UNIVERSITY *of* York

This is a repository copy of *The Boundaries of Popular Control in Late Medieval English Towns*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/211597/

Version: Published Version

Article:

Hartrich, Eliza Jane (2024) The Boundaries of Popular Control in Late Medieval English Towns. Journal of Social History. shae029. ISSN 1527-1897

https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shae029

White Rose
university consortium
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield & York

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

OXFORD

Special Issue: Popular Control in Pre-modern Europe

The Boundaries of Popular Control in Late Medieval English Towns

Eliza Hartrich*

*Address correspondence to Eliza Hartrich, Department of History, University of York, York, YO10 5DD, UK. Email: eliza.hartrich@york.ac.uk.

ABSTRACT

Scholarship on pre-modern popular politics often focuses on speech, identifying the ways in which people outside the elite could have a "voice" in government. Using examples from late medieval English towns, this article argues for the existence of a particular kind of popular politics that centered on seeing and hearing rather than speaking. This type of politics—labeled "popular control"—concerned the right of the urban political community at large to observe rituals of governance and to audit financial accounts. Through these acts of collective witnessing, lesser citizens and non-citizens exerted an indirect political power to restrict leaders' freedom of action and to ensure that their performance of office abided by set rules. The unusually detailed Hall Rolls and Hall Books produced by the civic government of Lynn in 1412–13 and 1418–25 illustrate that "popular control," far from being a vehicle for increasing the urban commons' "voice" in municipal decision-making, often stood in opposition to principles of elected representation. After 1418, more people were being admitted to the inner sanctum of virtuous individuals deemed capable of offering rational counsel to mayors and jurats, but there were fewer opportunities for the wider public to witness performances of governance by this expanded group of decision-makers. The crux of debate in fifteenth-century English towns—and, perhaps, in the tumultuous world of late medieval Europe more generally—was often less about *who* should exercise political influence and more about *how* popular political power could be exercised most appropriately and effectively.

1. INTRODUCTION

If one trend had to characterize the vast array of scholarship on the history of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe produced since the turn of the millennium, a strong case could be made for structuralized agency. In a variety of contexts, historians have stressed that peasants, women, artisans, and other individuals typically seen as existing outside the elite were, in fact, vital contributors to the institutions that governed them. At a macrolevel, two publications from 2009, John Watts's *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* and the edited volume *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe,*

1300-1900, argued that the growth of government often attributed to the later medieval period stemmed less from the will of princes and more from the demands of their subjects for better access to justice and more control over taxation.[1] Historians working on a microlevel, focusing on local communities, have adopted a similar perspective. In the realm of socioeconomic history, Christopher Dyer and Jean Birrell illustrate the extent to which peasants used the manor court in rural areas of England to dictate the customs observed on the manor and circumscribe the agricultural policies employed by their lords.[2] Legal history for these centuries, too, has touted the agency of the marginalized: Daniel Lord Smail writes that legal institutions in late medieval Marseille were molded by the desire of ordinary litigants to use them as a stage for publicizing extreme emotion, while Bronach Kane demonstrates the reliance of English church courts on female testimony during the same period.[3]

Urban history is one of the fields most affected by this "bottom-up" brand of late medieval institutional history. Where once attention focused on oligarchies and rebellion against them, since 2010 studies on towns in late medieval Italy, the Low Countries, Iberia, France, Germany, and England instead highlight that citizens outside the elite did not need to "fight the system" in order to act politically. There were recognized avenues (from participation in assemblies to private petitioning to disruption of rituals) in urban government that lesser merchants or artisans could employ to influence the behavior of civic leaders without resorting to violence.[4] Even non-citizens, those who did not have formal rights to participate in civic assemblies, had institutional means to challenge those who ruled them. Christopher Fletcher has explored the ways in which disenfranchised elements of English urban populations used the hue and cry and other communal policing mechanisms to criticize civic leaders and mobilize opposition to their policies.[5] The resulting tendency, especially when it comes to English towns, is for historians to stress the fragility of authority in late medieval urban settings. Mayors, aldermen, councilors, and treasurers were elected officials, not brought to power through inheritance or divine ordination.[6] The urban public—both the citizens who elected them and the non-citizens who walked through the town's streets and drank in its taverns—therefore believed itself entitled to monitor the behavior of these officials. Moreover, they had fully legitimate institutional means at their disposal to hold defaulting officials to account.

It is clear, then, that historians in the past twenty years or so have discussed at length the various institutional means by which non-officeholders in late medieval Europe set standards for municipal officials and ensured that they abided by them. These diverse and related phenomena, however, have never been assigned a named category. This absence of a separate label is analytically problematic. As the editors of this special issue point out, "popular politics" implies that such activities are somehow divorced from the main business of governing. "Popular politics" also risks conflating all aspects of the political process in which those outside the elite might participate. Not only were the types of political activity involving the "populace" highly varied, but they were sometimes even serving at cross purposes. Representing the views of one's guild or ward in a closed council meeting, with the hopes of influencing executive decision-making or the content of policy, was a form of power fundamentally different from participation in collective rituals that gave communal consent to decisions already made. As we shall see in Lynn, opportunities for the former could come at the expense of the latter. The editors' concept of "popular control"—"the capability of the people, broadly understood, to establish limits on social and political powers and institutions"—appealed to me not because it is capacious but because it is specific. Rather than seeking to identify *who* the "people" were and measure the *extent* of their political

activity, it shifts attention to *what they do* in government. This notion of "popular control" as a subset of popular politics concerned with imposing limits on power—"as a more or less structured pressure exerted by 'subjects' over authorities and therefore closely connected to the notion of accountability"—is at the heart of my contribution. What is interesting about this function of "popular control" is that it is not an especially active process. It is not about mechanisms for channeling the "voice" of the people into political decision-making and policy-making, and is therefore separate from the notion of political representation. "Popular control," or the features of it identified by the editors that I have found most pertinent for my own research, is instead about how the behavior of those in government is molded or constrained by the awareness that their actions will be seen by a broader public. I regard "popular control" as a legitimate but indirect means of political pressure, consisting mostly of seeing and hearing others manage resources belonging to the community. As will be discussed below, political conflict in the later Middle Ages often centered not on how much power the "people" had in government, but about whether that power took the indirect form of "popular control"/collective scrutiny or the more direct form of "representation" in councils—a subtlety that can be obscured under the umbrella term "popular politics."

In this article, using examples from fifteenth-century English towns, I shall sketch which areas of urban governance were most often subject to popular control through audits and collective witnessing by non-officeholders; crucially, though, I shall also highlight the areas of governance that were deemed outside the remit of popular control. Deliberation, decision-making, and discretionary judgments were reserved for officials to determine according to their intellect and reason: qualities that the "people" as a collective (or non-officeholding individuals within that collective) did not possess. In many English towns over the course of the fifteenth century, the boundaries between matters for popular scrutiny and matters for closed deliberation by virtuous individuals were frequently contested and renegotiated. There is, however, an observable shift over the course of the century: more people gained access to the inner sanctum of "virtuous" individuals trusted to make discretionary judgments, but at the same time many issues were moved from the arena of popular scrutiny to that of closed deliberation. To say that fifteenth-century English civic politics became less democratic or more oligarchic would be misleading. To quote the musical *Hamilton*, more men were actually being admitted to the "room where it happens." What happened in that room, though, was not brought to the attention of the public as frequently for their inspection.

This article is divided into three main sections. Section 2 outlines the role of common assemblies as the chief venues for "popular control": occasions for non-officeholders (often loosely termed "the commons") to witness the performance of rituals of accountability. The requirement for certain acts of urban government to be performed before an audience both limited the range of acceptable activities available to office-holding elites and set up the commons as auditors of governance. Section 3 describes the role of "discrete deliberation" in governance: sensitive matters subject to judgment by virtuous individuals, whose freedom of speech would have been hampered by the presence of the commons *en masse* as witnesses to their discussions. Section 4 employs the case study of early fifteenth-century Lynn to demonstrate the ways in which urban communities renegotiated the boundaries between "popular control" and "discrete deliberation" within their political system, and stresses that such boundary-setting was not strictly a battle between more democracy and less.

2. COMMON ASSEMBLIES: POPULAR CONTROL

The principal arena for popular control in municipal politics was the common assembly, because it was where the group known as the "commons" gathered to witness acts of governance. The terms "commons" and "commoners" gestured toward people who were deemed members of the political community but who did not hold formal office as mayors or elite councilors (typically called aldermen or jurats). They had a measure of ownership over any items considered "common" (in other words, as belonging to the community), and it was in this capacity that they were viewed as required scrutineers of the activities of mayors, aldermen, and other civic officials charged temporarily with management of the town's resources.[7]

As John Watts and Claire Hawes have demonstrated, however, the word "commons" (and its associated word "community") was fluid and did not refer to a specific group of people or social class.[8] "Commons" was a label adopted by any group that saw itself (or wished to have itself seen) as representing the community of the town or realm as a whole, and hence whose actions were *ipso facto* politically legitimate and in the collective interest. Governing elites themselves were often at pains to stress the involvement or presence of the "commons" so that they might present their decisions as communally-sanctioned and consensus-driven. In the context of English urban records, the word "commons" was very often defined by the venue of the common assembly—however large or small the number of non-officeholders present might be on any given occasion.[9] Typically, attendance at the common assembly was confined to those who were citizens (also known as "burgesses" or "freemen") of the town. Not all residents of towns were citizens. Citizenship was conveyed in most towns through inheritance, marriage, purchase, apprenticeship to a freeman, or by the mayor's gift. Entrance to the freedom was a formal process involving an oath taken before civic officials, providing the final opportunity for officials to vet those who would join the citizenry.[10] Some towns had more inclusive franchises than others. Around 50 percent of male heads of household were freemen in late fourteenth-century York, as compared to 19 percent in Exeter during the same period; when percentages are expanded to encompass the total population of these cities, probably around 25 percent of residents of York were freemen and around 3 percent of residents of Exeter.[11] Women, too, were burgesses of English towns, but they possessed economic privileges only and not the right to vote in civic elections or participate in communal assemblies, hence usually barring them from inclusion in the term "commons."[12] Efforts to restrict attendance at common assemblies to individuals summoned specifically for the task—rather than all citizens of the town—demonstrate further attempts by urban elites to circumscribe who could be deemed part of the "commons" at a particular time.[13] As a result, the "commons," though a highly flexible and manipulable label, tended to be associated with a select group—entirely male, of established reputation, and with connections to the senior members of the community. They were, nevertheless, regarded as representing the "community" of the town in ways that the mayor and aldermen alone typically were not. Certain aspects of the governing process, therefore, needed to be performed in the presence of some configuration of people able to make a reasonable claim to the label of "commons."[14]

Common assemblies were spectacles. The ringing of the "common bell" summoned citizens to the assembly. In the case of many of the Cinque Ports of the south-east coast, the blowing of a horn fulfilled this function; indeed, this practice led to the common assembly itself becoming known as the "hornblow" in the Cinque Port of Sandwich.[15] The common assembly could certainly be a venue for discussion, petitioning, obtaining consent for

taxation, or approving new ordinances, but its core function—the habitual acts that formed the reason such assemblies were summoned in the first place—was to serve as a venue for demonstrating the honesty of the mayors, aldermen, chamberlains, and other officials entrusted with advancing the town's interests and safeguarding its resources. Most importantly, the common assembly was the site where officials made their oaths of office.[16] The oath taken by bailiffs Thomas Gloys and John Exell of Great Yarmouth in 1491 was fairly typical, in that they promised to maintain the "ffrauncheses, good vsages, customes, statuteȝ + ordenaunces of this town" and that "no disseyte we shall doo, ne to our knowleg shall suffre to be don."[17] Interestingly, though, the officers being inaugurated usually made their promises *to* the leading civic officers even though the oaths were performed *before* an assembly of all the citizens. For example, in Sandwich, oaths of office were performed at the hornblow in front of the community of the town, but the text of the oaths themselves begins "This hire ye Maire and Jurats" (referring to the council of twelve that ruled the town), with no explicit mention of the commons.[18] It was a small but important distinction. The implication was that officials were directly accountable to the mayor and other senior officers (who could punish them for misbehavior), but the commons, as witnesses to the oaths, knew what was expected of their officials and thus could identify when individuals did not meet those ideals.

In addition to the oath-taking ceremonies, common assemblies also served as occasions for the commons to be reminded of the panoply of other urban ordinances, charters, and customs to which their leaders were subject. Ordinances enacted before an assembly of all burgesses, as well as charters issued by the king to the town, "belonged," in a sense, to the commons. Custumals and constitutions often stressed the need of the commons to know their town's ordinances and charters so that they could punish those who transgressed them.[19] A new constitution for Shrewsbury in 1444, for example, stipulated that every year at the election of civic officers "all the seid Articles and Ordinancez in this seyd Cedule conteyned, ben openly redde tofore the seid Commones . . . that all the Commones mowe here and knowe the gode rule and governance of the seid Toun . . . and to eschewe and voyde the perills in the seid Articles and Ordinancez pleynly expressed."[20] A dispute in Great Yarmouth prompted a reformulation of the civic ordinances in 1491, and these ordinances were to be announced publicly twice a year "to thentent they may the better to all men be opynly knowyn + weell + duly executed."[21] The role of the commons as guardians of the bylaws of the town gave them some coercive power in bringing to heel urban officials who did not obey the rules. In 1465 the Sandwich common assembly passed an ordinance that that the mayor should forfeit his annual salary of twenty marks to the community of the town should he ever act contrary to an ordinance made under the common seal or enacted by an assembly of the commons.[22] Two years later, this principle was extended further, when it was agreed "by the whole community" (*per totam Communitatem*) that the town imprison Mayor Henry Greneshild for crimes against his office.[23]

Common assemblies, then, were occasions not only for declaring the standards according to which officers should conduct themselves but also for scrutinizing their performance in office. In many towns, the oath-taking ceremony of the new mayor was preceded by a speech from the outgoing mayor describing his deeds in office and requesting the forgiveness of the commons for any inadvertent errors.[24] The men chosen to represent a town in parliament were also expected to give account of their activities to the citizenry at the common assembly.[25] In Lynn, a common assembly met after the conclusion of a session of parliament, at which point the Members of Parliament (MPs) for that year would read out the acts passed

in the parliament, provide a summary of the chancellor's opening speech, and present the expenses they incurred while in attendance. This event was no doubt designed as a mechanism for financial transparency.[26] MPs' wages were often the single largest item of expenditure made by a civic government in a given year (for which Lynn sometimes had to impose an additional tax on the citizenry), and the MPs' report on the parliamentary session to the common assembly was perhaps a way for them to prove that they had, indeed, attended the sessions for which they were being paid.[27]

Scrutiny of civic officials' activities thus often dovetailed with the commons' interest in protecting civic financial resources. Property held by the town as a corporation (e.g., lands, pasture rights, buildings, annuities) was a collective asset, and thus its management, lease, or alienation was a matter for communal oversight.[28] Levying of taxation, moreover, typically required obtaining the consent of the commons of the town, and they also expected to monitor how those taxes were assessed and collected.[29] In some towns, such as York from 1375, the municipal financial officers were required to present their accounts before an assembly of citizens annually, typically coinciding with the date of the election of new civic officials.[30] The institution of such practices as a routine component of officeholding could be the result of popular pressure. In 1414, the citizens of Norwich complained that because the city's treasurers had rendered their accounts before the insufficiently fastidious mayor and council of twenty-four (and not at a common assembly before all the citizens), they had been able to keep for themselves income that rightly belonged to the commonalty.[31] Through the arbitration of Sir Thomas Erpingham, the civic government and commons of Norwich eventually agreed to a new constitution on Valentine's Day 1415.[32] The constitution's provisions included a clause that all fifteen of Norwich's financial officers appear before an assembly of citizens when their year-long terms of office ended, "in weche assemble shal be ful declared what good yᵉ Comon haþ in debtours and redy money and yᵉ names of yᵉ debtours."[33]

The English urban commons, as constituted in the common assembly, were a collective audience to these performances of transparency: the Norwich treasurers "declared" their accounts at the common assembly, and the laws and ordinances of Shrewsbury were "openly redde tofore" the commons of the town.[34] There may well have been a didactic component to these processes of transparency and scrutiny. In witnessing acts of governance and the presentation of accounts, members of the commons who might aspire to higher civic office later on in their careers could learn the behavior expected of them and the rules they should follow. The common assembly was very much not, however, an occasion for individual participants to present specific grievances against the ruling elite.[35] In this regard, the accountability of English urban officials to the broader populace contrasts with the Sienese *sindacato* and Castilian *residencia* examined by María Ángeles Martín Romera. Those procedures involved a public call for any resident of the town or city to appear at a designated date to present individual claims against an official at the end of their term of office. Records of such occasions were patchy, but when they do survive feature the kind of individuated detail (names of accusers, names of witnesses to the alleged act of misconduct or debt) that is generally absent from English records in which the commons audit officials.[36] Individual complaints against English urban officials were almost always made outside the context of civic politics, often through lawsuits in the royal court of Chancery. Municipal governments themselves vehemently contested the validity of these lawsuits, which were viewed as major breaches of civic autonomy.[37] That English municipal common assemblies did not constitute a venue for individual claims against the authorities or comments on their conduct was made clear in the 1444 constitution for Shrewsbury. It declared that whenever the bailiffs of

the town should present a matter "to the hole Commones of the seid Toun, in such tyme as thei shall assemble holy in the Gyldhall," no member of the commons was allowed to speak in response.[38]

The role of the commons as audience, rather than discussants, at common assemblies reinforced the ritualized nature of these events. Matters deemed to be of "common" interest—such as civic property, financial accounts, parliamentary representation, and the use of the common seal—involved the commons but in a stereotyped way, often at a specified point in the calendar and following a prescribed routine of activities. Indeed, the literally "scripted" nature of these rituals of accountability was crucial. At common assemblies, mayors, common clerks, and other officials often translated, explained, or interpreted Latin documents in English (the *lingua materna*) when reading them out to the assembled citizens. During the fifteenth century, though, common clerks began to record some aspects of civic business in the vernacular, ensuring that what the commons heard coincided exactly with what was recorded in the archive and lessening the possibility of changes in meaning through translation. The civic texts most commonly written in the vernacular were those associated with public rituals of accountability performed at common assemblies: almost always written in the vernacular were the outgoing mayor's speech asking for pardon, oaths of office, and the constitutions describing the customs of the town that were read annually at common assemblies.[39] The Old Black Book of Sandwich is a prime example of the degree to which vernacular record-keeping was tied to the common assembly. This book of civic memoranda began in 1431 and included both matters discussed at the hornblow and those that came before the mayor, twelve jurats, and common council.[40] From 1451, the book is written in a combination of Latin and English, and it is matters that pertained to the commons and the hornblow that most consistently appear in English.[41] Oaths of office are invariably written in English, as are most ordinances pertaining to financial matters like taxation, collection of common rents, and maintenance of civic property.[42] This practice was established as a matter of principle in January 1470, when it was ordained that "frohens forth euery comen assemble and acte made by þe comens and also þe Accountes be made and entred in englissh."[43] Decisions made by the mayor, jurats, or common council or the trial and punishment of individuals brought before civic officials, on the other hand, continued to be recorded in Latin. In Sandwich, language helped to establish the boundaries of "popular control," since records made in the vernacular ensured that the speech acts heard by the citizens at a common assembly were accurately represented in writing in the civic archive.[44] Popular control in later medieval towns was thus primarily a process of seeing and hearing those in power, and then ensuring that there was no room for discrepancy (or, indeed, deliberate manipulation) between the performance of accountability and its written record.

Just because the commons were audiences does not necessarily mean that they were powerless. The model of "ocular democracy" advanced by twenty-first-century political theorist Jeffrey Edward Green offers new ways of understanding how the commons in fifteenth-century English towns could limit or mold the activities of those who governed them even when their own "voice" was restricted, occasional, or aggregated. According to Green, most non-officeholding individuals rarely have a formal "say" in political processes and even when they do (e.g., during elections) such limited contributions rarely lead to a sense of collective empowerment. Most humans, instead, experience politics as spectators: "the vast majority of our political experience, whether voter or nonvoter, is not spent engaged in such action and decision making, but rather watching and listening to *others* who are themselves actively engaged."[45] In a vocal model of democracy, emphasis is placed on the decision-making

capacity of the citizenry and their ability to initiate or influence legislation, whereas the ocular model conceives of the citizenry principally as judges of their leaders. Politicians are coerced by custom or media pressure into appearing in public in situations that the politicians themselves cannot entirely control, thereby affording the opportunity for citizen-spectators to observe the character and personal attributes of those politicians.[46]

While the dynamics of a fifteenth-century common assembly were certainly different to those of, say, a House of Commons debate in the twenty-first century, it remains the case that coerced political spectacles empower the people by giving them the opportunity to test whether their leaders are capable of fulfilling the expected duties of office and providing an assured performance within the "rules of the game."[47] Common assemblies in fifteenth-century English towns could not be orchestrated for purely propagandistic value by mayors, aldermen, and other civic officials precisely because there were certain set actions they had to follow according to custom, and they could not avoid or change these procedures without seeming as if they had something to hide: the commons were on hand to make sure that the expected measures for accountability were conducted and to see with what degree of panache their rulers conducted them.

3. COUNCILS: DISCRETE DELIBERATION

Popular control was but one aspect of fifteenth-century urban government, with a particular remit. It concerned the right of the commons to observe processes of governance through ritualized acts in common assemblies, and it typically pertained to the management of civic property, municipal financial accounts, and representation at parliament. Other components of urban politics, however, took place outside the common assembly and without a scrutinizing audience. Matters that required the exercise of discretion or judgment in fifteenth-century towns tended to be reserved for the mayor, a small council of twelve or twenty-four, and (in some cases) a larger "common council" of elected representatives of the commons.[48] Verdicts on individuals who broke civic ordinances, arbitration between citizens, decisions about the conduct of civic law suits, the composition of letters to the king and other external powerholders, and similarly sensitive issues were confined to a setting closed off from the eyes and ears of the non-officeholding citizenry.

Reserving matters of judgment for a smaller body made sense logistically: meaningful discussion was difficult in a room with hundreds of citizens.[49] But the language of municipal ordinances makes it clear that the restriction of deliberation to a smaller circle of officeholders also stemmed from the principle that not all citizens possessed the personal virtue to make reasoned decisions in the public interest.[50] The use of words such as *prudhommes* or *probi homines* to describe members of aldermanic councils emphasized that these individuals were worthier than ordinary citizens.[51] The fifteenth century also saw the word "discrete/discreet" frequently attached to mayors, bailiffs, aldermen, and common councilors. The Shrewsbury constitution of 1444 described the town's twelve aldermen and council of twenty-four as the "most sufficient and discrete within the seyd Toun" and listed their chief task as advising the bailiffs "bi her discrecion."[52] The Great Yarmouth constitutions of 1491 used "discrete" as an adjectival descriptor for their bailiffs, aldermen, common councilors, "Wardours for awardyng of heryng," and auditors.[53]

The adjective "discrete/discreet" had multiple meanings in Middle English.[54] It derived from the verb *discerno* (and adjective *discretus*), which in classical Latin meant to distinguish between or to keep separate. During the Middle Ages, however, the Latin *discretus* and the

Middle French *discret* acquired a new meaning, typically used in reference to officials: wise, prudent, discerning, capable of reasoned judgment.[55] The work of John Trevisa demonstrates, though, that connotations of separateness and rationality could intermingle. In his Middle English translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (*On the Properties of Things*), Trevisa referred to the essence of angels as "simple and vnmaterial, pure, distingt, and discrete."[56] Here, the description of the angelic essence as "discrete" meant that it was a unity unto and of itself— something apart from the world of man and unable to be changed. Interestingly, though, the paragraph that follows stresses that the unchangeable, "pure and clene" nature of angels means that "þey beþ nouȝt defouled with non foule affeccioun, and þey beþ stedfast in þe dignite of office."[57] In other words, the very separateness of angels and the "discrete" nature of their essence is what makes them less subject to influence and therefore more righteous in the exercise of their duties. Thus the two meanings of "discrete/discreet" were linked: an individual's capacity for discernment (and therefore their ability to perform any political office virtuously) was enabled by his separation from the multitude and its baser appetites.

In later medieval English towns, this separation was rendered physically, with deliberations and judgments typically occurring in an enclosed council chamber upstairs, while common assemblies took place in a large open hall on the ground floor. Guildhalls, purpose-built halls for the conduct of town business, are first known in England from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but many were newly constructed or rebuilt during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in ways that created designated spaces for particular facets of governance.[58] In London until ca 1300 all aspects of civic governance had taken place in single hall, but renovations to London's guildhall in the fourteenth century added a new upper hall to the previous one-story building.[59] The ground floor hall continued to be used for assembling the entire commonalty for mayoral elections, as well as for sittings of the Court of Husting (the city's primary judicial court and open to all citizens).[60] Now, however, the upper story housed a council chamber (used for meetings of the common council and capable of accommodating up to 200 people) and a very small interior chamber (used for meetings of the mayor and twenty-four aldermen, as well as probably for the storage of the civic archives).[61] The rebuilding of the London Guildhall in the fifteenth century differentiated the space yet further. A vast undivided hall remained for mayoral elections and ceremonial events, which was connected by a porch to a separate complex of more specialized chambers (the mayor's court, court of aldermen, and common council chamber) situated around an enclosed courtyard.[62] By the late fifteenth century some towns, such as Nottingham, had also introduced "parlours" (from the French *parler*) for the mayor to hold informal conversations with his councilors in a more relaxed environment.[63] To call these upper chambers "private," in contrast to the "public" lower hall, would be to misconstrue their purpose; "closed" versus "open" would be more accurate.[64] After all, the business that occurred in council chambers was undoubtedly "public" in the sense that it stemmed from an official meeting of a governmental body. Indeed, the deliberations that occurred in council chambers were recorded in minute books held in the municipal archive, but those records were rarely available for inspection by those outside the governing elite. These were documents that were "public" but not "open."[65] The key point is that when civic governments had the opportunity to construct a building specifically for the rituals and procedures of governance, they recognized "popular control" and "discrete deliberation" as separate components of the governing process that required very different kinds of "public" spaces.

In contrast to the common assemblies in the hall, the very purpose of which was to ensure that governance was seen and heard by the commons, meetings that occurred in the council

chamber were meant to be secret. The oaths of councilors usually included a clause instructing them to "kepe the townes counsel."[66] Such generic provisions were often fortified by further ordinances restricting access to council meetings or the disclosure of what occurred within them. Great Yarmouth forbade any minor civic officers from attending council meetings unless they were also members of the council of forty-eight or "sworn to the secrets of the town."[67] In Coventry in 1483, not only was a fine of 100 shillings to be exacted from anyone who revealed communications taking place in council but, moreover, the mayor's sergeant-at-mace would stand by the door during council meetings to ensure that no one else entered.[68] A Hull ordinance of 1440 stipulated that any aldermen who may "utter or discowe any mater moued by way of counsell amonges tham" should be removed from office.[69]

The desire to keep deliberative council meetings secret stemmed from several impulses, not all of them inherently elitist. One of the overriding motivations was to ensure that those attending councils were able to offer honest and impartial advice without fear of censure.[70] Moreover, ordinances regarding the secrecy of council meetings were intended to guard against interventions by outside authorities as much as to keep the commons at bay. A London ordinance of 1427 required all London aldermen to swear an oath not to reveal any matters discussed in their closed meetings. The rationale was that Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, uncle to King Henry VI and acting as Lord Protector of the realm during the king's minority, had managed to learn of unflattering remarks made about him by Alderman Robert Whittingham in a London council meeting, and the duke had threatened Whittingham as a result.[71] It is also notable that during a turbulent dispute between merchants and artisans in 1440s London, the less privileged group was the one that protested against information being leaked from the council chamber. The leader of the artisans, the tailor and alderman Ralph Holland, allegedly claimed that merchant Alderman Sir William Estfeld routinely reported confidential civic business to Lord Cromwell, the royal treasurer.[72]

The overriding consideration, however, seemed to be that councilors present a united front. Ordinances about keeping councils secret were often accompanied by measures discouraging mayors and aldermen from quarreling with one another in public. In 1424, the mayor, sheriffs, and twenty-four aldermen of Norwich formed a tripartite indenture, of which one key component was a vow to "secretly kepe alle counsell and communication . . . shewyd or meved be the Mair and Aldermen With Inne hemself." The issues discussed in meetings of the mayor and aldermen could later be brought before a common assembly of Norwich citizens, but only if the mayor and aldermen thought it appropriate. Also in the indenture was a clause specifying that should an alderman have a grievance (whether political or personal) against one of his fellows, he was required to present it to the mayor and other aldermen to be settled in the council.[73] In Hull in the 1440s, ordinances forbidding aldermen from revealing matters discussed in council were coupled with measures exhorting aldermen to "bere gode loue and trew hert" to one another. As in Norwich, if any Hull alderman were engaged in a dispute that "myght exorte or stirre any discencion or debate" between him and another alderman, then he must bring it to the attention of the mayor and aldermanic council immediately and abide by their decision on pain of a hefty £10 fine.[74] As we shall see in the Lynn examples below, the confinement of arbitration between officeholders to the council chamber could have the effect, in practice, of removing some allegations of public misconduct from the eyes and ears of the public.

When aspects of civic government combined popular control and discrete deliberation, the two components of the process were often carefully delineated. A Hull ordinance of

1440 proclaimed that if "it be compleined by any of the said Burgesseȝ and commons that the maier be tedius, noiant, or excessiue in execucion of any thyng pertenyng to his said office" that the mayor should then be "reconsiled and refourmed by þe gode avis of his brethir the aldermen."[75] The commons could *scrutinize* the conduct of the mayor and point out any irregularities, but the *judgment* of the mayor's character and the determination of appropriate punishment were left to the council of twelve aldermen. Witnessing an official's conduct, on the one hand, and discerning through reason how that behavior should be assessed and punished, on the other, were separate processes performed by different cohorts of people. It was a system that reflected, perhaps, some of the inherent tensions in medieval concepts of accountability that John Sabapathy has described. The populace or its representatives facilitated the identification of corruption by witnessing *acts* of official misconduct, but medieval scholastic thinkers were skeptical that such visible outward manifestations reflected the true nature of sin. Real corruption was internal, unspoken, and difficult to perceive—indeed, largely beyond human powers of comprehension.[76] In the absence of the divine ability to look into men's hearts and minds, though, the men of greatest discernment within the community were in the best position to assess the extent to which an outward act of misconduct represented an internal failure of virtue, and to allocate penalties accordingly.[77]

4. REDRAWING THE BOUNDARIES OF POPULAR CONTROL: LYNN IN THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The picture painted thus far is one of static boundaries between two elements of the political process: "popular control," through which the commons observed officials perform rituals of accountability in an open hall, and "discrete deliberation," in which a small elite deliberated and made reasoned judgments in a secluded chamber. Of course, the custumals, oath books, and other normative documents that set out these rules were at pains to give the impression that the procedures they outlined had existed since time immemorial. But, as Peter Fleming has emphasized, these custumals were often written in the aftermath of political conflict and were designed to establish a "new normal" rather than to reflect past practice.[78] In reality, boundaries between popular control and discrete deliberation rarely remained unchallenged. Here, I shall use the unusually detailed Hall Rolls and Hall Books of the Norfolk town of Lynn in 1412–13 and 1418–25 to illustrate how people within this community sought to define the remit of popular control during an especially fraught period in their history, in which three groups (the *potentiores*, *mediocres*, and *inferiores*) fought over how power should be exercised within the town. A key issue at stake was the extent to which a fair political system depended on collective acts of witnessing governance—popular control—or if many of these functions could be delegated to councils representing the citizenry. In the end, the commons of Lynn increased their *voice* in politics through the creation in 1418–20 of a new common council of twenty-seven that participated in the deliberative aspects of civic government, but opportunities for the commonalty as a whole to *see and hear* those who governed them decreased. Some within Lynn saw the shift from ocular to vocal democracy as a step in the wrong direction, limiting the ability of the populace to scrutinize municipal officers.

In adding a larger council elected by the commons to the more select council of twenty-four jurats, Lynn was hardly unusual among late medieval English towns. To cite some towns discussed earlier in this article, Sandwich developed a common council of sixty between 1434 and 1454 to operate alongside its mayor and twelve jurats, while Norwich added a common council of sixty to its aldermanic council of twenty-four in 1415.[79] As

Sofia Gustafsson has pointed out, the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Northern Europe more broadly saw a trend for the introduction of larger councils representing the commonalty to supplement an elite governing council.[80] In other respects, though, Lynn was anomalous. Despite being a major port, a center for Hanseatic trade in England, and the eighth-most populous English town (according to figures from the 1377 poll tax), Lynn had unusually limited rights of self-government; the town's overlord, the bishop of Norwich, operated the most important law courts in the town and on assuming office Lynn's mayor was required to swear loyalty to the bishop.[81] Further distinguishing Lynn from many of the other towns mentioned in this article was the role of the Holy Trinity Guild in the town's governance. This mercantile and religious fraternity controlled much of Lynn's commercial infrastructure, owning the Common Quay and crane, and also lent large sums of money to Lynn's civic government. Indeed, Lynn's common assemblies and council meetings were even held at the magnificent Hall of the Holy Trinity Guild.[82]

These power dynamics contributed toward a series of notoriously complex political disputes in Lynn during 1411–20, including several riots.[83] The incidents are too numerous and multifaceted to elaborate here, but at their root were attempts by Lynn's current mayor (also simultaneously Alderman of the Holy Trinity Guild) in 1411–13 to force former mayors to pay back large sums of money they had borrowed from the Guild in 1399–1406 when pursuing a law suit against the bishop of Norwich. Other controversies arose from this central cause, including over whether ordinary burgesses should have any role in selecting the mayor and over the increasing dominance of Lynn's leading families in the council of twenty-four. Arbitrations in 1412 and 1416 produced temporary solutions to these difficulties, including a nine-person committee to oversee all taxation and expenditure, but the one that proved most lasting was the institution in 1418 (confirmed by the bishop of Norwich in 1420) of a new common council of twenty-seven, with the commons electing three representatives from each of the town's nine wards. Until recently, historians tended to view Lynn's troubles in class terms, as a struggle between a wealthy elite who dominated civic government (the *potentiores*, representing the interests of the former mayors); a group of middling merchants and wealthier artisans (the *mediocres*, seeking a greater say in the selection of officials and greater accountability from the *potentiores*); and artisans and non-burgesses (the *inferiores*, often presented as forerunners of the proletariat).[84] Work by Kate Parker, however, has questioned some these assumptions, pointing out that the *inferiores* included among their ranks some lawyers with close connections to the bishop of Norwich.[85] The *inferiores* nevertheless were united in that they were not burgesses and they were not merchants, thereby leaving them outside the group of those who mattered in Lynn's civic politics.[86]

I am not intervening in these debates *per se*, but instead taking advantage of the fact that Lynn's tumultuous politics in these years led to an unusually detailed series of Hall Rolls and Hall Books for 1412–13 and 1418–25. Unlike most other English urban records from the time, these documents listed the names of those present at common assemblies and council meetings and recorded the events that occurred at both in some detail. Most interestingly for our purposes, the Hall Rolls and Hall Books also categorized the different types of meetings that occurred. The principal categories of civic meeting were the *congregatio generalis*, *congregatio*, and *congregatio priuata*. Before the disorders of the 1410s, Lynn town clerks distinguished little between types of meetings. All meetings in the 1385–87 Hall Roll are described as *congregatio communitatis* ("meeting of the community"), while in the next surviving Hall Roll for 1399–1403 each meeting is listed as *congregatio Maioris et Communitatis*

("meeting of the Mayor and Community").[87] It may well be that the new tripartite labeling system was the brainchild of Lynn town clerk William Asshebourne, constituting one of his many attempts to document for posterity the varied political configurations that emerged during the crises of 1411–20.[88] It was the *congregatio generalis*—the common assembly—that in 1412–13 was the locus of politics. The Hall Roll covering the time between August 29, 1412 and September 4, 1413 records twenty-four total meetings, and at least fifteen of these (62.5 percent) were described as a *congregatio generalis*.[89] Meetings described as *congregatio generalis* in this particular Roll were attended by burgesses and non-burgesses alike in the large hall of the Holy Trinity Guild; these assemblies were open to any male resident who wished to attend. Those meetings in the 1412–13 Roll described as *congregatio* or *congregatio priuata*, on the other hand, seem to have been confined to specifically summoned individual burgesses (often, but not always, only the mayor and jurats).[90] All meetings in 1412–13 described as a *congregatio generalis* were attended by at least 100 people, and on occasion 400–500 people—significant crowds, when one considers that Lynn's total population in 1377 was probably not more than 6,000 people.[91] The common clerk, William Asshebourne, would typically list around 100 attendees by name, and then give up. His entry for the July 3, 1413 *congregatio generalis* was far from unusual in naming 104 attendees and then referring to "other Burgesses and non-Burgesses to the number of 80 persons, whose names are not written because they stood so densely that that they could not be perceived."[92] It is possible that *congregatio generalis* was not just a new term, but, indeed, represented a new phenomenon peculiar to the crisis of 1412–13: of very large assemblies that most of the male population was eager to attend.

In 1412–13, the citizens present at *congregationes generales* were witnesses and auditors to many aspects of civic governance. At a September 26, 1412 *congregatio generalis*, Master John Tilney stood up before the approximately 200 men present in the Guildhall and "reported the news" (*retulit Noua*) from a recent meeting with the Chancellor at Canterbury.[93] The commons also witnessed the sealing of two documents with the common seal, and Thomas Brygge (one of the *potentiores*) was hauled before the assembly to explain why he had been conducting personal business in Calais when he should have been one of the eighteen individuals on an arbitration committee to solve the disputes in Lynn.[94] Popular scrutiny of MPs was especially intense. In June 1413, many of the leading burgesses of Lynn refused to attend a *congregatio generalis* because non-burgesses had been permitted to enter the Hall. Mayor Roger Galyon countered that it was the occasion when Lynn's MPs "had their day for declaring the acts of the last parliament and to tell us the news" and when contributions toward MPs' expenses were assessed and levied; as a result, he could not deny entry to the Hall on this day.[95] Lynn's MPs William Hallyate and John Tylney then stood at the north end of the Hall and declared the acts of the last parliament to the mayor and commons "from point to point, from the first to the last."[96] At the *congregatio generalis* they also returned to the chamberlains the civic charters and muniments they had brought to parliament, a public display that the town's archives were not being mishandled or appropriated for personal use.[97] The commons were present, as well, while the mayor asked MPs a series of questions about their activities, such as why they had been unable to secure confirmation of Lynn's charters during the parliamentary session and what response they had received from the executors of Henry IV's will concerning debts owed to the town.[98] Six days later, at another *congregatio generalis*, the mayor reported to the commons about the expenses incurred by the MPs.[99] In all these instances, the commons were, as far as we know, not

playing a role in final decision-making, but were on hand to observe those acting in the name of the town and confirm that they had fulfilled their duties.

In 1418, the addition of a common council of twenty-seven to the twenty-four jurats allowed the *mediocres* a greater "voice" in Lynn's government. The common council became a training ground for new political leaders, providing opportunities for artisans and victuallers to hold civic offices previously reserved for merchants. This period also saw the citizenry become less merchant-dominated: in 1425 the artisan burgesses gained the right for their apprentices to become burgesses as a matter of course, in the way that apprentices to merchants had always done.[100] The common council increased the access of certain members of these social groups to the *congregationes* and *congregationes priuatae*, the private meetings for deliberation and decision-making. The 1412–13 meetings listed as *congregatio* or *congregatio priuata* had a maximum attendance of around twenty-six people, consisting of the mayor, twenty-four jurats, and one or two other high-ranking civic officers.[101] After 1418, though, the *congregatio* and *congregatio priuata* almost always constituted the mayor, twenty-four jurats, and the common council of twenty-seven. It became extremely rare for only the mayor and jurats to meet, as shown by the fact that when this did occur in May 1419, the common clerk noted snidely that the "common council did nothing because they were not summoned."[102]

At the same time, however, this change lessened the role of the *congregatio generalis* in civic life. While nearly two-thirds of total civic meetings in 1412–13 were assemblies of the whole commonalty, *congregationes generales* constituted only around 14 percent of meetings in 1418–19, 22 percent in 1420–21, and 14 percent in 1421–22.[103] By 1423–25, the entire community was summoned only a couple times per year, exclusively for electing new officials, swearing them in, and hearing the reports of MPs—comprising under 5 percent of total meetings.[104] Even if the very large *congregatio generalis* may have been a product of a period of unusual political tension, its abandonment in favor of other types of meeting would have been noticeable and significant. As Pablo Gonzalez Martin and François Otchakovsky-Laurens have observed in studies of late medieval Burgos and Marseille, respectively, a move from mass gatherings of the citizenry to smaller meetings could be more democratic rather than less, as long as there were sufficient opportunities for a wide range of residents to communicate (either directly or indirectly) with those at the heart of power.[105] In terms of popular control, though, the shift to a more representative form of government was limiting: the vast majority of civic government was no longer being conducted before the commons as a collective, and thus the commons' ability to observe officials' performance attenuated. In short, the commons of Lynn may have gained more of a "voice" through the common council, but they could no longer "see" or "hear" as many aspects of governance. The inspection of financial accounts, use of the common seal, surveys of the town's rental portfolio, officials' debts to the town—all in 1412–13 often done in *congregationes generales*—became matters for the mayor, jurats, and common council to address in the council chamber, away from prying eyes.[106]

This shift is reflected, as well, in the language used to describe the new common council. At a *congregatio* on February 11, 1419, the common councilors present were lauded for their personal virtue as "discrete and venerable Burgesses."[107] For the next few years, the description of the common councilors as "discrete" became standard—a clear sign that they were part of the governing process that involved judgment and counseling. It was also reiterated that *congregationes* of the twenty-four jurats and common council, as occasions for the offering of advice and making of discretionary judgments, should be kept secret. At a January 8,

1421 congregatio, councilors complained that on many occasions advice given during council meetings had been disclosed to non-councilors, and as a result the twenty-four jurats and common council agreed to impose a penalty of twenty shillings on anyone who "made relation of, spread rumors, or in any way disclosed any counsel spoken in the Guildhall to anyone, except to his fellows of the same status." Moreover, any mayor who neglected to punish such an offence swiftly would forfeit his salary.[108]

All these measures combined to produce a subtle yet important change in the nature of urban officials' accountability. It was regarded less as a matter for public scrutiny and more as the fulfilment of a personal duty to fellow councilors. John Crosse was stripped of both his franchise and his position as common councilor at a congregatio in 1425 and not at a congregatio generalis; his degradation was to stand until he begged the mayor's mercy.[109] A dispute over an unknown matter between jurat John Thoresby and common councilor William Walden in November 1421 was settled at a congregatio at the request of the mayor and twenty-four jurats; that the occasion was one of personal honor (and peer pressure) was apparent from the fact that the councilors forced Thoresby and Walden "with great difficulty" (cum magna difficultate) to embrace one another and exchange kisses.[110] It was also at a congregatio of the twenty-four jurats and common council that controversy arose in 1419 around the fairness of recent tax assessments. The jurats and common councilors, and not the community of burgesses as a whole, demanded to "hear and see" (auditum et visum) the assessment rolls and then forced the mayor to agree to a reassessment.[111] Lynn was still holding its officials to account, but that control was less "popular" than it once was, in that a group of elected individuals were the ones performing scrutiny. Such a process was not necessarily ineffective, but it was different from collective communal witnessing/hearing of governance that had been prominent in Lynn politics during the turbulent days of 1412–13.

Attempts to create an integrated approach, combining popular control with discrete deliberation, are apparent in the annual statement by the outgoing mayor of his accomplishments in government. On either August 29 (the day of the mayoral election) or Michaelmas (the day the new mayor took office), the outgoing mayor would appear before a congregatio generalis and make a statement about his time in office, asking the commons to forgive him any mistakes, as these were made from ignorance rather than malice.[112] It was a set text, written out in the vernacular in an otherwise Latin record. In 1425, the generic statement was accompanied by a lengthy document outlining the specific achievements of John Parmenter's two-year mayoralty.[113] Here was popular control: a performance of accountability, in which the mayor demonstrated to the populace that he was willing to have his actions audited by the community and that he was capable of following accepted modes of public conduct. The more substantive review of the mayor's time in office, though, occurred months later at a closed congregatio, where the jurats and common council reviewed records from the mayor's time in office, "considered with mature deliberation" the events of the past mayoralty, and decided if he should receive his customary £20 salary.[114]

Throughout the late 1410s and early 1420s, Lynn's burgesses continued to debate which aspects of governance should be performed in the open hall, indicating a degree of uncertainty about where the boundaries between "popular control" and "discrete deliberation" should lie. A case in point was a lengthy dispute in 1419 concerning accusations that former tax collectors John Shermon and Peter Campbell had embezzled funds. Shermon and Nicholas Franke (married to the widow of the now-deceased Campbell) were forced to "obey and submit themselves and stand by the ordinance and judgment of the noble Burgesses, the venerable Jurats of the town of Lynn, ... and the discrete Burgesses of the

common council."[115] Further inquiries into the matter were made principally in *congregationes* of the twenty-four jurats and common council, rather than before a *congregatio generalis*, and focused on questions of personal honor: at a July 26, 1419 *congregatio*, Shermon swore, "Sires if it may be founden þᵗ euer I resceyued peny, halpenny, or fferthing [of the foresaid fifteenth] I wil be shamed for euermore."[116] There was, however, some unease at the confinement of this matter to the council chamber. In determining whether Shermon and Campbell had, indeed, embezzled tax revenue, the twenty-four jurats and common council eventually decided that they wanted to wait to make a decision until Lynn's legal counsel arrived; they also stipulated that, since the matter pertained to the whole community, all burgesses should be summoned to hear the mayor discuss the issue with the town's lawyers.[117]

These concerns about the conduct of civic business away from the eyes of commons came to the fore in elections. Before 1412 and after 1416, the procedure for electing the mayor of Lynn involved the Alderman of the Holy Trinity Guild choosing four electors (who chose eight more electors to join them); the electors all swore their oaths before the *congregatio generalis* in the Hall, but then retreated to the council chamber to select the new mayor.[118] At the mayoral election of 1419, common councilor Geoffrey Bilneye stood up in the Hall and said "Sire we wold wyten be whate autorite or warent ӡe Clepe vp iiij persones to make our Meyre." He then "sought to see and hear the Charter of privileges and liberties granted to the Burgesses of Lynn by the lord King and his progenitors" to check that the electors were following correct procedure.[119] A similar situation arose in 1422, when it came time to elect a new jurat to replace the deceased Robert de Brunham. The mayor summoned a *congregatio priuata* of the remaining jurats only (with no common councilors present) to conduct the election. Jurat John Parmenter objected that vacancies among the twenty-four jurats should be filled only when the mayor and remaining jurats had "assembled before themselves other Burgesses of that town in the Guildhall."[120] Even councilors entitled to a "voice" thought that the legitimacy of elections might be compromised by the lack of an audience to witness crucial aspects of the process.

What the Lynn example shows is not a case of a town moving from less democracy to more democracy, or vice versa, but rather the extent to which urban political life centered on debates concerning the boundary between popular control and discrete deliberation. The former was characterized as a collective act of witnessing and hearing governance—an activity important for ensuring official transparency and accountability. The political turmoil experienced by Lynn in ca 1411–16 created an environment in which the *congregatio generalis* became one of the principal venues for routine governance. The post-1418 settlement reached by opposing parties in Lynn redrew those boundaries again, favoring the admittance of representatives of the commons to the group of "discrete" men who partook in secret deliberative *congregationes* at the expense of the public performance of government in *congregationes generales*. Such an approach should not be seen as inevitably sinister: in a period where the number of burgesses in Lynn increased, it was only practical that representative governance be put in place so that meetings could be conducted in a meaningful manner. Moreover, *congregationes* could meet more frequently than *congregationes generales* and allowed for the frank airing of opinions. Continuing debates and negotiations in the years after 1418 about which activities should take place behind closed doors and which before the full assembly of burgesses, though, demonstrate unease about the limited opportunities for "ocular democracy," even as the "voice" of the commons in deliberative governance increased. Both popular control and discrete deliberation needed to coexist and were not

necessarily opposing binaries, in much the same way that Clare Birchall has stressed that both "transparency" and "secrecy" are legitimate and inherently inter-related parts of twenty-first-century democracy rather than representing "good" and "bad" government, respectively.[121]

5. CONCLUSION

"Popular control," as I have outlined it, was a specific *kind* of politics. It was characterized by the right of non-officeholders (however hazily defined) to monitor their governors' management of resources that were deemed "common." In the case of a town, that could be "common lands," "common seals," "common chests," or "common ditches," to name only a few. This monitoring was collective and, crucially, enacted through seeing and hearing their leaders govern. Periodic and often ritualized occasions at which mayors, aldermen, and other municipal officials had to read out financial accounts, take oaths, or use the common seal forced these officers to follow sets of rules they had not devised and provided the "common" people with an opportunity to check that those who ruled them were willing and/or capable of completing these performances of accountability. Values of transparency, vigilance, and openness, however, stood alongside those of discretion, reason, and virtue. Men of proven character and rational judgment were the ones who deliberated and made decisions. Often, such discussions and decisions were defined by the fact that were not visible to the wider community but conducted behind closed doors and with members sworn to secrecy.

I am keen, though, not to overstress the opposition between "popular control" and "discrete deliberation." Stephen Rigby, Christian Liddy, and Peter Fleming have acknowledged a duality to urban politics, but tend to present it in binary terms: as a tension between a "descending" vision of government held by mayors and aldermen who viewed themselves as an elite whose power came from the king, and an "ascending" vision of government held by the commons who thought that urban officials derived their authority from their election by the community.[122] The example of fifteenth-century Lynn, though, demonstrates that conflict in towns was often not between two contrasting visions of government but instead about which aspects of government should be subject to "popular control" and which required "discrete deliberation." No one disputed that the right of the public to "see" and "hear" was crucial to the operation of any late medieval English town, but, equally, it was neither practical nor desirable that all aspects of government be open to scrutiny. "Popular control" was thus a bounded entity in urban politics that can be understood best when considered alongside other aspects of the political system. The stuff of politics was in determining where those boundaries lay.

****

More broadly speaking, the experiences of Lynn in the early fifteenth century demonstrate the inadequacy of "popular politics" as a label for political activity in later medieval Europe. As we have seen, both popular control and discrete deliberation could involve the "people," but in different ways and through different faculties. In the former, they were a largely mute audience to performances of official accountability and in the latter they were participants in informed discussion through representatives. There was considerable disagreement and negotiation not just about the *extent* of non-elite involvement in government but also about the *forms* it could take and the *ways* it could be channeled most effectively or most responsibly. Creating "popular control" as a subset of "popular politics" allows us to identify the

more nuanced aspects of the struggle to define what role "the people" should play in politics in an era when the relationship between people and the common weal pervaded political debate.

This variegated understanding of what "popular" political involvement might mean was apparent not just in the urban context of common assemblies and councils of aldermen, but also in high politics, as the leading statesmen of late medieval England attempted to conceptualize how the "people" fitted into the body politic of the realm. In his planned sermon to the 1483 parliament that never assembled (due to Richard III deposing his young nephew Edward V), Bishop Russell recognized both the commons as a collective and the "common voice" as elements of English government, but notably did not regard the former as the best vehicle for conveying the latter.[123] The commons, he wrote, should be at one remove from the encounters between the king and his lords spiritual and temporal. They were akin to the Jews who waited at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses and Aaron spoke with God, or to the plebeian tribunes of ancient Rome who "might not presume to entre withyn the courte of the Senatours." Like the tribunes, though, the commons of England "schulde ... have setes withoute to examine what were decried by the nobles."[124] Their fundamental role (both as the House of Commons in parliament and the broader "commons" of the realm) was to "herkene and attende uppon" the king and his lords: a scrutinizing audience, left outside the places where deliberation occurred.[125] The "common voice," Russell wrote, needed to be heard in a properly functioning government, but it was the nobility and not the commons who would channel it. The lords should seek out "turue and unfayned reportes" from the people of the realm and then make sure that their own advice to the king was informed by the "commyn voyce grownded in a resonable presydent." In contrast to the commons who harkened and examined, the lords spiritual and temporal would "speke with the prince" on behalf of the people, as Moses and Aaron "did with God mouthe to mouthe."[126]

Structures of the English parliament and urban governments in the fifteenth century were by no means the same, but Russell's comments are nevertheless pertinent to our discussion of "popular control" in fifteenth-century Lynn. As Russell's sermon shows, the inclusion of the "common voice" in political discussion was not something inherently connected to the rituals surrounding open and transparent government. The role of the commons was to view certain ritualized acts of governance as a collective, in a facet of politics I have termed "popular control"—a process that served as a check on the actions of those in power. For the commons to inform policy-making directly was a different matter entirely and one linked to a very different set of political principles, through granting a few individuals access to the enclosed councils of virtuous men who could judge wisely (as in the case of Lynn) or in giving the commons the opportunity to communicate with those "virtuous men" before they entered the council chamber (as Russell proposed). Whether popular involvement in politics was better served by rendering more and more aspects of government open to the commons' scrutiny or by creating channels for the commons to participate through representatives in discrete deliberations remained an open question. It was no wonder, in these circumstances, that the proliferation of councils in fifteenth-century Europe (whether urban, monarchical, or ecclesiastical) provoked such controversy. We see, perhaps, echoes of Lynn in the heated debates at the Council of Constance over the relationship between discussion at committees organized by "nation" versus the more ritualized general sessions, or the continuous renegotiation of the relationship between parliament and emergency royal councils (to cope with royal minorities, illness, or inadequacy) in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century England.[127]

****

Lastly, in recognizing the collective witnessing and hearing of government—popular control—as a distinctive component of "popular politics," it becomes possible to question the metaphors that dominate scholarly studies of late medieval politics and identify the cultural assumptions that lay behind those metaphors. Histories of popular politics in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe have fixated on "voice." The 2014 volume *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe* argues explicitly that verbal interventions of non-elites in politics (whether through speech acts or texts) demonstrated the agency of these individuals—that they could participate in politics directly and openly, and did not need to use the covert "weapons of the weak" employed by James C. Scott's Malaysian peasants.[128] Vincent Challet and Ian Forrest's chapter on "the masses" in late medieval French and English government sets out to examine those who "did not have an institutional or official voice" and identify the alternative "voices" (judicial, prophetic, emotional) through which they could "speak" to those in power.[129] These works and others in the same vein have been fundamental in making historians take artisans, peasants, and laborers seriously as political agents.[130] In "popular control," though, we see another side to the coin. Popular pressure on individuals in power could be exerted simply by their presence—by hearing and seeing, rather than by speaking. Occasions on which the "commons" were brought in to observe processes of government and ensure it followed customary procedures constituted a different kind of political agency, one that set limits on what rulers could and could not do. "Popular control" was not necessarily a lesser form of popular politics than that manifested through speech; indeed, in many ways it brought a more consistent pressure to bear on those in power. To comprehend the full array of modes through which political influence could be exercised, we need to change the way we write about pre-modern politics. Popular "eyes" and "ears" were as significant as popular "voices." Those below the ruling elite affected the exercise of power not just by "speaking" to it, but by "seeing" and "hearing" it, too.

The issue was not that collective witnessing was a weak means of popular politics but that it was an inherently incomplete one; the deliberative aspects of government needed to be kept secret and so could not be left open to the eyes and ears of those who did not hold office.[131] Attempts to include representatives of the common "voice" in the discussions occurring in council chambers was one potential solution, but, as we have seen with Lynn, such efforts sometimes came at the expense of "popular control" and the rituals of collective witnessing that formed a crucial aspect to it. The vocal protests and seditious speech that so characterized fifteenth-century European marketplaces, taverns, and homes bear testimony to an active "public sphere," but perhaps also indicate frustration as more aspects of government in towns and principalities were conducted in councils, by expert civil servants, or at princely courts—venues where "popular control" through collective witnessing and hearing was less possible or less appropriate.[132] Popular voices were everywhere in late fifteenth-century politics, but popular control was not.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ENDNOTES

1. John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 2009), esp. Conclusion; Wim Blockmans, André Holenstein, and Jon Mathieu, eds, *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900* (Farnham, 2009). The degree to which a "state-building from below" approach to the later Middle Ages has been recognized as a key meta-narrative in medieval history is apparent from Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 2016), Chapter 12.

2. Christopher Dyer, "The Ineffectiveness of Lordship in England, 1200-1400," *Past & Present* special issue (2007): 69-86; Jean Birrell, "Manorial Custumals Reconsidered," *Past & Present* 224 (2014): 3-37.

3. Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423* (Ithaca, 2003); Bronach C. Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England: Men, Women, and Testimony in the Church Courts, c. 1200-1500* (Woodbridge, 2019); and, more broadly, Bronach Kane and Fiona Williamson, eds, *Women, Agency and the Law, 1300-1700* (London, 2013).

4. Just a few examples of literature in this vein: Eliza Hartrich, "Civic Rituals and Disciplined Dissent in Late Medieval England" in *Disciplined Dissent in Western Europe, 1200-1600: Political Action between Submission and Defiance*, ed. Fabrizio Titone (Turnhout, 2022), 223-246; Christian D. Liddy, "Who Decides? Urban Councils and Consensus in the Late Middle Ages," *Social History* 46 (2021): 406-434; Ben Eersels and Jelle Haemers, eds, *Words and Deeds: Shaping Urban Politics from below in Late Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2020); Fabrizio Titone, "Developing Strategies of Protest in Late Medieval Sicily" in *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, ed. Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers (Abingdon, 2017), 292-310; Christian D. Liddy, *Contesting the City: The Politics of Citizenship in English Towns, 1250-1530* (Oxford, 2017); Jesús A. Solórzano Telechea, "The Politics of the Urban Commons in Northern Atlantic Spain in the Later Middle Ages," *Urban History* 41 (2014): 183-203; Christian D. Liddy and Jelle Haemers, "Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City: York and Bruges," *English Historical Review* 128 (2013): 771-805.

5. Christopher Fletcher, "News, Noise, and the Nature of Politics in Late Medieval English Provincial Towns," *Journal of British Studies* 56 (2017): 250-272.

6. A point stressed, for example, in Christian D. Liddy, "Cultures of Surveillance in Late Medieval English Towns: The Monitoring of Speech and the Fear of Revolt" in *Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, 311-329 at 314-315, 321-324; Fletcher, "News, Noise," 254-255; Peter Fleming, "Telling Tales of Oligarchy in the Late Medieval Town" in *The Fifteenth Century II: Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Woodbridge, 2001), 177-193 at 178.

7. This discussion of civic accountability draws from Eliza Hartrich, "The Politics of Record-Keeping in Fifteenth-Century English Towns" in *Words and Deeds*, 195-212 at 199-201, as well as Liddy and Haemers, "Popular Politics," 793-794, 796-800.

8. John Watts, "Public or Plebs: The Changing Meaning of 'The Commons,' 1381-1549" in *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies*, ed. Huw Pryce and John Watts (Oxford, 2007), 242-260; Claire Hawes, "The Urban Community in Fifteenth-Century Scotland: Language, Law and Political Practice," *Urban History* 44 (2017): 365-380.

9. See Hawes, "Urban Community," 373-375, who makes this point with regards to fifteenth-century Aberdeen.

10. For oath-taking on admission to the freedom, see James Lee, "'Ye Shall Disturbe Noe Mans Right': Oath-Taking and Oath-Breaking in Late Medieval and Early Modern Bristol," *Urban History* 34 (2007): 27-38 at 31; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 25-30.

11. For Exeter, see Maryanne Kowaleski, "The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century" in *The English Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1200-1540*, ed. Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser (London, 1990), 184-215 at 185-190. For York, see R.B. Dobson, "Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 26 (1973): 1-22; Jennifer I. Leggett, "The 1377 Poll Tax Return for the City of York," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 43 (1971): 128-146 at 130.

12. Sarah Rees Jones, "Women and Citizenship in Later Medieval York" in *The Routledge History Handbook of Gender and the Urban Experience*, ed. Deborah Simonton (London, 2017), 169-181.

13. Hartrich, "Politics of Record-Keeping," 204.

14. Following the definition of "commons" used in Hartrich, "Politics of Record-Keeping," 198-206, and in Liddy and Haemers, "Popular Politics," 771-805.

15. Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 88-90. For common horns and the Cinque Ports, see Sheila Sweetinburgh, "Mayor-Making and Other Ceremonies: Shared Uses of Sacred Space among the Kentish Cinque Ports" in *The Use and Abuse of Sacred Places in Late Medieval Towns*, ed. Paul Trio and Marjan De Smet (Leuven, 2006), 165-187 at 170-171. For Sandwich, see, e.g., Kent History and Library Centre [hereafter KHLC], Maidstone, Sa/AC 1, Old Black Book of Sandwich, fol. 204r (an account of events at "a horne blowing holdyn here at Sandewiche" on February 10, 1472).

16. Good recent discussions of oaths of office in late medieval English towns include: Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 112-121; Lee, "Ye Shall Disturbe Noe Mans Right", 27-38; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Ceremony and Civility: Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Oxford, 2017), 4-7, 62-64; and Esther Liberman Cuenca, "Oath-Taking and the Politics of Secrecy in Medieval and Early Modern British Towns," *Continuity and Change* 38 (2023): 9-29.

17. Norfolk Record Office [hereafter NRO], Norwich, Y/C 18/1, Great Yarmouth Book of Oaths and Ordinances, 1491-1683, fol. 2r.

18. See, e.g., KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fols. 133r, 206r.

19. Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 145, 165-205.

20. *Rotuli Parliamentorum 1278-1503* [hereafter *RP*] (6 vols, London, 1832), v, 127.

21. NRO, Y/C 18/1, fol. 30r.

22. KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 131v.

23. KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 170r, discussed in Eliza Hartrich, *Politics and the Urban Sector in Fifteenth-Century England, 1413-1471* (Oxford, 2019), 219-220.

24. For instance, see below, n. 112.

25. May McKisack, *The Parliamentary Representation of the English Boroughs during the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1932), 133-145, and Hartrich, *Politics and the Urban Sector*, 37-39, 51-52.

26. McKisack, *Parliamentary Representation*, 140-144.

27. For MPs' wages in Lynn, see McKisack, *Parliamentary Representation*, 89-91. For the example of a £50 tax levied in 1423 on the citizens of Lynn to fund MPs' expenses, see King's Lynn Borough Archives [hereafter KLBA], King's Lynn, KL/C 7/2, Hall Book 1422-1429 and 1451, 58-59.

28. Christian D. Liddy, "Urban Enclosure Riots: Risings of the Commons in English Towns, 1480-1525," *Past & Present* 226 (2015): 41-77; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 51-85.

29. Christian D. Liddy, "'Bee war of gyle in borugh.' Taxation and Political Discourse in Late Medieval English Towns" in *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14ᵗʰ-17ᵗʰ Centuries*, ed. Andrea Gamberini, Jean-Philippe Genet, and Andrea Zorzi (Rome, 2011), 461-485.

30. Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 120; Hartrich, "Politics of Record-Keeping," 200.

31. *The Records of the City of Norwich* [hereafter *RCN*], ed. William Hudson and John Cottingham Tingey (2 vols, Norwich, 1906-10), i, 73-74.

32. For background, see Ben R. McRee, "Peacemaking and its Limits in Late Medieval Norwich," *English Historical Review* 109 (1994): 831-866 at 835-853.

33. *RCN*, i, 104; see also Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 197-199. For a detailed description of Norwich accounting procedures in the fifteenth century, see Carole Rawcliffe, ed., *The Norwich Chamberlains' Accounts 1539-40 to 1544-45* (Norfolk Rec. Soc., 83, 2019), 9-11.

34. *RCN*, i, 104; *RP*, v, 127.

35. I am indebted to Susan Maddock for this point.

36. María Ángeles Martín Romera, "Popolo and *Sindacato* in the City of Siena: Rethinking Popular Agency in Medieval Italy," *Journal of Social History* 56 (2022): 265-293, and "Accountable to the Community? Medieval Officials in Castile: The Perspective from Below," *Journal of Medieval History* 46 (2020): 552-571.

37. Eliza Hartrich, "Rebellion and the Law in Fifteenth-Century English Towns" in *Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, 189-207 at 195-200.

38. *RP*, v, 122.

39. For examples, see above, nn. 17-18, 20-21, and below, n. 112.

40. There is evidence of the existence of a common council from as early as 1434, when contributions towards a £60 loan to the king were divided between the "sixty people" (*inter sexaginta personas*) and the mayor and jurats: KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 16v. A representative assembly of sixty was formally established only in 1454, however: KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 96v.

41. The first entry in English is KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 85v.

42. See, e.g., KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fols. 87v (1452 ordinance requiring all those who rented lands or tenements from the town to present evidence of their tenure); 97v (oath of jurats); 105r-105v (1458 ordinances requiring payment of all unpaid rents due from previous year); 131r (1465 allowance made on chamberlain's accounts); 131v (1465 ordinance forbidding mayor from breaking acts made by common seal or at a common assembly); 133r (chamberlain's oath); 164v (1471 tax assessments); 188v (1470 ordinance made at common assembly forbidding erection of kiddles); 199r (1471 subsidy granted for Queen Margaret of Anjou's journey to England); 199v (1471 allowance of MPs' expenses on chamberlain's account); 206r (common councilor's oath).

43. KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 193r. See also Hartrich, "Politics of Record-Keeping," 202.

44. Though note the less politicized explanations for "code-switching" between Latin and the vernacular in late medieval Scottish urban records: Joanna Kopaczyk, "The Language of Medieval Legal Record as a Complex Multilingual Code" in *Cultures of Law in Urban Northern Europe: Scotland and its Neighbours c. 1350-c. 1650*, ed. Jackson W. Armstrong and Edda Frankot (London, 2021), 58-79; Anna D. Havinga, "The Vernacularisation of the Aberdeen Council Registers (1398-1511)" in *Cultures of Law*, 80-102.

45. Jeffrey Edward Green, *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship* (Oxford, 2009), 4.

46. Summarized in Green, *Eyes of the People*, Chapter 1.

47. Alan Finlayson, "'What is the Point of Parliamentary Debate?' Deliberation, Oratory, Opposition and Spectacle in the British House of Commons," *Redescriptions* 20 (2017): 11-31.

48. For urban councils and decision-making, see Liddy, "Who Decides?," 421.

49. As discussed by Pablo Gonzalez Martin, "Popular Politics and Political Transformation in Burgos, 1345-1426" in *Words and Deeds*, 53-71.

50. For the role of virtue in urban governance, see Susan Reynolds, "Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought," *Urban History Yearbook* 9 (1982): 14-23. For the claim that emphasis on the virtue of officials fundamentally bolstered elite power, see Fleming, "Telling Tales," 177-193.

51. See discussion in Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 134-135.

52. *RP*, v, 121.

53. NRO, Y/C 18/1, fols. 2v, 26v.

54. For examples, see "discret and discrete," *Middle English Compendium*: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED11881/track?counter=1&search_id=24277834.

55. "discreet, adj., n., and adv.," *OED Online*. March 2023. Oxford University Press: https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54025? (accessed May 16, 2023).

56. John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M.C. Seymour (2 vols, Oxford, 1975), i, 61.

57. Trevisa, *On the Properties*, i, 62.

58. Kate Giles, "Public Space in Town and Village 1100-1500" in *Town and Country in the Middle Ages: Contrasts, Contacts and Interconnections, 1100-1500*, ed. Kate Giles and Christopher Dyer (Leeds, 2005), 293-312 at 299; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 144.

59. David Bowsher, Tony Dyson, Nick Holder and Isca Howell, eds, *The London Guildhall: An Archaeological History of a Neighbourhood from Early Medieval to Modern Times* (2 vols, Museum of London Archaeology Service, 36, 2007), i, 21, 66, 137.

60. For the Court of Husting, see Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2004), 128-129.

61. Bowsher et al., eds, *London Guildhall*, i, 137-143; Caroline M. Barron, *The Medieval Guildhall of London* (Corporation of London, 1974), 22.

62. Bowsher et al., eds, *London Guildhall*, i, 181-214.

63. Robert Tittler, *Architecture and Power: The Town Hall and the English Urban Community c. 1500-1640* (Oxford, 1991), 33-34, 37, 112.

64. For the problems with applying "public" and "private" dynamics to medieval spaces, see Shannon McSheffrey, "Place, Space, and Situation: Public and Private in the Making of Marriage in Late-Medieval London," *Speculum* 79 (2004): 960-990.

65. Hartrich, "Politics of Record-Keeping," 206-212.

66. This example is from the common councilor's oath in Sandwich: KHLC, Sa/AC 1, fol. 206r. For the importance of secrecy in municipal oaths of office, see Liberman Cuenca, "Oath-taking," 11-19, 24-25.

67. NRO, Y/C 18/1, fol. 28r.

68. *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris (4 vols in 1, Early English Text Society, Old Series, 134, 135, 138, 146, 1907-13), 516-517; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, 153.

69. Hull History Centre [hereafter HHC], Hull, C BRE/1/2, fol. 14r.

70. Liddy, "Who Decides?," 429.

71. London Metropolitan Archives, COL/CC/01/01/002, Common Council Journal, ii, fol. 93v; Hartrich, *Politics and the Urban Sector*, 64.

72. Caroline M. Barron, "Ralph Holland and the London Radicals, 1438-1444" in *English Medieval Town*, 160-183 at 179.

73. *RCN*, i, 109-110.

74. HHC, C BRE/1/2, fols. 21v-22r; Hartrich, *Politics and the Urban Sector*, 119-120.

75. HHC, C BRE/1/2, fol. 13r.

76. John Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability in Medieval England 1170-1300* (Oxford, 2014), 259-260.

77. Ian Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church* (Princeton, 2018), Chapter 10, makes a similar argument with regards to jurors in the medieval English Church.

78. Fleming, "Telling Tales," 181-182.

79. For Sandwich, see above, n. 40. For Norwich, see *RCN*, i, 98-101.

80. Sofia Gustafsson, "The Introduction of Large Councils in Late Medieval Towns: The Example of Stockholm" in *Words and Deeds*, 73-87. See also Stephen Rigby, "Urban 'Oligarchy' in Late Medieval England" in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. John A.F. Thomson (Gloucester, 1988), 62-86 at 72.

81. For Lynn's 1377 population, see Alan Dyer, "Appendix: Ranking Lists of English Medieval Towns" in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. I: 600-1540*, ed. D.M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 747-770 at 758. For the jurisdictional relationship between the bishop of Norwich and Lynn, see L. S. Woodger, "Bishop's Lynn" in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386-1421*, ed. J. S. Roskell, Linda Clark, and Carole Rawcliffe (3 vols, Woodbridge, 1993), and Matthew Phillips, "Urban Conflict and Legal Strategy in Medieval England: The Case of Bishop's Lynn, 1346-50," *Urban History* 42 (2015): 365-380.

82. For the Holy Trinity Guild, see Katharine M. Parker, "Lordship, Liberty and the Pursuit of Politics in Lynn, 1370-1420" (Unpublished University of East Anglia PhD thesis, 2004), 46-56; Kate Parker, "A Little Local Difficulty: Lynn and the Lancastrian Usurpation" in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 2005), 115-129 at 119; Kate Parker, "Politics and Patronage in Lynn, 1399-1416" in *The Reign of Henry IV: Rebellion and Survival, 1403-1413*, ed. Gwilym Dodd and Douglas Biggs (York, 2008), 210-227 at 211-212.

83. Detailed discussion of this period in Lynn's history can be found in Michael D. Myers, "The Failure of Conflict Resolution and the Limits of Arbitration in King's Lynn, 1405-16" in *Traditions and Transformations in Late Medieval England*, ed. Douglas Biggs, Sharon D. Michalove, and A. Compton Reeves (Leiden, 2002), 81-107; Parker, "Lordship, Liberty," Chapter 5; Parker, "A Little Local Difficulty," 115-129; Parker, "Politics and Patronage," 210-227.

84. Alice Stopford Green, *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century* (2 vols, London, 1894), ii, 402-426; Rigby, "Urban Oligarchy," 68-69.

85. e.g., Parker, "Politics and Patronage," 220-221.

86. Thanks again to Susan Maddock for her insights on Lynn politics in the fifteenth century, and for kindly discussing her prosopography of Lynn political actors with me.

87. KLBA, KL/C 6/1-2.

88. The most famous being William Asshebourne's Book: KLBA, KL/C 10/2, with calendar in A.E.B. Owen and D. M. Owen, eds, "William Asshebourne's Book: King's Lynn Corporation Archives 10/2," *Norfolk Record Society* 48 (1981): 55-120.

89. KLBA, KL/C 6/3. Meetings described as *congregatio generalis* occurred on August 29, 1412 (rot. 1r); September 26, 1412 (rot. 1v); October 10, 1412 (rot. 2r); December 10, 1412 (rot. 2v); December 12, 1412 (rot. 6r); December 14, 1412 (rot. 6v); December 19, 1412 (rot. 7r); December 24, 1412 (rot. 7v); January 26, 1413 (rot. 9r); April 10, 1413 (rot. 11r); May 31, 1413 (rot. 13r); June 20, 1413 (rot. 13r); June 28, 1413 (rot. 13r); July 3, 1413 (rot. 13v); August 21, 1413 (rot. 14v); and August 29, 1413 (rot. 16r). Two additional meetings (undated on rot. 2v and

December 10, 1412 on rot. 6r) have naming and dating clauses faded to the point of illegibility, but may also be *congregationes generales*. I have included these two meetings in the total number of meetings for 1412-13, but have not classified them in any of the three categories.

90. It is worth noting that, while the use of the term *congregatio generalis* is a good indication of an event when all burgesses were summoned to the Guildhall, the Hall Rolls and Books are not entirely consistent in their vocabulary about meetings. Note, for instance, the meeting on September 29, 1419 labeled as a *congregatio* despite having the attendance and performativity typical of a *congregatio generalis*: KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 22r. There is also some ambiguity in the use of the term *congregatio priuata*. A *congregatio priuata* typically referred to a meeting of the mayor and twenty-four jurats only, but could also be used for any meeting that pertained to a specific sub-section of the Lynn community, rather than to the burgesses as a whole. Note, for instance, the classification as *congregationes priuatae* of meetings of specific wards in 1424-1425 (e.g., KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 27, 42-43); the term was also used to describe meetings in which the mayor summoned merchants for consultation about specific commercial matters (e.g., KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 3).

91. For an estimate of Lynn's population, see Dyer, "Appendix: Ranking Lists," 758-760.

92. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 13v: "alijs Burgensibus et non Burgensibus ad numerum iiij[xx] personarum hic non scriptum pro eo quod steterunt ita dense quod apprehendere non poterant."

93. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 1v: "retulit Noua."

94. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 2r.

95. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 13r: "habent diem ad declarandum actus parliamenti vltimi et noua nobis dicere." The section on MPs' expenses is as follows: "et similiter dicit quod oportet assessares colligere et leuare expenses Burgensium parliamenti [insertion: infra breue] ad quod factum contributores debent esse quilibet secundum facultates suas [insertion: contribuere] et ideo non [insertion: est] negandum eis hac die introitum hic."

96. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 13r: "de punctu in punctum a principio vsque ad finem." See also McKisack, *Parliamentary Representation*, 140-141.

97. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 13r.

98. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 13v.

99. KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rot. 13v.

100. KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 29-33; Susan Maddock, "Society, Status and the Leet Court in Margery Kempe's Lynn" in *Town Courts and Urban Society in Late Medieval England, 1250-1500*, ed. Richard Goddard and Teresa Phipps (Woodbridge, 2019), 200-219 at 211-213.

101. See, esp., KLBA, KL/C 6/3, rots. 6r, 8r, 14r.

102. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 16r: "communi consilio non est actum eo quod non sunt premuniti." Note, also, an earlier meeting on the same membrane which records "nihil hic de communi consilio qui non sunt premuniti."

103. Calculated from KLBA, KL/C 6/4-6.

104. See KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 17 (December 24, 1423); 50 (August 29, 1425); 57 (March 4, 1423); 86 (August 29, 1423); 91-92 (September 29, 1424).

105. Gonzalez Martin, "Popular Politics," 53-71; François Otchakovsky-Laurens, "The Universitas Massilie, an Assembly of the Whole City? Power Struggles and Social Tensions in Marseille during the 14th Century" in *Words and Deeds*, 33-51.

106. See, e.g., KLBA, KL/C 6/6, rot. 7v (March 4, 1422 *congregatio* with use of common seal); rot. 8r (February 7, 1422 *congregatio* forgiving debt owed by common councilor John Brekeropper); rot. 13v (July 10, 1422 *congregatio* for scrutiny of accounts and identification of those who had not paid taxes towards Henry V's recent visit); KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 6 (October 25, 1423 *congregatio* on rent arrears).

107. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 5r: "de discretis Burgensibus venerabilibus."

108. KLBA, KL/C 6/5, rot. 4v: "fecerit relacionem rumores vel quouusmodo discoopererint aliquod consilium in Gildhalda locutum alicui nisi et preter socijs suis de eodem statu quo idem est."

109. KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 108.

110. KLBA, KL/C 6/6, rot. 3r.

111. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 10v.

112. See, e.g., KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rots. 1r, 22r; 6/5, rot. 2r; 6/6, rot. 1r; 7/2, 50.

113. KLBA, KL/C 7/2, 53.

114. KLBA, KL/C 6/5, rot. 13v (June 9, 1421): "cum matura deliberatione considerarunt." See also the *congregatio* in KL/C 7/2, 35 (February 16, 1425).
115. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 5r: "obedire ac se submittere et stare ordinationi et iudicio nobilium Burgensium venerabilis Jurati ville Lenn. . .et discretorum Burgensium communis consilij."
116. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 18r.
117. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 18r.
118. Both forms of election are described in detail in the June 2, 1416 letters patent revoking the new election ordinances of 1412, which is calendared in *Historical Manuscripts Commission, 11ᵗʰ Report, Appendix Part III: The Manuscripts of the Corporations of Southampton and King's Lynn* (HMSO, 1887), 195-203.
119. KLBA, KL/C 6/4, rot. 20v: "petit visum et auditum Carte priuilegium et libertatum Burgensibus Lenn per dominum Regem et progenitores suos concessae."
120. KLBA, KL/C 6/6, rot. 10r: "congregates sibi prius ceteris Burgensibus ville illius in Gildhalda."
121. See, e.g., Clare Birchall, "Introduction to 'Secrecy and Transparency': The Politics of Opacity and Openness," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28 (2011): 7-25; Birchall, *Radical Secrecy: The Ends of Transparency in Datafied America* (Minneapolis, 2021).
122. Rigby, "Urban Oligarchy," 62-86; Fleming, "Telling Tales," 177-193; Liddy, *Contesting the City*, esp. 36-40, 216-218. For the "ascending" and "descending" theories of government, see Walter Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages* (Routledge Revivals edn, Abingdon, 2010), 1-5.
123. The sermon draft is printed in S.B. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1936), 168-178, and discussed in John Watts, "The Policie in Christen Remes: Bishop Russell's Parliamentary Sermons of 1483-84" in *Authority and Consent in Tudor England: Essays Presented to C.S.L. Davies*, ed. G.W. Bernard and S.J. Gunn (Farnham, 2002), 33-59.
124. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas*, 173-174.
125. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas*, 175.
126. Chrimes, *English Constitutional Ideas*, 171.
127. Alexander Russell, *Conciliarism and Heresy in Fifteenth-Century England: Collective Authority in the Age of the General Councils* (Cambridge, 2017), Chapters 3, 5; John Watts, "Counsel and the King's Council in England, c. 1340-c. 1540" in *The Politics of Counsel in England and Scotland 1286-1707*, ed. Jacqueline Rose (Proceedings of the British Academy, 204, 2016), 63-85; Eliza Hartrich, "Locality, Polity and the Politics of Counsel: Royal and Urban Councils in England, 1420-1429" in *Politics of Counsel*, 101-116; J.L. Watts, "The Counsels of King Henry VI, c. 1435-1445," *English Historical Review* 106 (1991): 279-298.
128. *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe: Communication and Popular Politics*, ed. Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrer, and Vincent Challet (Turnhout, 2014), esp. the introduction "Medieval Voices and Popular Politics," but pervading the volume as a whole.
129. Vincent Challet and Ian Forrest, "The Masses" in *Government and Political Life in England and France, c. 1300-c. 1500*, ed. Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Philippe Genet, and John Watts (Cambridge, 2015), 279-316.
130. See above, nn. 2-4, and below, n. 132, as well as John Watts, "The Pressure of the Public on Later Medieval English Politics" in *The Fifteenth Century IV: Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Linda Clark and Christine Carpenter (Woodbridge, 2004), 159-180.
131. A point made in Watts, "Pressure of the Public," 175-176.
132. For developments in fifteenth-century governments, see Watts, *Making of Polities*, 403-409, 419. For seditious speech and "voice" in fifteenth-century politics, see esp. Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, "'A Bad Chicken was Brooding': Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders," *Past & Present* 214 (2012): 45-86; Christian D. Liddy, "'Sir Ye Be Not Kyng': Citizenship and Speech in Late Medieval and Early Modern England," *The Historical Journal* 60 (2017): 571-596; and Sarah Rees Jones, "Emotions, Speech, and the Art of Politics in Fifteenth-Century York: House Books, Mystery Plays and Richard Duke of Gloucester," *Urban History* 44 (2017): 586-603.