally associated with baronial complaint as a way of expressing their personal grievances against Brembre and the way in which his rule had been detrimental to both the King and civic governance within London. Their ability to manipulate rhetoric to suit themselves is evident. This section continues to examine the guildsmen's criticisms of Brembre's mayoralty, considering in particular Brembre's election at the Guildhall, his conduct during the riots at Cheapside, and the way in which London's artisans suffered collectively following Northampton's fall from power – all of which occurred between his

¹²¹ Bellamy, *The Law of Treason*, p. 14.

initial election in October 1383 and Northampton's exile from London in September 1384 – in addition to how these grievances were expressed in a way that suited an urban setting.

A common feature across these petitions was criticism about the way in which Brembre had orchestrated his mayoral election at the Guildhall in 1383.¹²² As we saw earlier in this thesis, the Guildhall was at the centre of London's administrative structure and civic life – it was a socially significant space within late medieval London, which stood as an economic, social and political epicentre.¹²³ In chapter two, we saw how Brembre responded to those who had disrupted the mayoral election in October 1384, holding the individuals who rose up against him to account and distributing justice within the Mayor's Court as a way of safeguarding his power, in addition to justifying his stand against the artisans who threatened his rule. In the guild petitions, however, Brembre is portrayed as a hypocrite, having committed the very crimes during the election in October 1383 – that he had attempted to eradicate in the election of October 1384 – as a way of securing his position as mayor. As a result of the October 1383 mayoral election, 'the Guildhall and its environs had become a contested space, a staging ground for political actions expressed within – and expressive of – a charged factional situation'.¹²⁴ The way in which the guildsmen reimagined and recaptured this moment in time engaged with the very situation, suggesting an awareness amongst the guildsmen of what the Guildhall symbolically stood for and how this institution's identity had changed as a result of Brembre's conspiratorial ways.

The petitions outlined that 'toutz temps dount nule memoire ne court et par lour chartre des Roys grauntez er confermez qaunt le maire de loundres serra esluz y serra esluz

¹²² From the petitions we learn that the mayoral election referred to the event that took place on 'la ffeste de saint Edward lan du regne nostre seignour le Roy qorest eoptisme'. This was during the Feast of the Translation of St. Edward which took place 13th October 1383. *Handbook of Dates*, p. 35 was consulted to determine the regnal year.

¹²³ Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. I, p. 34.

¹²⁴ Strohm, 'Hochon's Arrow', p. 12.

par la communealte et ffrank gentz du dite Citee'.¹²⁵ The point here was that the format of mayoral elections had been a longstanding practice that followed certain accepted principles. We know, for example, that following an ordinance of 1376 the leaders of guilds, including the artisanal guilds, had a right to be present at the election of the Lord Mayor of London.¹²⁶ According to the guilds, however, Brembre overturned customary procedures and, with the support of his accomplices, had,

crier en diuerses parties du dite Citee et charger chescun homme de la dite Citee sur peyn demprisonement et sur peyne de quanque quils purroient forfaire deuers le Roy que nul serroit si hardy destre al dite elleccioun fors ceux que feurent somouns et ceux que feurent somouns feurent somouns par lour assent.¹²⁷

The petitioners continued, informing readers that Brembre and his allies, including 'foreyns come autres', came in 'graunt noubre les queux feurent armez en la Gyhall de loundres pour f<ai>re cele elleccioun et pour auoir mys au mort toutz autres gentz queux ne feurent pas somouns sils eussent la venuz pour la dite elleccioun'.¹²⁸ This was not the

¹²⁵ TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); (from time immemorial – and granted and confirmed by their charter of kings – {that} when the mayor of London will be elected he will be elected by the commonalty and free men of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 371, 374, 381, 385, 388, 392, 395, 398, 400, 404, 408, 412. This opening caveat is not included in the *Mercers' Petition*. The *Founders' Petition* is interesting in that it gives the additional details that no 'estrangers ne ... vitailers' were to participate in electing the Mayor and perhaps has been added into the petition as a result of rivalry with these two respective groups.

¹²⁶ J.J. Baddeley, *The Guildhall of the City of London Together with a Short Account of its Historic Associations and the Municipal Work Carried On Therein* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1899), p. 115.

¹²⁷ TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); (proclaimed in various parts of the said city and charged each man of the said city – upon the penalty of imprisonment and upon the penalty of all that they could forfeit to the king – that no-one should be so bold as to be at the said election except for those who were summoned, and those who were summoned were summoned by their agreement); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 371, 374, 381, 385, 388, 392, 396, 398, 409, 412-413.

¹²⁸ TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*) (great number, the which were armed in the Guildhall of London in order to make

ritualistic ceremony defined by celebration and procession. Brembre's actions had, like those who took action against him in the 1384 mayoral election, violated a historic civic ceremony that was key to maintaining good governance and, as a result, the principles of the ideology of common profit within the London populace. In being armed, it was clear in the petitions that Brembre's party disrespected city custom and tradition and thus corrupted 'a show of corporate display and civic pride'.¹²⁹

Moreover, the implication in these extracts was that the election was engineered to work in the favour of Brembre and his allies. As the guildsmen revealed in their petitions, Brembre only summoned to the Guildhall those who support his own party. The petitions show the importance of how urban spaces were utilised and the impact that this could have on the way that civic governance was administered – controlling this vital political area was key in ascending to the mayoralty. Across their petitions, the guildsmen maintained that Brembre excluded those he knew would not support his objectives. Whilst elections had the potential to be rambunctious affairs, as stated in chapter two, this particular election was portrayed by the artisanal guilds as being conducted inappropriately. That it was held contrary to tradition and to the peace of the City was described in the *Mercers' Petition*, for example. The Mercers explained that,

where the eleccioun of mairaltee is to be to the fire men of the cite, by gode and paisible auys of the wisest and trewest ... Nichol Brembre wyth his vpberers ... with stronge honde as it is ful knowen and thourgh debate and strengre partye ayeins the pees bifore purueyde was chosen mair in destruccioun of many ryght.¹³⁰

that election and in order to have put to death all other men who were not summoned if they should have come there for the said election); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 371, 374, 381, 385, 388, 392, 396, 398, 409, 412-413.

¹²⁹ Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages*, p. 243.

¹³⁰ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 430.

Whilst during the later fourteenth century those usually summoned to elections were of ‘the better class of people’, there appears to be an element of resentment and bitterness within the guild petitions towards Brembre’s exclusionary practices.¹³¹ Rather than allow those who had the freedom of the City to attend the mayoral election, Brembre defied London custom and took the mayoralty by force, disturbing the ‘pees’ of London and, in turn, the common profit.

The dismay with which the impingement of this right was viewed was especially highlighted by the Mercers’ comment that Brembre had acted ‘ayeins the forsaide fredam and trewe comunes’ when he ‘did crye openlich that no man sholde come to chese her mair but such as were sompned’, who, of course, ‘were of his ordynaunce’.¹³² Their usage of the phrase ‘trewe comunes’ is especially interesting, for the term was laden with political implications dating to the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381.¹³³ It is possible that the Mercers chose to co-opt this term, similar to the rebels of 1381, ‘as a way of creating a sense of communal solidarity’ amongst those who traditionally were involved in civic ceremonies, like mayoral elections.¹³⁴ This certainly seems to be the suggestion if we consider that several of the French petitions outlined that ‘la communealte’ of London were responsible for electing the Mayor – these were people who had a political voice and that worked as a collective.¹³⁵ Moreover, in the *Leathersellers and Whittawyers’ Petition* readers were further informed about the process of a mayoral election, learning that,

¹³¹ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 148-149.

¹³² TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 431.

¹³³ For the use of this phrase by the 1381 rebels see Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p. 59. The writer of the *Anonimalle Chronicle* recorded that ‘es ditz communes avoient entre eux un wache worde en Engleys, “With whom haldes yow?” et le respouns fuist “Wyth Kynge Richarde and wyth the trew communes”’, *Anonimalle Chronicle*, p. 127. (the said commons had amongst themselves a password in English, “With who are you?” and the response was “With King Richard and the true commons”). Translation is my own.

¹³⁴ Firth Green, *Crisis of Truth*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ TNA, SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinners’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/199/9925 (*The <...>steres’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 367, 371, 381, 388, 396, 400, 409, 436.

les bones gentz de sa dite Cite par vertue de lour franchises et chartres a eux graunt<ez> et confermez par nostre dit seignour le Roy et ses tresnobles progenitours q<ue>ux d<iou>x assoille soleient chescun an le iour Seint Edward par commune vois des bons gentz enfranchises en la dite Cite peisiblement sanz destourbances faire vs<...> avoir lour frank elecc<iou>n dun mair.¹³⁶

This passage indicated that a mayor was elected based on the common voice of those present at the election – it was a shared decision by the many. Whilst it was only those who had access to the franchises of the City, thereby restricting who could vote for the Mayor, the way that the Leathersellers and Whittawyers presented the situation is by representing themselves as speaking with one voice that was representative of the good of the community for they would be choosing their political leader that would look after the interests of the City. In doing so, those present at the election ventriloquised the voice of the masses – a popular tool used in this period.¹³⁷ For example, John Gower exploited this in *Vox Clamantis* to add immediacy and candour to his argument. Gower contended that he was ‘not speaking of these things on [his] own part; rather, the voice of the people [had] reported them to [him], and ... complains of their adverse fate at every hand. [He spoke] as the masses [spoke]’.¹³⁸ In taking away their ‘comune vois’, Brembre was dividing rather than uniting them. Moreover, in recounting that this was a common part of the election which occurred each year, the Leathersellers and Whittawyers demonstrated that there was a precedent for this and that at subverting tradition Brembre had taken away the rights of

¹³⁶ TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers’ Petition*) (the good men of the said city, by virtue of their franchises and charters granted to them and confirmed by our said lord the king and his most noble forebears – whom God save – should each year on the day of Saint Edward by the common voice of the good men enfranchised in the said city, peaceably without disturbances, to make <...> have their free election of a mayor); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 446, 452.

¹³⁷ See Anne Middleton, ‘The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II’, *Speculum*, 53 (1989), 94-144 for a discussion on how speaking with a common voice was used by late fourteenth-century poets like Gower and Langland for example. Also see Andrew Galloway ‘The Common Voice in Theory and Practice in Late Fourteenth-Century England’ in *Law, Governance and Justice: New Views on Medieval Constitutionalism* ed. Richard W. Kaepur (Leiden, Boston: Brill 2013), pp. 244-286.

¹³⁸ *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, p. 113.

those involved in this civic ceremony. Whilst we must be careful at taking this detail at face value, what it does show is that in claiming that they spoke as a collective in order to choose the new mayor, the Leathersellers and Whittawyers legitimised their own arguments. As we saw in chapter one, the commonalty of London saw themselves as having a voice and right to participate in urban politics.¹³⁹ In removing the rights of a large group of people who would have participated in this event, Brembre acted against what was a shared privilege for freemen of London.

That Brembre acted for his advantage is particularly evident in the *Cordwainers' Petition* and the *Embroiderers' Petition*, which both embellished what occurred at the October 1383 mayoral election to a greater extent. The *Cordwainers' Petition* and the *Embroiderers' Petition* recounted that after issuing a proclamation outlining that no one should come to the mayoral election unless summoned, Brembre,

la noet ensuiant fist carier a la dite Gyhall graunt quantite darmure oue quele sibien foreins come autres feurent armeez en la dite Gyhall lendemain pour la dite electioun faire et certains abusshementz des gentz armeez feurent illeoques mys. Et quant les bones gentz de la dite Citee la venoient pour la dite electioun faire solonc la franchise et lauciene custume de dite Citee, les auantditz gentz armeez sailleront sur eux oue graunt noise criantz tuwez tuwez leur pursuiantz hydousement.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ In chapter one we saw that Ralph Strode was the representative of London's commonalty, who were active in voicing their concerns regarding urban governance. See p. 64, 92.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*) (the following night, carried to the said Guildhall a great quantity of armour, with which foreigners as well as others were armed in the said Guildhall the day after in order to make the said election, and certain ambushes of armed men were placed there. And when the good men of the said city came there in order to make the said election according to the franchise and the ancient custom of the said city, the aforesaid armed men sprang out upon them with a great noise shouting "Slaughter! Slaughter!", threateningly chasing them). The wording in the *Embroiderers' Petition* (TNA, SC 8/20/1000) differs somewhat but portrays the same meaning: 'la noet deuant la iour del electioun du maire fist carier graunt quantite darmure en la dite Gyhall oue quele sibien foreins come autres feurent armeez en la dite Gyhall lendemain pour la dite electioun faire, et certains embusshementz des gentz armeez feurent mys illeoques encontre sa proclamatioun. Et quant les bones gentz de la dite citee la venoient pour la dite electioun faire solonc le franchise de la dite citee, les auantditz gentz armeez sailleront hors sur les ditz bones gentz oue graunt noyse criantz tuwez tuwez hidousement leur pursuiantz'. Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 417, 421, 425, 428.

Brembre's violent scheme resulted in the 'bones gentz pour paour de mort se fuwyrent et ascondirent en mesons et autres lieues secretz come en terre de guerre'.¹⁴¹ The guildsmen created an image in which London was perceived as a war zone. Moreover, in adding direct speech to their narration, as indicated by the terms 'tuwez tuwez', as well as the simile 'come en terre de guerre', the Cordwainers and Embroiderers gave their story additional dramatic quality, embellishing and reinforcing the horrors which they had experienced at the 1383 mayoral election. The inclusion of the phrase 'cryinge with loude voice sle, sle' in the *Mercers' Petition* worked to the same effect, and was intended to stress the violent actions that overtook the Guildhall election.¹⁴² A key issue raised by the guildsmen was that Brembre's abhorrent actions had caused injury and harm to the wider civic community, specifically 'les bones gentz'. The phrase 'les bones gentz', in particular, was indicative of those who were considered to be good citizens and provided a striking contrast against Brembre's character who, for the guildsmen, represented the very opposite.

Linked to this is the identity that the guildsmen created for themselves across the petitions: they did not act alone but rather as a collective, working collaboratively towards restoring common profit principles within the London populace. Rather than petition individually, the guilds implored those present at the Merciless Parliament as a collective, thereby invoking the rhetoric of community in their pleas.¹⁴³ There was certainly an emphasis placed on communal obligation, especially when 'individual members might assume their particular share of a common responsibility for the injustice, violence, and poverty which distanced humanity from its divine creator'.¹⁴⁴ That the guildsmen felt some form of collective responsibility is most evident in the defense of their own members. We have seen how both the Saddlers and Cordwainers were vituperative in their condemnation

¹⁴¹ TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*) (good men fled for fear of death, and hid in houses and other secret places as in a land of war); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 417, 421, 425, 428.

¹⁴² TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 431.

¹⁴³ For the importance of the concept of community within guilds see Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford: OUP, 202015), pp. 189-228.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

of Brembre for the killing of Constantyn following the events that transpired at Cheapside, yet they were not the only guilds to mention crimes committed against their members by Brembre. The Goldsmiths were the only other guild to name its members and the offences endured by their members. By recounting the imprisonment of both ‘Richard Merdon’ and the anonymous ‘R<...><...>derness’, members of the Goldsmiths Company, this guild revealed the same pattern of bad behaviour from Brembre.¹⁴⁵ The Goldsmiths altered their narrative to report that Brembre had placed them in prison. This section of the petition, however, is damaged and much of the text, as a result, is illegible. However, as has been previously discussed in this chapter, if we take the *Goldsmiths’ Petition* to be the text that the other guild petitions were based on, it is possible to reconstruct the likely content of this particular paragraph in the *Goldsmiths’ Petition*.

Similarly, the Armourers and the Drapers, the anonymous <...>steres guild, in their retelling of what occurred at Cheapside, indicated that ‘pour malice [Brembre] prist certains gentz du dite mestier et les emprisona greuousement’.¹⁴⁶ Indicating that their guild, in particular, had suffered as a result of Brembre’s maliciousness, making this affront to their company personal. The term ‘malice’, moreover, suggests that Brembre’s actions were done with the intention of purposefully harming these guilds and was a conscious decision that would have been taken for his own benefit.¹⁴⁷ Whilst these were comments on the way that their individual guilds had been harmed by the uprising at Cheapside, what it does show is that London’s artisanal guilds tapped into community ideology as a way of justifying their stance against Brembre and understanding how appealing to these notions could fortify their arguments against him. The *Embroiderers’ Petition* also demonstrated an awareness among London’s artisanal guilds

¹⁴⁵ TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 401, 405.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, SC 894/4664 (*The Drapers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*), (for malice, [Brembre] took certain men of the said mystery and grievously imprisoned them); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 377, 379, 389-392-393.

¹⁴⁷ ‘malice (s).’, *AND*.

of how communitarian ideas could be employed to counteract a political opponent.

The Embroiderers outlined that,

[e]t si le fauxine du dit monseignour Nicholl feusse contredit par nous Brouderers ou ascun mistier de la dite citee en general ou si ascun mistier sa dite mistier vorroit contresteere ou eux assembler pour lour necessitee ou profit come toutdys ad estee vsee tantost ils deussent estre empeschez et enditeez qils vorroient leuer encontre la peas.¹⁴⁸

Their complaint against Brembre extended beyond themselves and we see that the Embroiderers recognised that guilds across the City were at Brembre's mercy. The Embroiderers depicted Brembre as a tyrant and, notably, established that he was acting contrary to city custom by not allowing the different guilds in the City to benefit in any way that opposed his own mystery. The extract is imbued with this notion that Brembre was working for his own profit and that of his allies, for the Embroiderers provided a sharp distinction between what they, and other artisans in the City, could do in contrast to those with whom Brembre was allied. Throughout these petitions we see phrases such as 'destruire bonez gentz du dit Citee', 'destruire touz eouerours', 'destruire les loialx liges' and 'destruire ceux que pleignout ore' to emphasise that several individuals across the City had been affected negatively more generally by Brembre's mayoralty yet in the *Founders' Petition* there is a direct reference to the destruction of men belonging to the multiple guilds in London.¹⁴⁹ The Founders asserted that Brembre had conspired and

¹⁴⁸ TNA, SC 8/20/1000 (*The Embroiderers' Petition*) (And if the deceit of the said Sir Nicholas was refused by we embroiderers or any other mystery of the said city in general or if any mystery would oppose his said mystery or assemble themselves for their necessity or profit – as had always been practiced – they were immediately impeached and indicted that they would rise up against the peace); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 425, 428.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, SC 8/21/1003 (*The Pinners' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*), (destroy the good men of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 367, 369, 371, 374, 381, 385, 436, 441; TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*), (destroy all workers); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 388, 392; TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999

imagined to ‘destruire bonez gent de diuerses mistiers du dite Cite<e>’, adding specificity to their message that Brembre had schemed to have as many guildsmen who opposed him destroyed.¹⁵⁰ The term ‘diuerses’ indicated that, yet again, they were not alone in suffering under Brembre and there had been various others belonging to guilds in the city of London that had been conspired against.¹⁵¹ Standing together as a united body and presenting themselves as a community helped to justify their arguments and show that the shared good amongst the guilds had been disadvantaged so that Brembre could maintain his authority, power and status.

Moreover, the Embroiderers asserted that as a result of Brembre’s misconduct in London, ‘plusours bones gentz de la dite cite ore sont enditeez et ouertement desclaundrez et tenuz disloialx et tretours a nostre dit seignour le Roy’.¹⁵² Chapter three outlined how important maintaining one’s reputation was in late medieval England and we see here a concern for the way that they were perceived.¹⁵³ The fact that their repute and character had been openly smeared by Brembre could harm their business and status in society. The Mercers also highlighted this point, describing how they had ‘ben openlich disclaundred, holden vntrewe and traitours to ouwre kyng’.¹⁵⁴ We saw in chapter three how important it was to be of good repute and the misfortunes that could arise from having a tarnished reputation. Moreover, this was not only an act against those ‘togydre of the mercerye’ but ‘othere craftes’ also.¹⁵⁵ In identifying with other ‘craftes’ in the City, the Mercers

(*The Saddlers’ Petition*); (TNA, 8/21/1000 (*The Embroiderers’ Petition*), (destroy all loyal lieges); Ellis, *Verba Vana*, Vol. II, pp. 401, 404, 409, 412, 424, 427; TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers’ Petition*), (destroy who complain now); Ellis, ‘*Verba Vana*’, Vol. II, pp. 390, 393, 410, 414.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, SC 8/21/1002 (*The Founders’ Petition*), (destroy the good men of various myseries of the said city); Ellis, ‘*Verba Vana*’, Vol. II, pp. 371, 374, 382, 386.

¹⁵¹ ‘divers (1) (adj.)’, *AND*.

¹⁵² TNA, SC 8/21/1000 (*The Embroiderers’ Petition*), (and many good men of the said city are now indicted and openly slandered and held disloyal and triators to our said lord the king); Ellis, ‘*Verba Vana*’, Vol. II, pp. 426, 428-429.

¹⁵³ See chapter 2, esp. pp. 186-187.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘*Verba Vana*’, Vol. II, p. 431. The *Mercers’ Petition* is the only other petition in this group of records to make this complaint. This is possible because the *Mercers’ Petition* was potentially a loosely translated copy of the *Embroiderers’ Petition*, see Ellis, ‘*Verba Vana*’, Vol. I, pp. 127-132.

¹⁵⁵ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘*Verba Vana*’, Vol. II, p. 431.

legitimised their arguments by claiming that they had collectively been discredited – theirs was a shared grievance and it was the wider community whose relationship with their monarch had been tarnished. Furthermore, we yet again are given an insight into how Brembre disrupted the relationship between ruler and ruled in both the *Embroiderers' Petition* and *Mercers' Petition*, thus overturning the natural order within the medieval polity. Under Brembre, the guildsmen were made to seem traitors and therefore threatened the King and his rule. Brembre thus caused distress within the London community rather than working towards fostering cohesiveness and an environment in which the common good could thrive.

Concern over the manner in which mayoral elections had been held also extended onto Exton's election in 1386. This particular grievance is isolated to the *Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers and Bladesmiths' Petition*, which accused Exton of carrying out a fraudulent election. These minor guilds stated that,

Nicholas' ore maire de loundres soit discharge de son Office pour ce quil fut forsuige en la Gyldhalle de loundres de tous maneres de Offices pour tous iours <et> pour ce quil ne fut esleu comme la loy de la franchise de la cite Citee voet sinoun par le dit monseignour Nichol et par certaines gens de lour assent.¹⁵⁶

In the same way that Brembre was unscrupulously and unlawfully elected, so too was Exton. Furthermore, they considered Exton to be another unprincipled and immoral character who abused the office of mayor, for he 'veut sustenir lez <fau>xet<ees et> extor<cions> qui furent commences par le dit monseignour Nichol et les autres de son

¹⁵⁶ TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*), (Nicholas Exton now mayor of London be discharged from his office because he was forsworn in the Guildhall of London from all manner of officers for all days, and because he was not elected as the law of the franchise of the said city wills but by the said Sir Nicholas and by certain men of their party); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 437, 442.

affinite'.¹⁵⁷ The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers and Bladesmiths used such language to show that misgovernance would continue if those associated with Brembre were left in positions of power. The term 'affinite', especially denoted this sense of a party system at play, whereby there was a division within the City between those who agreed with Brembre and those who were opposed to him. A similar criticism was also extended to William Cheyne, the Recorder, and Hugh Fastolf, sheriff of London, for being Brembre's 'accomplices'.¹⁵⁸ Such an association made them appear to be complicit in the destruction of good and lawful governance. From this point of view, the power dynamic within the City had shifted under their leadership, resulting in a fractured and dysfunctional metropolis in which urban politics and civic conduct fell short of the high standard expected by the populace.

Brembre's immoral and corrupt conduct was the very antithesis of 'a show of corporate display and civic pride', which besmirched and tainted what the London Guildhall represented.¹⁵⁹ This conduct surrounding his election shows that even before officially becoming mayor, Brembre had already acted contrary to how a mayor of London was supposed to act. As outlined in chapter one, mayors of London were expected to follow certain codes of behaviour in which the common good and the prosperity – moral, political, social and economic – of the London populace were to be upheld above all else. In his efforts to become mayor, however, Brembre had, paradoxically, become the type of public menace that mayors of London were expected to root out and punish. Furthermore, the 1388 Guild Petitions demonstrated that certain codes of behaviour were expected to be adhered to in areas such as the Guildhall, a space defined by honour and civic ritual, as well as by morality and appropriate political conduct. Brembre's cunning and violent coup to gain the mayoralty of London was not a celebration of civic virtues but, instead, inverted the goals of an urban community.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid (would sustain the falsenesses and extortions which were begun by the said Sir Nicholas and the others of his accord); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 439, 444.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid (accomplices); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 439, 445.

¹⁵⁹ Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages*, p. 243.

It is particularly significant that the guildsmen stressed that Brembre's misrule and corrupt practices had been longstanding. The Mercers, in particular, highlighted this, detailing at the start of their petition that 'many wronges subtiles and also open oppressions ydo to hem by longe tyme bifore passed'.¹⁶⁰ Several of the French petitions raised the same concern, addressing that certain misdoings had persisted within the City through their explanation of how Brembre,

oue lassent des autres auant ditz de sa Couygne ... fisrent grauntz {assembles en diuerses lieux de la dite cite ... et la conspirerent entre eux coment ils purroient meyntener lour fauxime quilz vssent {adeuant comencez pour destruire ceux que pleignent ore et tous autres queux feurent enditez par} lour ymaginacioun et conspiracie.¹⁶¹

These were actions that had been planned with the intention of causing destruction to their opponents. The grievance continued and the guilds stated that,

ffe<ust> ordeignez par lour commune assent de prendre {de les auantditz gentz queux feurent de lour assent a ceste fauxime meyntener graunt somes} dargent la quel torcenouse prise ad estee continue du temps que John' Norhampton {feust oustee de son office et le dite seignour Nichol Brembre eslutz par le manere il est dist auant tanque en cea & unqore} est continue.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, p. 430.

¹⁶¹ TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); (with the agreement of the aforesaid others of his covin ... made large assemblies in various parts of the said city ... and there conspired amongst themselves how they could maintain their falseness that they had before begun in order to destroy those who complain now and all the others who were indicted by their false scheming and conspiracy); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 382, 386, 389, 393, 410, 414.

¹⁶² TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*), (it was ordained by their common agreement, to maintain this falseness, to take from the aforesaid men who were of their party great sums of money, the which wrongful taking has been continued from the time that John Northampton was removed from his

Moreover, in the way that the guildsmen conceived the past and the present, they implicitly distinguished between a time during which the City was ruled honourably and a time in which London's virtuous status as the capital city had deteriorated. Their nostalgia and feeling of the past shaped the way in which they conceived their current reality and allowed them to form a distinction between what they believed to be good governance and what they conceived of as misgovernance. In revisiting memories of their past, the guildsmen formed 'a negative evaluation of the present situation'.¹⁶³ In providing this contrast, the guildsmen subliminally showed whose principles they believed allowed for urban governance to prosper.

Furthermore, the Mercers asserted that 'hiderward hath the mairaltee ben holden as it were of conquest or maistrye', suggesting that, in the eyes of the Mercers, Brembre's ascension to the mayoralty was viewed as the defeat of an adversary which was subjugated.¹⁶⁴ This aspect of Brembre's mayoralty was also noted by the Cordwainers and Embroiderers, who similarly outlined that 'la mairaltee du dite Citee depuis le dit temps tanque encea ad estee tenuz par conquest et maistrie'.¹⁶⁵ The message here was that Brembre held his mayoralty through force, rather than peaceful and harmonious cooperation with those for whom he was responsible. In subverting traditional relationships within the London polity Brembre created a city in which hostility, rather than unity, thrived.

As an officer of the City, Brembre was obliged to serve the common good, yet he failed to do so. This is particularly pronounced in the way that, across these petitions, he was presented as working against communitarian values and the good of the communities which made up the urban body. This was most marked in the *Mercers' Petition*, which

office and the said Sir Nicholas Brembre was elected by the manner that is said before until now, and still is continued); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 402, 406, 410, 414, 449, 453

¹⁶³ M. Chase and C. Shaw, 'The Dimensions of Nostalgia' in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* ed. M. Chase and C. Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 1-17.

¹⁶⁴ 'conquest(e) (n)', *MED*; 'maistrie (n)', *MED*.

¹⁶⁵ TNA, SC 8/20/1000 (*The Embroiderers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*), (the mayoralty of the said city, since the said times until now, has been held through conquest and force); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 417, 421, 425, 428.

described Brembre as being ‘a ragged subie<ct> or stok inward’.¹⁶⁶ Rather than employ the conventional analogy of the human body to express the relationship between parts of society, the Mercers turned to nature to illuminate the importance of preserving the natural order. Despite not imagining the City ‘as a macrocosm of the human form’, the Mercers retained the customary understanding of what a unified community of people should and could be like.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, Brembre was identified as ‘the forsaid Brere or brembre’, representing Brembre as a ‘mutant’ part of the tree. Whilst this may be a play on his name, it was a pointed and conscious effort by the Mercers to highlight Brembre’s notoriety in their choice of language.¹⁶⁸ The Mercers eschewed body politic rhetoric to stress that Brembre had despoiled and besmirched the polity through his misrule. They continued, expounding that ‘wyth yowre ryghtful lordship [Richard II] ygraunted for moost pryncipal remedye’.¹⁶⁹ The focus here was on reasserting traditional hierarchies and ascribed roles – they looked towards the King for redress and for reinstating good governance within the City. It was the King who accessed ‘goddes lawe’ and could, with ‘al resoun’, ensure that ‘no domesman stonde togidre juge and partye’ and that ‘wronges sholle more openlich be knowe and trothed or apere’.¹⁷⁰

From time immemorial: Remembering the Jubilee Book

The guildsmen had a clear awareness of what good civic conduct, mayoral responsibility, and governance looked like. Moreover, from my discussion of the 1383 mayoral election, it was made clear that the concept of ‘time immemorial’ played an important part in the petitions, and the guildsmen emphasised that Brembre had defied

¹⁶⁶ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 433.

¹⁶⁷ Lilley, *Cosmos and the City*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ Scase has shown that the *Mercers’ Petition* is not the first document from this period to make this pun on Brembre’s name and has shown that in the articles of appeal within *Knighton’s Chronicle*, Brembre is referred to as ‘Nichol Brembul(le), which [echoed] the usage [of this word] in a letter sent by the Appeallants to the citizens of London late in the previous year, where he is ‘Nichol Brambulle’. Scase, *Literature and Complaint*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁹ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 433.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

longstanding traditions and customs that were a vital part of London's civic history.

The petitions themselves were driven by the guilds' experience and memory of what civic life and governance was like as from the point that Brembre became mayor in 1383. The use of memory within the petitions is particularly prominent in the guilds' discussions of documents pertaining to the way in which guild administration and rights were managed, in addition to London governance more generally. This includes an awareness of the importance of charters given to each of the individual guilds, the significance of the 1382 statute issued by Northampton which regulated the way that victuallers could take office in the City, and the importance placed upon the Jubilee Book as a key text detailing how London's civic officers should rule. The Jubilee Book has been discussed at length in chapter one, yet what this final section does is examine the guilds' discussion of this text to examine how the perceived malpractices of Brembre influenced and shaped the way in which the artisanal guilds remembered, responded, and restructured their immediate past. This final section will also show how the guilds understood the ideology of common profit to be intrinsically linked with the nature and aims of the Jubilee Book.

As well as the *Mercers' Petition* – which we saw in chapter one regarded the Jubilee Book as a text that benefitted civic governance – there are seven other petitions which discussed this text.¹⁷¹ The perspective offered on the Jubilee Book by the guildsmen is significant and completely contrasted against the views given about the text that were explored at the start of chapter one. Barron, especially, has noted that the 1388 Guild Petitions are important when discussing the fate and nature of the Jubilee Book, yet her mention of these records was brief, focusing primarily on the fact that the 1388 Guild Petitions are where we find the last mention of the Jubilee Book.¹⁷² This study, like Barron's, recognises that the petitions are vital for understanding that the Jubilee Book was

¹⁷¹ The eight petitions which mentioned the Jubilee Book in their petitions include: TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers and Bladesmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*).

¹⁷² Barron, 'The burning of the Jubilee Book'.

the production of the labours of civic figures who sought true and profitable governance but focuses more, instead, on what the petitions reveal about how the Jubilee Book's content and nature could be used as a way of conceptualising the political arena which London's artisanal guilds faced in the late 1380s.

The 1388 Guild Petitions are excellent examples of how a particular community identity and context had the potential to influence the ideology employed to describe a set of circumstances, in this case the burning of the Jubilee Book. Whilst these petitions were created less than a year after the burning of the Jubilee Book, we see that the guilds had not forgotten about this contentious text and used London's turbulent past to their advantage. As has been shown for early modern England, '[t]he way in which history was perceived by different social groups and communities could vary greatly, of course ... no less than today, people drew upon competing and often contradictory versions of the past to inform their actions and justify their opinions'.¹⁷³ The same phenomenon can be viewed in the 1388 Guild Petitions, in which the guildsmen used the Jubilee Book's contentious past to their advantage.

Scholars working in the field of memory studies have shown how memory had the potential to reconfigure itself as the result of present circumstances.¹⁷⁴ Isabel Karreman, extending the work of Maurice Halbwachs, for example, posited that events 'always start in the present, and so inevitably at the time when the memory is recalled, there will be shifting, distortion, revaluation, reshaping'.¹⁷⁵ We see then that context was vital in understanding how a memory was defined and expressed from its inception, as well as the

¹⁷³ Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 214.

¹⁷⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* trans and ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Isabel Karreman, *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; Adam Fox, 'Memory and the Authority of Writing' in *The Experience of Authority*, pp. 89-116; Alexandra Walsham, 'History, Memory, and the English Reformation', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (2012), 899-938; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008); Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013); Margaret McGlynn, 'Memory, Orality, and Life Records: Proofs of Age in Tudor England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2009), 679-697; George Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Daniel Woolf, 'Senses of the Past in Tudor Britain' in *A Companion to Tudor Britain* ed. Robert Tittler and Norman Jones (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2004), pp. 407-429.

¹⁷⁵ Karreman, *Drama of Memory*, p. 8.

fact that the past was ‘a matrix to which the present is crucially connected’.¹⁷⁶ The guildsmen’s interpretation of the burning of the Jubilee Book also gives those studying these records an insight into the guildsmen’s consciousness about the importance of documentary culture and why it was important to preserve the City’s history.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the guildsmen’s recollection of the Jubilee Book and its use of common profit rhetoric can be conceived of as a social memory. Social memories have been characterised by Andy Wood as being ‘political’, something which ‘[formed] a contested terrain between states and subordinates, ruler and ruled, elite and

popular, or between ethnic and religious groups, in which opposing forces [fought] out battles over the meaning of the past’.¹⁷⁸ This understanding of social memory can be applied to how London’s artisanal guilds used the memory of the Jubilee Book’s destruction by Exton and his allies, including Brembre, as a way of challenging the past and, in turn, highlighting their opponent’s style of governance.

Across the petitions, the guildsmen agreed that ‘vn liure appelle le <Jubilee> feust an la chaumbre la Gyhall de la dite cite en qu<e>l <plu>sours {et} pour la griendre partie des tous les bones articles compiles par <lon>g<e> et aun<ci>ene <e>xperience tochant la bone gouvernaille de mesme la cite’.¹⁷⁹ Similar to its French counterparts, the Mercers agreed in their petition that ‘bifore tyme the moost profitable poyntes of trewe gouernaunce of the Citee compiled togidre bi longe labour of discrete and wyse men’.¹⁸⁰ Despite differences in wording across the French petitions and evident linguistic

¹⁷⁶ George Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 39.

¹⁷⁷ On the consciousness of documentary culture within medieval society see Anthony Musson, *Medieval Law in Context: The Growth of Legal Consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants’ Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹⁷⁸ Wood, *Memory of the People*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷⁹ TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/9882 (*The Goldsmiths’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers and Bladesmiths’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers’ Petition*) (a book called the Jubilee was in the chamber of the Guildhall of the said city, in which {was} many – and for the greater part of all – the good articles compiled by long and ancient experience, touching the good governance of the same city); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 383, 387, 390, 393, 403, 406-407, 411, 414, 419, 422, 438, 444, 450, 455.

¹⁸⁰ TNA, SC 8/20/997 (*The Mercers’ Petition*); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, p. 432.

differences with the *Mercers' Petition*, the guildsmen's varying description of the text's compilation suggests that the guildsmen had an awareness that, not only was the work that went into creating the Jubilee Book a long process over time, but that it also drew upon previous customs and knowledge of civic constitutions. Of course, as demonstrated in chapter one, the Jubilee Book had indeed drawn on earlier material relating to the history and customs of the city of London.¹⁸¹ The intention behind this statement was to show a sense of continuity in tradition, in addition to preserving and gaining an accurate knowledge of what benefitted London and the City's inhabitants.

These communities presented the Jubilee Book as an authoritative text which had been created with the intention of safeguarding the City's interests and information that was important for those ruling London. The guildsmen gave particular attention to the duties of civic officers in relation to the Jubilee Book, stating that 'le dit Nicholl maire monseigneur Nicholl touz les Audermans et bones comuners du dite Citee feurent iurrez de les tenir et sustenir as touz iours'.¹⁸² Variations of this phrase recurred throughout the petitions that discussed the Jubilee Book; the *Cordwainers' Petition* and the *Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition* specifically stated that the reasons for upholding their oaths was for the 'honour de dieu et profit de commune people'.¹⁸³ Parallel to the content of the Jubilee Book, the petitions emphasised the importance of civic officers' duty of care to the common people who were meant to benefit from right and proper governance. Their awareness of what the Jubilee Book stood for was thus permeated by common profit ideals and had overarching Christian undertones. As

¹⁸¹ See chapter one, pp. 56-57.

¹⁸² We see in TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*) that William Cheyne, the Recorder, is also listed as a civic figure who should respect the oath that he took on entering office. He is also mentioned, although not by name, in TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*) and TNA SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters' Petition*). Moreover, *The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition* is the petition in this group which discusses the Jubilee Book that deviates the most from the original phrasing: 'les mair Recordour Aldermannes et les bons comunes de <meis> me la Cit<e> <e>stoient iurrez et <sole>ient estre du temps en temps pour les ex<...> garder'; Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 383, 439, 450.

¹⁸³ TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths' Petition*) (the said mayor Nicholas, Sir Nicholas, all the aldermen, and the good commoners of the said city were sworn to hold and to uphold them, for all days, to the honour of God and profit of the common people); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 419, 422-423, 439, 444.

examined in chapter one, the Jubilee Book stated that civic officers were not to act for their own singular profit but were to work towards and protect the common profit of the City's inhabitants. As a text containing reforms of governance relating to the City, it was part of a broader system for protecting the common folk, implying that the destruction of the Jubilee Book – and as a result the good articles pertaining to London civic governance – was an attack on the peoples' communal good. This understanding of the Jubilee Book's influence on civic governance establishes how common profit and the urban prosperity of the City's people were conceived of, by the guildsmen, as being naturally intertwined.

From the petitions, readers were also informed as to who was responsible for the burning of the Jubilee Book. The Cordwainers, Cutlers, Bowyers, Spurriers, Fletchers, Bladesmiths, Leathersellers and Whittawyers made it abundantly clear that Exton and his accomplices – undoubtedly including Brembre – were responsible for eradicating the Jubilee Book from civic life. Key to these petitions was the fact that Exton and his allies had not acted alone. The Cordwainers elaborated further on these circumstances than did the Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers, Bladesmiths, Leathersellers and Whittawyers, explaining that 'le dit Nicholl Exton' et ses accomplices outt ars sanz consent de la bone commune du dite Citee a graunt destructioun et anientissement des plusours bones liberteez franchises et custumes de mesme la citee'.¹⁸⁴ This statement reveals that Exton and his allies acted without the consent of the wider community, whose role in civic life was important. Acting without the consent of these individuals also, indirectly, implies that Exton and his colleagues acted for their own self-interest. Particularly revealing is the damage caused to the City and urban governance by civic leaders. The description given

¹⁸⁴ TNA, SC 8/20/998 (*The Cordwainers' Petition*) (said Nicholas Exton and his accomplices have burnt, without the consent of the good commons of the said city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 419, 422-423. This same explanation is shorter in the TNA, SC 8/21/1006 (*The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers and Bladesmiths' Petition*) and TNA, SC 8/21/1001B (*The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition*). *The Cutlers, Bowyers, Fletchers, Spurriers and Bladesmiths' Petition* only included that 'le dit Nicholas Exton & ses {complices ars sanz} la consent de la bonne commune de la dite Citee', whereas in *The Leathersellers and Whittawyers' Petition* we are only informed that Nicholas Exton acted with some accomplices. (the said Nicholas Exton and his accomplices have burnt, without the consent of the good commons of the said city, to the great destruction and annulment of many good liberties, franchises and customs of the same city); Ellis, 'Verba Vana', Vol. II, pp. 438-439, 444, 450, 455.

by the Cordwainers is also reflective of a fractured society, one characterised by disunity and coercion rather than collaboration and harmonious conduct. In destroying the Jubilee Book, we are faced with a scenario in which figures at the apex of civic power disrupted communitarian values, caused detriment to the benefit of London citizens who had access to the liberties and franchises of the City, and disregarded longstanding civic customs.

Several of these petitions also provide an interesting comment on how a particular, well known term could be adapted to suit a different viewpoint in determining who caused the destruction of the Jubilee Book. Rather than naming individuals, these guilds articulated that ‘ceste liuere puy la ffeste de pasque darrein passez par couygne et ordinance d<a>scuns en temps {du mair qorest est} ars a graunt damage de la gouernance du dite Citee entemps a venir’.¹⁸⁵ Whilst the Jubilee Book was burnt during Exton’s mayoralty, the guildsmen did not target a specific individual when determining who caused the destruction of this text. Instead, they used the term ‘covin’. This term has recurred multiple times throughout this thesis, always carrying malicious and negative connotations within the contexts it has been used and continued to do so here. In chapters two and three we saw its use by Brembre to warn and vilify groups who worked in secret, yet its usage has been extended on to those working at the heart of civic governance, portraying them as conspiring in secret as a means of adversely affecting civic governance. The link between a ‘couygne’ and the detrimental, long-term effects this fraudulent group had on civic governance was firmly established by the Painters, Armourers and Goldsmiths. As a result of secret machinations designed to eliminate the Jubilee Book, good governance suffered and, in turn, any efforts made to move towards the common good were exhausted.

¹⁸⁵ TNA, SC 8/21/1004 (*The Painters’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/21/1005 (*The Armourers’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/198/8992 (*The Goldsmiths’ Petition*); TNA, SC 8/20/999 (*The Saddlers’ Petition*); (The same book, after the feast of Easter last passed, by covin and ordinance of some, in the time of the present mayor, is burnt to the great damage of the governance of the city in times to come); Ellis, ‘Verba Vana’, Vol. II, pp. 383-384, 387, 390-391, 394, 403, 406-407, 411, 415.

Here the Jubilee Book held significant meaning for the artisanal guilds insofar as they used it to engage with a wider political discussion regarding who ruled London, their place within the City and the liberties and franchises of Londoners. They reimagined the history of the Jubilee Book to create an image of London that was plagued by Brembre's and his co-conspirators' misdoings. Their discussion of the Jubilee Book is significant given the image they fashioned for Brembre. London's mayor may have been an individual 'at the pinnacle of civic governance', yet Brembre, in the eyes of the guildsmen, failed to adhere to urban protocols and the expectations that came with his office.¹⁸⁶ In contrast to the ideal figure of the Mayor crafted in the Jubilee Book, Brembre was a mayor who did not act for the welfare of the 'comune people'. It is important to note that the representation of the Jubilee Book offered by the guildsmen would not have been possible without prior knowledge of the text and its content.

Whilst it is not clear in the petitions how the guildsmen gained knowledge of the text, chapter one argued that the fact that the Jubilee Book was written in English was significant, for one of the aims of the text was to make ideas about what constituted good civic governance accessible to a broader group of people. It is possible that this is the reason why these groups knew of the material included in the Jubilee Book. What is clear, nevertheless, is that whatever information they had of the Jubilee Book, the petitioners continued to link the text to the ideology of common profit – after all, the text had been created as a way of reforming the City in the name of the common good. Moreover, although social memory of the Jubilee Book was contested, the memory provided by the artisanal guilds shows the importance of linking the text to common profit and the way that this discourse was continuously associated with the principles laid out in this contentious manuscript. In the 1388 Guild Petitions, we witness a conscious reconstruction of a past event which appears to have been deeply ingrained within the memory of London's artisanal guilds as a means of justifying criticisms of Brembre's and his accomplices' style

¹⁸⁶ Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 147.

of governance.¹⁸⁷ Their inclusion of the burning of the Jubilee Book shows how history, time and experience were interrelated and could influence, as well as legitimise, a particular viewpoint.¹⁸⁸ Through their representation and memory of the Jubilee Book, the guildsmen transformed their petitions into material objects that preserved their version of ‘memory, truth, and virtue’.¹⁸⁹

Conclusion

The guild petitions reflected not only the events of 1388 but, also, exposed the social, political and intellectual context in which the discourse of common profit could be situated. The petitions were evidence of an impressive verbal performance by London’s artisanal guilds, in which they used language associated with common profit ideals to their advantage. They turned and organised their experiences into a verbal exposition which created an image of Brengre as the perfect scapegoat for whom the turbulence and disorder in London could be blamed on.¹⁹⁰ In the same way that Gower’s *Vox Clamantis*, Chaucer’s *Lak of Steadfastnesse*, and Favent’s *Historia Mirabilis Parliamenti* explored the turbulence and chaotic nature of London’s political life, the content of the 1388 Guild Petitions were rooted in the streets of London.

The ideas and models used to address civic governance and life in the 1388 Guild Petitions supports Hanawalt’s claim that ‘emotive language’ in records relating to civic ceremony and politics in London ‘signalled the betrayal of the common good’ by authority figures and city officials.¹⁹¹ The petitions offer an explanation as to why when ‘civic values [were violated] London’s citizens strove to defend’ them.¹⁹² Although their petitions did not have the desired effect in parliament, the guildsmen ensured that their viewpoints and voices were heard.

¹⁸⁷ Musson, *Medieval Law in Context*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁸ Karremann, *The Drama of Memory*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Matthews, *Writing to the King*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹¹ Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility*, p. 3.

¹⁹² Ibid.

The condemnation of the Appellees started off as the mission of the Lords Appellant, yet the guildsmen made their vendetta against Brembre their own. Their experiences of London and urban life were at the core of their petitions. Their voices were not silenced by ‘the sovereign voice’ of the Lords Appellant whose voices Turner has argued ‘[vied] for narrative space’ at times in the petitions.¹⁹³ The inclusion of key civic officers, like Exton, Cheyne, Fastolf, in addition to important civic spaces and civic records shows what the guildsmen felt were important for them to mention in order to show how urban life and the common good had been disrupted during the 1380s.

Themes pertinent to medieval political theory were integrated throughout the petitions and it is clear that the guildsmen had a nuanced understanding of how civic governance was intrinsically linked to the notion of common profit. Conserving the good of the whole was reinforced and alluded to in every item mentioned, even if it was used to couch their own self-interest. Public life and civic authorities were portrayed and challenged in the 1388 Guild Petitions. The artisans had been ousted from power as ruling oligarchs in the City, particularly the wealthier and more politically influential guilds such as the Mercers, Goldsmiths and Drapers. Justifying their position from the angle of common profit would assist them in regaining what they had lost. The 1388 Guild Petitions, therefore, are deserving of a more prominent place amongst civic records that contribute to our understanding of preserving peace, affluence, and the common profit of late medieval London. Benson celebrated London city records for providing an excellent insight into ‘the value of community and ... the common good and the welfare of the people as a whole’.¹⁹⁴ It is about time that the guild petitions are included in this grouping.

¹⁹³ Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁴ Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, pp. 211-212.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the concept of common profit held a central place in the political culture of late fourteenth-century London. One of the clearest conclusions emerging from this work is the way in which this discourse could be enacted, as well as adapted, to encourage obedience and to legitimate authority by different parties vying for civic authority. Lindenbaum has characterised London political debate in this period as ‘crude’ and a contributing factor to ‘the climate of suspicion regarding documentary culture’.¹ This thesis has shown that this was not always the case. Whilst the burning of the Jubilee Book clearly shows that feelings about documentary culture ran high, we have seen that documentary culture could also be used as a strategic tool, which persuaded audiences that those in power were working towards the maintenance of the common good.

The link between language, discourse and political action is vital in understanding the disputes that characterised 1380s London and this study has highlighted how political vocabularies and ideologies shaped urban administrative texts and the tactics of those wishing to remain in power. Moreover, common profit rhetoric could be used by those who had been undermined by the political regime to reassert their voices and challenge their political opponents. This has been particularly important in chapter four, in which my examination of the 1388 Guild Petitions has shown how less prominent guilds engaged with common profit ideology to confront and vilify Brembre. Whilst more influential guilds, like the Goldsmiths, were staunch Northampton supporters and used their guilds for political purposes, this thesis has shown that a wider array of communities engaged with the political climate and had a conscious awareness of the influence that common profit rhetoric had on political debate. The texts examined in this thesis emerged from London’s political context *c.* 1376 – *c.* 1391 and have shown that notions of good governance could be heavily drawn upon as a way of arguing what was, and was not, beneficial to the body politic. A study of the Jubilee Book, the Plea and Memoranda Rolls, proclamations within

¹ Lindenbaum, ‘London texts and literate practices’, p. 288.

Letter Book H, and the 1388 Guild Petitions has demonstrated that, like the literary works of Chaucer, Gower and Langland, administrative texts produced in London were part of this wider trend of highly politicised writing that emerged during the 1380s due to political strife. London's administrative texts thus functioned in a similar way to literary works, painting a portrait of the City as a place rife with corruption yet, simultaneously, as a place where maintaining good governance was also important.

The prominent position that the ideology of common profit had in influencing these texts shows the malleability of this concept and the way it could be manipulated depending on purpose, circumstances and identity. In doing so, this thesis has engaged with and supported work carried out by urban historians – Hawes, Dumolyn, Haemers, Davis, and Harry, who have explored administrative texts across a range of European contexts – and has shown how ideas of medieval political theory were inherent in urban writing.² The evidence offered in this thesis shows that Thrupp's contention that Londoners in the 1380s had 'no clear body of political theory' cannot be sustained. Notions of the body politic were used to emphasise the importance of hierarchy within London society and how crucial it was that each member of the London populace played their part – ranging from the Mayor himself to the 'comune people' – if the common profit and welfare of the City and its inhabitants was to thrive.

By taking into account 'the rich textual cultures of the city of London' and its 'innovative civic culture', this examination has added to our awareness of how community ideals could be shaped and moulded in late medieval English administrative records to suit political purposes.³ Whilst sources like the Letter Books and Plea and Memoranda Rolls have been utilised to a great extent by scholars such as Barron to show the day-to-day business of London governance, this thesis has highlighted that a study of the language

² Hawes, 'The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland'; Hawes, 'Community and Public Authority in Later Fifteenth-Century Scotland'; Dumolyn, 'Urban Ideologies in Later Medieval Flanders'; Haemers, *For the Common Good*; Davis, 'Common good and common profit'; Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*.

³ Sarah Rees Jones, 'Civic Literacy in Later Medieval England' in *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I* ed. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 27 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2014), p. 222.

employed in these texts can tell us more about the motivations, intentions and anxieties of those who ruled London. Each text analysed in this thesis emerged from significant political crises in which civic leadership and authority came under scrutiny. In my analysis of the Jubilee Book, for example, we have seen how the language and ideas that permeated the text were used to empower those in civic governance and to promote civic reform. The context of the Jubilee Book adhered to common profit principles and thus was designed to serve public interests.

This thesis has also highlighted that the phrase common profit did not always have to be included in the text for it to be clear that ideas pertaining to the body politic, governance and the communal good were central concerns of those ruling. In doing so, the approach of this thesis has moved away from work carried out by Ormrod and Davis, whose studies focused primarily on instances when the term common profit was utilised within texts, both parliamentary and urban. Whilst the term has arisen within certain material examined here, this has allowed us to widen the range of ideas and vocabulary related to this concept. Terms like ‘covin’, ‘congregation’, and ‘conventicle’ have appeared throughout this thesis to denote the kind of behaviour and actions that were considered detrimental to good governance and the well-being of the City, as well as its inhabitants more generally. By making use of various methodologies, particularly Critical Discourse Analysis and socioliterary practices, this thesis has engaged further with language analysis and what this can tell us about social practices in late fourteenth-century London.

In particular, this thesis has addressed how language was reflective of changing political outlooks, especially towards how the common good could be achieved through implementing good governance. Moreover, a study of the language used to express principles of common profit has shown how this discourse was central in defining medieval London – the City was both a place where values of good governance dominated civic thought and culture yet which, simultaneously, was also a place where immorality

and corruption flourished as a result of factional rivalries. A study of language in the medieval records has also highlighted how civic authorities and others, like the guildsmen, conceived of themselves – as well as the rest of society more broadly – as having a place in the way that urban governance functioned. Throughout these sources there is an emphasis on the different roles that people played and how these related to their constituent parts in society. The exchange between Gaunt, the Common Council, the Aldermen and Brembre in chapter two is illustrative of this. In this chapter we saw how they employed common profit rhetoric and notions of good governance to express their role in deciding Northampton's fate.

This study of London's administrative texts has demonstrated that concerns regarding the common good could be as easily found in urban administrative texts as in a political treatises or royal records. London, however, was not the only English city to produce a wealth of civic writing. In a study of English civic literacy, Rees Jones has shown how administrative officials across late medieval England kept their records in civic archives after leaving office, and that 'larger numbers of administrative staff were employed to keep the expanding collections of records, manage them in archives and provide access to the public'.⁴ Cuenca's research on borough customary law in late medieval England has also shown how extensive the production of civic records was in English towns and cities. Medieval cities like Bristol, for example, had civic chronicles and customals, such as *Ricart's Kalendar* and the *Little Red Book of Bristol*, which, like the London sources I have used, focused on the regulation of trade, public nuisances, and, relevant to this study, office-holding.⁵ These sources, like those studied here, would have focused on their own individual and unique concerns when administering and discussing civic rule and law. Further investigation of the centrality of common profit rhetoric within

⁴ Ibid, p. 221.

⁵ Cuenca, 'The Making of Borough Customary Law in Medieval Britain'; Esther Liberman Cuenca, 'Town clerks and the authorship of customals in medieval England', *Urban History*, Vol. 46, Iss. 2 (2019), 180-201. We also see large volumes produced across counties like Kent. For this see J. Croft, 'The customals of the Cinque Ports, c. 1290 – c. 1500: studies in the cultural production of an urban record' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 1997).

administrative records of other urban English towns would allow for a comparative approach and establish whether circumstances particular to each location affected the way in which ideas of common profit were expressed. Moreover, this thesis has examined the rhetoric of common profit throughout a period that suffered extreme political turbulence. It would be beneficial to examine a calmer period of English history to see if the language utilised in urban administrative was reflective of this. This would give us a wider understanding of politics and language as a whole over larger periods of time, different contexts and different places.

Linked to this, we may also want to give consideration to the education that those at the centre of civic life had and the influence that this potentially had on their actions, decisions and thought processes as reflected in administrative records produced during their leadership. Whilst professional clerks/scribes wrote the records studied here, this thesis has shown that it was the viewpoint and political ambitions of those in positions of authority that were copied down and preserved for reasons of posterity. Added to Barron's observation that Ralph Strode, the potential author of the Jubilee Book, studied at Oxford before coming to London is the fact that, within Trinity College Cambridge MS O 3 11, which contains a copy of the Jubilee Book, there is a translation of Nicholas D'Oresme's treatise on the changing of money. This included the preface to D'Oresme's text in which reference was made to what advice a king or prince could take in order to manage money within their realm.⁶

Strode is an especially interesting character and a wider part of the story of late fourteenth-century London. At the same time that Chaucer referred to Gower in the conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde* as 'O Moral Gower', he referred to Strode as 'philosophical Strode'.⁷ Whilst Strode may be a more obscure figure than Gower in the history of late fourteenth-century London, the quality ascribed to him by Chaucer suggests

⁶ TCC, MS O 3 11, fol. 1v.

⁷ R. F. Yeager, "'O Moral Gower": Chaucer's Dedication of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1984), 87.

that he was a man of great knowledge, well versed with ‘the “disputisouns” that that had engaged the best minds of his century’.⁸ This suggests that Strode was a person aware of larger concerns and debates of his day and certainly supports the possibility that he could, potentially, have authored the Jubilee Book, for it engaged with contemporary issues revolving around how to define London governance. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Chaucer chose to mention Strode at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* which – whilst principally a story about love – dealt with Troy’s history and which was, in some respects, based on Chaucer’s London. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the Galfridian myth of London as Troy was frequently employed as a way to imagine the City as a place of grandeur and greatness, despite Troy’s ultimate, tragic fall. If Strode was the author of the Jubilee Book, perhaps he was trying to use the Jubilee Book as a means to set a standard by which government should be administered based on this myth. If so, this allows for further work to be done on how understandings of London as Troy infiltrated urban records produced in London, and the way that we understand how London governance was imagined in these texts. As recorded by Walsingham, Brembre named London ‘Little Troy’, and himself the ‘duke of London’. This seems to suggest that there may be value in considering the way in which urban leaders conceived of themselves as leading London – Troy – to victory and restoring the City’s glory. This line of thought thus offers another interesting avenue of exploration for historians to study the way that civic governance in London was imagined.⁹

The significance of common profit rhetoric in asserting and reinforcing civic authority did not suddenly emerge during the early fifteenth century as a result of London’s turbulent past. Fifteenth-century civic officials may have learnt from this period of uncertainty and instability, but an awareness of the benefits of appealing to notions of good governance and communitarian values was certainly recognised by both Brembre and

⁸ Rodney Delasanta, ‘Chaucer and Strode’, *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1991), 205.

⁹ *Chronica Maiora*, p. 262.

Northampton, as well as those closely associated with them.¹⁰ This study has thus shown that it was not only during ‘a time of social and political readjustment’ that ‘the language of common profit served a distinctive ideological function and helped to celebrate and entrench the status of government office’, but that common profit rhetoric was a tool strategically used when civic leaders and their rivals felt threatened and needed to regain the political upper hand.¹¹ The concept of common profit, therefore, was a central feature of political negotiation and was a strategic tool that enabled civic life to be controlled.

¹⁰ Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community*, pp. 23-40 for the impact that the situation of late fourteenth-century London had on fifteenth-century civic officers.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 8.

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