

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

# Mutualities and Obligations: Changing Social Relationships in Early Modern England

KEITH WRIGHTSON

*Fellow of the Academy*

## I

‘THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL OF ALL BONDS in medieval society’, wrote Michael Clanchy in 1983, ‘was that of mutual obligation.’<sup>1</sup> Such bonds—among the members of families and households, between kinsfolk, lords and tenants, neighbours, or the brothers and sisters of guilds and fraternities—are conventionally taken to have provided both the templates of social relations and the coordinates of social identity in medieval society. They located people. They inculcated values and established expectations. They were a source of order and of meaning in individual lives.

Historians of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society are no less aware of the importance of such relationships. As Bernard Capp recently put it: ‘Early modern conceptions of social order were rooted in the principle of reciprocal obligations.’<sup>2</sup> And yet, if there is a broad consensus that such relationships continued to provide much of the ‘connective

Read at the Academy 22 November and at Newcastle upon Tyne 24 November 2005.

<sup>1</sup> M. Clanchy, ‘Law and Love in the Middle Ages’, in J. Bossy (ed.), *Disputes and Settlements. Law and Human Relations in the West* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet. Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 131.

tissue<sup>3</sup> of early modern society, it is one that is somewhat at odds with, and remains under the shadow of, an older interpretative tradition. In that tradition, which held sway for roughly a century prior to the 1970s, such social bonds were represented as undergoing fundamental change from at least the sixteenth century; fraying, eroding, sometimes dissolving.

This process was sometimes described elegiacally as one of declension, sometimes celebrated as one of emancipation. Whichever the case, it was closely linked to the notion of the ‘rise of individualism’, that cultural prime mover which was held to encapsulate much of what was ‘modern’ about the ‘early modern’ period. Thus, to W. J. Ashley, the social bonds and cultural constraints that underpinned the medieval economic system were ‘broken down . . . by the sheer force of individual self-interest’ in the sixteenth century. A generation later, Ephraim Lipson characterised the succeeding ‘Age of Mercantilism’ as ‘a battleground’ in which ‘an insurgent individualism’ gradually overthrew ‘the cramping restrictions of a communal society’, and instituted ‘the new England which rose up on the ruins of the old order’.<sup>4</sup>

These quotations from two of the leading university textbooks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contain the essence of the old master narrative of the social history of early modern England. As will be evident, it was a narrative of modernisation. Its creators addressed, in the specifics of English economic and social development, the broader preoccupation of the emergent social sciences with the making of the modern world, and in particular the problem of how individual human agency is either constrained or enabled by successive systems of social, economic and political organisation.<sup>5</sup> Their primary concern

<sup>3</sup> The metaphor is borrowed from S. Ottaway, ‘Introduction: Authority, Autonomy and Responsibility Among the Aged in the Pre-Industrial Past’, in S. Ottaway, L. A. Botelho, and K. Kittredge (eds.), *Power and Poverty. Old Age in the Pre-Industrial Past* (Westport, CT, and London, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Ashley, *An Introduction to English Economic History and Theory. Part 2. The End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1893), p. 49; E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England, Vol II: The Age of Mercantilism*, 6th edn. (London, 1956), pp. ii, ix, xii, lxxiv.

<sup>5</sup> For the broader intellectual context within which this interpretation was formulated, see R. M. Smith, ‘“Modernization” and the Corporate Medieval Village Community in England: some Sceptical Reflections’, in A. R. H. Baker and D. Gregory (eds.), *Explorations in Historical Geography* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 150–5, and M. Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self. Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 16–17. The specific contribution of the English Historical Economists is examined in G. M. Koot, *English Historical Economics, 1870–1926. The Rise of Economic History and Neo-Mercantilism* (Cambridge, 1987). Their hostility to the prevailing dogmas of political economy and a timeless

was with economic change, but they traced its roots in a manner that demonstrated their sharp awareness of what would later be termed the social and cultural ‘embeddedness’ of economic practices. William Cunningham, for example, was centrally concerned with how ‘medieval economy with its constant regard to the relations of persons was giving place to modern economy which treats the exchange of things as fundamental’. Such a shift could not be understood without attention to changes in such social institutions as the guild and manor, in communal morality and personal relationships, and in the fundamental principles of social structuring, as men gradually came to ‘arrange themselves according to the things they own and exchange’. It was a complex and subtle vision of how ‘medieval life was breaking up and modern society was slowly rising on its ruins’.<sup>6</sup>

This vision, further elaborated in the earlier twentieth century, still held its place in the 1960s and early 1970s, when it was briefly reinvigorated by some of the pioneering works of the ‘new social history’ of early modern England. Christopher Hill described how ‘during the seventeenth century modern English society . . . began to take shape’, attributing both economic and religious change to ‘the rise of a spirit of individualism’ which subjected a range of traditional communities to an ‘atomizing process’.<sup>7</sup> In his analysis of witchcraft cases, Keith Thomas found evidence of ‘the breakdown of the tradition of mutual help upon which many English village communities had been based’, and of ‘the essential conflict between neighbourliness and individualism which generated the tensions from which the accusations of witchcraft were most likely to arise’.<sup>8</sup> In yet another context Lawrence Stone depicted a complex

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conception of ‘economic man’ was central to their conception of medieval society and to their preoccupation with the emergence and naturalisation of economic individualism. For an illuminating discussion of the views of Alfred Marshall, whose concern to emancipate economics from history distanced him from the Historical Economists, but who shared their perception of the pre-modern era as one witnessing the gradual evolution of institutions and attitudes more conducive to economic freedom, see R. C. O. Matthews and B. Supple, ‘The Ordeal of Economic Freedom: Marshall on Economic History’, *Quaderni di storia dell' economica politica*, 9 (1991).

<sup>6</sup> W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce during the Early and Middle Ages*, 5th edn. (Cambridge, 1910), pp. 464, 465–7, 489, 550.

<sup>7</sup> C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (London, 1961), pp. 1, 307; C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, Panther edn., 1964), esp. ch. 14, quoting pp. 469, 471.

<sup>8</sup> K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1971), p. 555 (cf. pp. 556, 561). Alan Macfarlane similarly interpreted witchcraft prosecutions as ‘a means of effecting a deep social change; a change from a “neighbourly”, highly integrated and mutually interdependent village society to a more

transformation of familial and kinship relations from the dissolution of the solidarities of the Open Lineage Family characteristic of the sixteenth and earlier centuries, to the emergence of the Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family produced by the ‘rise of Affective Individualism’, that ‘extraordinary change in attitudes towards the individual and towards emotion that occurred between 1660 and 1800’.<sup>9</sup>

In the late 1970s, then, the interpretative tradition positing the erosion of traditional bonds of mutual obligation as a central feature of modernisation, was not only still in being, but continued to exert an influence on the proponents of an expanded social history. Then suddenly, it faltered, and within a few years it had become virtually the interpretation that dare not speak its name, ‘no longer sustainable’ in the judgement of one recent student of social relations.<sup>10</sup> Why?

The most important general reason was certainly what has been termed the ‘demythologising’ impact of the new social history upon received assumptions concerning the nature of ‘traditional’ society.<sup>11</sup> Closer scrutiny of the recoverable actualities of the ‘pre-modern’ world resulted in a collision between prior theoretical expectations and accumulating empirical evidence. As more than one historical sociologist has pointed out, the ‘pivotal dichotomies’ of modernisation theories, their persistent then/now ‘contrasts of type’, and unidirectional ‘theories of tendency’ have all been called into question.<sup>12</sup> But for students of early modern England the suddenness of the collapse of confidence in the established narrative of social change also had a more immediate cause. Lawrence Stone’s massive intervention in the history of the family—then the most active area of the subject—galvanised such concerns. The ensuing furore not only demolished Stone’s attempt at an authoritative history of family relationships, but also undermined the credibility of the inter-

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individualistic one’: A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. A Regional and Comparative Study*, 2nd edn. (London, 1999, (1970)), p. 197.

<sup>9</sup> L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1977), pp. 4–7, 118–19 and *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> I. Krausman Ben-Amos, ‘Gifts and Favors: Informal Support in Early Modern England’, *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), 295–6.

<sup>11</sup> On demythologising, see e.g. M. Anderson, ‘The Relevance of Family History’, in M. Anderson (ed.), *Sociology of the Family: Selected Readings*, 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 39; M. Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family*, trans. J. C. Whitehouse and S. Matthews (Cambridge, 1986), p. 5; T. K. Hareven, ‘The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change’, *American Historical Review*, 96 (1991), 95.

<sup>12</sup> M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Vol I: A History of Power From the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 31; P. Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Shepton Mallet, 1982), p. 20.

pretative model that underlay it.<sup>13</sup> And seeds of doubt blown before the storm over the family were soon taking root throughout the subject.

None of this has had much impact on theorists of modernity who can continue to pronounce confidently on the nature of the pre-modern world because they have never studied it. But it had a profound effect on historians of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. And the basic pattern has been repeated in virtually every new area of the subject opened up in the last twenty-five years. In the emergent histories of women's subordination, of the development of 'civility', of masculinity, of the emotions, or of ageing, linear narratives of modernisation have aroused interest, inspired research, and provided an initial interpretative momentum, only to be subsequently dismasted by a growing sense of the complexity, the diversity, and sometimes the sheer familiarity of the 'pre-modern' past.<sup>14</sup>

This leaves us with a problem. The new social history was launched in the 1960s in the hope of providing a more rigorous *history* of social relationships. It was centrally concerned not only with broadening the historical agenda, but also with processes of change over time. The first part of that project has succeeded admirably. Yet at the same time it is widely acknowledged that we have stumbled over the question of change. Pervasive scepticism with regard to the inherited master narratives has not been matched by more constructive responses to 'the liberation of early modern social relations from the straitjacket of modernist historiography'.<sup>15</sup> Since the 1980s, the prevailing preference has been for an

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller discussion of the controversy over the family, see K. Wrightson, 'The Family in Early Modern England: Continuity and Change', in S. Taylor, R. Connors and C. Jones (eds.), *Hanoverian Britain and Empire. Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson* (Woodbridge, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> See e.g., on women: J. M. Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide', in D. Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350–1600. Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing* (London, 1992) and A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993). For civility and the 'civilising process': A. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 10, 282. For masculinity, see the Special Feature on Masculinities in *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), esp. K. Harvey and A. Shepard, 'What Have Historians done with Masculinity? Reflections on Five Centuries of British History, c.1500–1950', 279–80; A. Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, c.1500–1700', 292, 295, and K. Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, c.1650–1800', 298–305. On the history of emotions: L. Pollock, 'Anger and the Negotiation of Relationships in Early Modern England', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 568–9. On old age: S. Ottaway, 'Introduction', in Ottaway *et al.* (eds.), *Power and Poverty*, pp. 2 ff., and S. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life. Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> A. Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict. The Peak Country, 1520–1770* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 11.

essentially synchronic analysis of social relationships in the period (focused mostly on the decades 1560–1640 or on other favoured sub-periods). To be sure, this includes considerable attention to the ‘little dynamics’ of social relations—the ‘constant jostlings and realignments’ to be observed in families and communities; the element of negotiation that infused so many relationships of power and authority.<sup>16</sup> But it remains cautious with regard to longer-term processes of change. In consequence, the literature is characterised by a certain perennialism: a tendency to privilege continuities of experience. We have an impressive literature on how best to characterise particular social relationships in particular sub-periods, but as John Tosh puts it in another context, excessive preoccupation with the ‘plurality of contested meanings’ to be found in any particular period can carry the risk of ‘dissolving any sense of trajectory and process’.<sup>17</sup> And this in turn can threaten to isolate the social history of early modern England and to diminish the potential significance of what it has revealed.

This is not a problem for what Eileen Power once called ‘those for whom the blessed date 1760 has taken the place of the blessed word Mesopotamia’.<sup>18</sup> But it presents a standing challenge to historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For we cannot continue simply to declare the inadequacies of older models of how the ‘first modern society’ supposedly emerged in eighteenth-century England without making the effort to put something better in their place. Most historians of the period, I think, would sympathise with J. H. Clapham’s sense of ‘that profound change in the social atmosphere of England which occurred somewhere between Shakespeare and Defoe’.<sup>19</sup> We need to define that shift more closely and to account for it more convincingly. It is encouraging that in recent years such efforts have been undertaken by historians of the Reformation era, of the development of the English state, and of economic growth. Earlier controversies are being transcended by creative

<sup>16</sup> Quoting S. Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 59. For the negotiation of authority, see e.g. the essays in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996), and M. J. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> J. Tosh, ‘Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 330.

<sup>18</sup> E. Power, ‘On Medieval History as a Social Study’ (1933), in N. B. Harte (ed.), *The Study of Economic History. Collected Inaugural Lectures, 1893–1970* (London, 1971), p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> J. H. Clapham, ‘The Study of Economic History’ (1929), in Harte (ed.), *Study of Economic History*, p. 64.

efforts to map the changing contours of England's political, religious and economic cultures, to identify their central dynamics, and to provide a history that is developmental without being unilinear or teleological.<sup>20</sup> How far can we attempt the same in the history of social relationships? That is my concern in this lecture.

## II

Relationships of mutuality and obligation provide a point of entry to these large issues of continuity and change. They speak directly to the concerns of both classical and recent social history, as we have seen. More importantly, they were of deep and abiding concern to contemporaries. For it was through such relationships that they mapped their society and rendered it 'legible'.<sup>21</sup> A great deal of energy has been devoted in the last twenty-five years to reconstructing those personal social maps, and we can start by considering what it has revealed about these relationships.

First, and most obviously, they were of many kinds. Some were relationships of authority. In a polity 'predicated upon personal relationships and hierarchical ties of obligation', the nobility and gentry 'based their claims to rule upon promises to protect and assist those beneath them in the social hierarchy'.<sup>22</sup> They were expected to respond to appeals for their 'good lordship', and they expected deference and service in return. Within the household, servant and master were bound, according to William Gouge, by 'a mutuall and reciprocall bond', albeit one involving 'a common equitie . . . but no equallitie: mutuall duties, but divers and distinct duties, appertaining to their severall places'. Similarly, though more problematically, the 'Common Mutuall Duties' of husband and wife,

<sup>20</sup> M. J. Braddick's, *State Formation in Early Modern England c.1550–1700* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1, 96 offers a new 'grand narrative of the development of the state'. C. Marsh *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England. Holding their Peace* (Basingstoke, 1998), N. Jones, *The English Reformation. Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (Oxford, 2002), and E. H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003) all seek to transcend the debate over 'success' and 'failure' in the English Reformation. E. A. Wrigley similarly redefines the debate over industrialisation and economic growth in *Continuity, Chance and Change. The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1988) and 'The Divergence of England: the Growth of the English Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 10 (2000).

<sup>21</sup> For the notion of social 'legibility', see J. C. Scott, *Seeing like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London, 1998), pp. 2–3 and ch. 1.

<sup>22</sup> K. J. Kesselring, *Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 120–1, 125–6.

involving ‘mutuall love’, ‘mutuall providence’, and ‘mutuall peace’, were exercised in a framework of inequality, albeit ‘small inequality’: ‘They are yoke-fellows in mutuall familiarity, not in equall authoritie.’<sup>23</sup>

Other relationships of obligation were more diffuse, and might or might not be inflected by differences of status, wealth or power. Kinsfolk composed a rather loosely structured group in England—at least beyond the closest of relatives. It was not unusual for witnesses in cases heard in the church courts of Durham, for example, to declare that they were ‘somewhat of kin’ to the parties, ‘but in what degree [hee/shee] knoweth not’.<sup>24</sup> It was significant, nonetheless, that they were asked the question. As Naomi Tadmor has demonstrated, the diverse and flexible language of kinship permitted people to declare relationships, ‘to claim recognition, propose social bonds, set moral and religious duties, and postulate many expectations’. Kin were in effect those relatives by blood or marriage on whom one could make claims (albeit not always successfully).<sup>25</sup> ‘Friends’ was a term that could carry ‘a plurality of meanings’ from kinsfolk through close business associates, to selected companions: it ‘straddled . . . familial and non-familial relationships’. But whatever the precise nature of the connection—among kin or between peers, or patron and client—this was a relationship based on active support; ‘friends’ were those, as one Tudor gentleman put it, who would be ‘fast and suer . . . and sticke unto us in all causes wherein we should neede yor he[l]pes and frendshippe’.<sup>26</sup>

Connections between kin and ‘friends’ were often geographically extensive, linking people across a local social area, a region, even nationally. Those between neighbours, in contrast, were based upon residential propinquity, knitting together the households of parishes, manors, townships, or urban districts, in what one contemporary called ‘the mutuall comforts of neighbourhood and intercourse one with another’.<sup>27</sup> Between the two lay the pre-Reformation religious fraternities, and the craft fellowships or brotherhoods of the towns—both also known as guilds—

<sup>23</sup> W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), pp. 172, 173, 196, 221, 228, 253, 271–2, 303.

<sup>24</sup> The literature on English kinship is superbly surveyed in N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England. Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 107–12. Cf. Ben-Amos, ‘Gifts and favors’, 305–9. For the Durham courts, see e.g. Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections [hereafter DUL], DDR/EJ/CCD/1/12, fos. 23v, 24, 38, 40.

<sup>25</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, pp. 122 ff., 163, 165.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167–9, 191, 212; Folger Shakespeare Library, Bagot Papers, L. a. 778. The gentleman was William Saunders, writing to his uncle Richard Bagot, 12 July 1585.

<sup>27</sup> C. Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1980), p. 29.



which extended the language and ethos of kinship into forms of association which were not bounded by actual kinship ties but ‘used the analogy of brotherhood to express their solidarity’.<sup>28</sup> The religious fraternities have been described as ‘the characteristic institutions of late medieval popular religion’, embodying ‘sacred Christian kinship’ and ‘a continuing sense of the value of cooperation and mutuality in seeking salvation’, through intercessory prayer and the promotion of Christian charity.<sup>29</sup> They were focused upon altars maintained in particular parish churches, but could also draw their members from wide catchment areas.<sup>30</sup> The craft fellowships also used the language of brotherhood and sisterhood, but their membership was confined to the practitioners of a given occupation in a specific town, and while they also performed social and religious duties, their principal *raison d’être* was the control of entry into and the conduct of particular trades.<sup>31</sup> To this extent they were the counterparts of the manorial institutions that strove to protect the interests of and regulate relationships among the tenants of a manor. In both cases this was a bounded sphere of mutuality, distinctly hostile to the encroachments of outsiders—usually termed ‘foreigners’.

Other distinctions can be made. Some of these relationships were contractual in nature, as in the cases of marriage or the bond between master and servant or apprentice, or guild-members bound by oath. Others were essentially informal, as with the circle of village youths revealed assisting one another’s courtships in Roger Lowe’s diary, or the gangs of Cambridge scholars whose ‘disruptive assertions of manhood’ disturbed the peace of the university city. (A future Bishop of Durham was amongst those who masqueraded as the Proctor’s Watch and trashed the Cross Keys tavern in 1593.)<sup>32</sup> Yet others lay somewhere between these

<sup>28</sup> Quoting S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> S. Brigden, ‘Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London’, *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 94–100; J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 58; E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 131, 142–3.

<sup>30</sup> G. Rosser, ‘Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages’, in S. J. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People. Local studies in lay religion, 1350–1750* (London, 1988), pp. 33–4; K. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia c.1470–1550* (York, 2001) pp. 1, 33–4, and chs. 3 and 5 *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> D. Woodward, *Men at Work. Labourers and Building Craftsmen in the Towns of Northern England, 1450–1750* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 29–35.

<sup>32</sup> W. L. Sachse (ed.), *The Diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, 1663–74* (London, 1938); A. Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 93–5.

poles, unregulated by law, but sometimes involving expectations so powerful as to be effectively binding. Some of these bonds were established for life, as between spouses, or parents and children.<sup>33</sup> Others were temporary, as with the annual contracts of servants. Most, however, were relatively enduring. Of sixty-one members of the joiners' guild of Chester whose dates of death are known in the period 1591–1719, over three-quarters were members for more than ten years, and almost half for more than twenty years, while witnesses deposing on behalf of neighbours in court cases frequently attested to long association with the parties concerned.<sup>34</sup> Again, some bonds of mutuality and obligation were rooted in powerful emotional attachment—to William Gouge love was the first duty of members of families.<sup>35</sup> Others were fundamentally instrumental in their nature. Yet in practice it could be impossible to disentangle the two, and the one reality bled into the other. Connections between those deemed 'friends' frequently had 'a strong element of instrumentality'—what Philip Abrams called 'a calculative involvement rooted in actual or prospective exchange'—but they could also involve a high degree of trust and moral expectation.<sup>36</sup> Religious fraternities ostensibly existed to express mutual concern for one another's souls, yet membership also conferred social and economic advantages sufficiently extensive to make one recent historian reluctant 'to view them purely, or even largely, as religious bodies'.<sup>37</sup> Craft guilds regulated trade but also provided emotional support: the butchers of Carlisle were entirely typical in requiring members to attend the funerals of 'every Brother or Brothers Wife or Child'.<sup>38</sup> Neighbours were not only a source of the myriad of forms of practical assistance and cooperation described in north Pennine manors as to 'do neyburhead' or 'kype neybourhede', but also constituted a reference

<sup>33</sup> I. Krausman Ben-Amos powerfully re-emphasises the lifelong nature of obligations binding members of nuclear families in 'Gifts and Favors', 301–5.

<sup>34</sup> Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 76. When Cuthbert Pearson's marital difficulties led to litigation in the Durham consistory court, the nineteen witnesses called could attest to a total of 293 years of knowledge of the man: D. Levine and K. Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society. Whickham 1560–1765* (Oxford, 1991), p. 280.

<sup>35</sup> Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp. 225, 428–30, 498–9.

<sup>36</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, pp. 179, 205–6. M. Bulmer, *Neighbours. The Work of Philip Abrams* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 95.

<sup>37</sup> Rosser, 'Communities of parish and guild', pp. 35–7; Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, p. 17 and chs. 3–5, quoting p. 171.

<sup>38</sup> Cumbria Record Office, D/Lons/L/1133 'Butchers' Guild No. 1'. The Shoemakers of the same city also required attendance at the funerals of the brothers' servants and apprentices: D/Lons/L/1133, 'Shoemakers' Guild No. 1', p. 8.

group which could inspire strong sentiments of attachment. As William Fulcher of Southwold said of a neighbour in 1552, he was 'not of kindred' to her, but 'favoreth hir as one neighbor shulde favor an other'.<sup>39</sup>

In sum, relationships of mutuality and obligation varied considerably in their nature and ostensible function, their social articulation, their geographical extensiveness, degree of institutional definition, durability and emotional content. The essential point is that they were ubiquitous. To contemporary moralists they were the very sinews of the commonwealth, be it the 'little commonwealth' of household or parish, the 'city commonwealths' of England's corporate system, or the commonwealth of the realm itself.<sup>40</sup> They created cohesion by evoking a sense of identification with and obligation to others in particular social and institutional contexts. From the perspective of any individual they were constitutive of personal and social identity. For each individual was 'the embodied centre of a social universe of self and others', located within a web of such relationships.<sup>41</sup> Robert Moore of Newcastle, for example, was a house-carpenter, a member of the Carpenters' guild and a freeman of his city. He was an inhabitant of St Nicholas' parish. When he died in 1636, he had recently been widowed. He had a grown son and daughter, the latter married to a shipwright. He was close to his sister-in-law, to whom he left a token of regard, and to his nephew, who he named as his residual heir. He owned three properties in addition to his own house and was landlord to seven tenants. He was owed a total of twenty pounds by 'several persons', and owed a total of thirty pounds in his turn. He died of the plague, confined to his chamber, after dictating his will 'through a partition of dales' to his 'nere neighbor' Thomas Finlay and the scrivener Ralph Taylor, who was 'well acquainted with him . . . havinge done divers businesses for him'. Neither saw him, but they were confident of his identity 'well knowinge his voice and tonnge'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> A. J. L. Winchester, *The Harvest of the Hills. Rural Life in Northern England and the Scottish Borders, 1400–1700* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 46; Norfolk Record Office, DN/DEP/6/5b, fol. 202v (I am grateful to Andy Wood for this reference).

<sup>40</sup> For the family as 'a little Commonwealth' or 'private Commonwealth', see S. Amussen, *An Ordered Society. Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 37. For the parish as a 'little commonwealth', see H. Falvey and S. Hindle (eds.), *'This Little Commonwealth': Layston Parish Memorandum Book, 1607–c.1650 and 1704–c.1747*, Hertfordshire Record Publications, 19 (Hertford, 2003), p. 72. For the 'city commonwealth', see P. Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth. Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Quoting R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London and New York, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> DUL, DDR/EJ/CCD/2, Folder 20.i.1637–6.v.1637, fol. 23v, and Folder 19.v.1637–17.vi.1637, fol. 85; DPR1/1/1636/M9/1–5.

Robert Moore died alone, but in life he was at the centre of a constellation of relationships each of which helped to define him. Such relationships sometimes overlapped: John Marsh of Muggleswick, County Durham, described himself and John Grinwell as not only ‘*neighbors and frinds*’, but also ‘of *kindred* . . . within the third or fourth degree’.<sup>43</sup> They could inflect one another. The servant Barbara Baul of Faversham called her mistress ‘a *mother* to her and a *speciall good frend*’.<sup>44</sup> Each relationship was lived out in the context of the rest, and the connections of each individual intersected with those of others, ramifying outwards to create larger nexuses of actual or potential reciprocity.

Those relationships and the obligations that they entailed might be constraining. But they were also rewarding and enabling. They were there to be mobilised. That might be in small things as when Elizabeth Aeckley of Haughton, County Durham, called on her neighbour (and former mistress) Isabel Rawdon ‘to borrow some flower . . . for want of her owne’, and on another morning ‘to gett a coale of fire’ to kindle her hearth.<sup>45</sup> It might be at significant moments of the life course. Parents, godparents, ‘friends’, masters and mistresses and neighbours could all play a part in the making of a match and in the setting up of a young couple.<sup>46</sup> Kin and ‘friends’ were drawn upon over long distances to place young men in city apprenticeships.<sup>47</sup> Families, neighbours, guilds and parish authorities all contributed to the maintenance and care of the elderly.<sup>48</sup> Kin, ‘friends’ and ‘neare neighbors’ attended the dying, and assisted in the making of wills. Symond Wilkinson of Haltwhistle, Northumberland, a former servant, neighbour, and ‘inward and kinde frend’ of Margaret Ridley, strove hard to ‘diswade her’ from leaving her entire estate to one nephew, ‘sayinge it would give her frends and kindred great distaste if she did soe

<sup>43</sup> DUL, DDR/EJ/CCD/1/2, fol. 23. (My emphasis.)

<sup>44</sup> D. O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint. Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester and New York, 2000), p. 147. (My emphasis.)

<sup>45</sup> DUL, DDR/EJ/CCD/2, Folder 20.i.1637–6.v.1637, fol. 22. As Bernard Capp observes, ‘Every small favour reinforced the bonds of friendship and trust, and made it more likely that help would also be forthcoming in a major crisis’: *When Gossips Meet*, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> P. Rushton, ‘Property, Power and Family Networks: the problem of disputed marriage in early modern England’, *Journal of Family History*, 11 (1986); M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987), ch. 6; A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London and New York, 1993), ch. 5; O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, chs. 1, 3, 6.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g. the steps taken by Ralph Josselin and Henry Newcome in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *English Family Life, 1576–1716. An Anthology from Diaries* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 176–84.

<sup>48</sup> Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, pp. 2, 7–9 and *passim*; Woodward, *Men at Work*, pp. 82–3.

neglect them', and when she persisted, sent them warning 'to looke the best for themselves that they could'.<sup>49</sup> Again, such mobilisation might be occasioned by a particular crisis. Margaret Draper, finding herself pregnant by a married man, left her service in 1601 and hid in a succession of Norfolk towns 'stayeng a weeke or two sometimes with one frynd some tymes with another'.<sup>50</sup> Ursula Ardwick wrote 'in no small hast' to her 'cosen' Walter Bagot in 1618, declaring her 'miseree', reminding him of his promise 'that you woulde stande my frende that my husband should not wronge me', and urging him as 'a frende and kinsman' to send both for her and for the servants and neighbours who would bear witness to her husband's abuse.<sup>51</sup>

### III

Given their significance, it is hardly surprising that these relationships were prescriptively defined: in homilies, sermons, and the literature of moral complaint; in conduct books and advice manuals; in catechisms that elaborated on the implications of the Ten Commandments; in the standards of conduct required by guild ordinances, manorial bye-laws and village orders. All these set out the generalised expectations defining a range of standardised social roles. Yet such prescriptive norms can too easily be taken to imply a rigidity in the actual definition of roles and a consistency in their performance that can be seriously misleading.

The household, for example, was routinely dissected by the authors of conduct books into a series of dyadic relationships or 'couples'—husband/wife; parent/child; master and mistress/servant—which placed emphasis upon hierarchical structures of authority and subordination. That 'the family itself was infinitely more complex than its literary model and its relationships more awkward' is widely recognised.<sup>52</sup> Yet the implications of this disparity remain only partially explored. William Gouge,

<sup>49</sup> Levine and Wrightson, *Making of an Industrial Society*, pp. 288–90; DUL, DDR/EJ/CCD/1/12, fol. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, Bacon–Townshend Papers, L. d.717.

<sup>51</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, Bagot Papers, L. a.454.

<sup>52</sup> L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers. Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996), p. 26. Cf. D. C. Beaver, 'Brief glimpses of the relationships between spouses contrast sharply to the formal patriarchy expressed in law and in prescriptive literature', *Parish Communities and Religious Conflict in the Vale of Gloucester, 1590–1690* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1998), pp. 50–1.

for example, was fairly typical in his practice of following up his prescriptive advice with a discussion of ‘contraries’, and ‘objections’: ‘the opinion of many wives who think themselves every way as good as their husbands and no way inferior to them’, for example, or ‘the opinion and practice of many [children] who hold parents consent at the most but a matter of conveniencie’.<sup>53</sup> These views were introduced in order to be corrected. Yet their very presence reveals his awareness of doubt, and of competing definitions of familial roles and obligations which apparently enjoyed widespread currency and arguably gave domestic relations flexibility and a considerable capacity for adaptation to circumstances.<sup>54</sup>

Laura Gowing has suggested that the central issue was ‘not how far household practice and gender order reflected ideology, but in what ways individuals sought to use such prescriptions’: how they *interpreted* them.<sup>55</sup> The relationships discussed in such texts involved not only authority but also mutual duties: reciprocal expectations that fostered a sense of entitlement, of rights to be defended when individual personalities came into friction.

This was particularly evident in marriage. Joan Thynne, after reporting to her absent husband on her disposal of the yield of what she termed (with legal correctness) ‘your fields’ and ‘your hay’, turned to the defence of management decisions to which he had taken exception. ‘Therefore sweet Mr Thynne’, she tartly concluded, ‘wrong me not so much as to condemn me without just cause of offence, for if I could as well have contented you, I should have thought myself a happy woman. But seeing that I never have nor shall content you, I am and will be contented to do my best endeavours if it please you to esteem of them.’<sup>56</sup> Such expressions of

<sup>53</sup> Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, p. iii (on his method of using ‘contraries’) and pp. 271, 442.

<sup>54</sup> Gouge famously confessed that his female parishioners took ‘much exception’ to his preaching on a wife’s duties and in particular to his ‘restraining of her from disposing of the common goods of the family without or against her husbands consent’, some of them calling him ‘an hater of women’: *Domesticall Duties*, pp. iv–v. One wonders how far the printed version of his views convinced them.

<sup>55</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Her daughter-in-law, Maria, denied her right to manage the household by a controlling husband, was more forthright: ‘Well Mr Thynne, . . . believe I am both sorry and ashamed that any creature should see that you hold such a contempt of my poor wits, that being your wife, you should not think me of discretion to order . . . your affairs in your absence, but if you be persuaded that it is most for your credit to leave me like an innocent fool here, I will the more contentedly bear the disgrace’: A. D. Wall (ed.), *Two Elizabethan Women: Correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne 1575–1611*, Wiltshire Record Society, 38 (Devizes, 1983), pp. 14–15, 31–2.

reproof, grounded in recognised expectations, were an acceptable means by which members of families (and in particular those in subordinate roles) could assert claims to proper respect and consideration, impose their own interpretations of a situation, and reconfigure relationships without breaking them.<sup>57</sup> They could pave the way towards the explicit negotiations by which the Manchester wigmaker Edmund Harrold and his wife Sarah attempted to resolve their marital difficulties. He had been aware for some time that ‘its best to keep good decorum and to please wife’, before he recorded that 11 September 1712 was ‘remarkable for my wife and I make a bargain; she’s to refrain washing clothes, and I’m to refrain drinking to excess’.<sup>58</sup> And when relationships did break down, it was a powerful sense of the reckless betrayal of legitimate expectations that structured the passionate recriminations heaped upon one another by warring spouses.<sup>59</sup>

The negotiative element so evident in the conduct of marital relationships was also apparent in the relations of servants and apprentices with their masters and mistresses. Here again there were definite expectations of proper treatment over and above the basic conditions of a hiring contract or indenture, and in the case of long-term servants or apprentices prolonged interaction could foster intense personal bonds.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the frequency with which such expectations were disappointed was such as to render master/servant relationships ‘inherently unstable’. Minor frictions meant that the domestic order was ‘continually disputed and redefined’, and more serious failures of the ‘mutual obligations of service’ could result in legal action. Two-thirds of the master/servant disputes surveyed by Peter Rushton for north-east England were initiated by the servants or apprentices themselves, demonstrating their capacity to act in defence of their interests, and when they did so, they drew upon the precepts and language of prescriptive norms to express their grievances and justify their assertiveness.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Pollock, ‘Anger and the negotiation of relationships’, pp. 574, 583, 587.

<sup>58</sup> Houlbrooke (ed.), *English Family Life*, pp. 96–7. Cf. pp. 65–8 for the case of Adam and Susan Eyre.

<sup>59</sup> T. Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 187–201.

<sup>60</sup> Ben-Amos, ‘Gifts and Favors’, 310 ff.

<sup>61</sup> P. Griffiths, *Youth and Authority. Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996), ch. 6, quoting pp. 291, 298; P. Rushton, ‘“The Matter in Variance.” Adolescents and Domestic Conflict in Northeast England 1600–1800’, *Journal of Social History*, 25 (1991), 91–5. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos suggests that handling such conflicts was part of the process by which the

Moreover, the dyadic structure adopted in the conduct books, and often reproduced by historians, belies the fact that in practice ‘the various relationships intruded into one another’. The household was ‘a shifting pattern of multilateral relationships’, involving spouses, parents and children, siblings, servants, lodgers, and visiting or co-resident kin, each of which had bearing on the others.<sup>62</sup> Nor were such complexities contained within doors, for a variety of significant others had access to and influence upon a household’s affairs. Mark Close hastened from Swaledale to Newcastle in 1669 once alerted to the need to rescue his mistreated son.<sup>63</sup> Lettice Kynnersley’s marriage was destabilised by her husband’s improvidence, his quarrels with his father (who would not grant him an adequate estate), her own fraught relations with his mother (who sought to rule all), and mounting anxiety over the future of her children. That it survived was due to the immediate support she received from her servants and neighbours, and to the frequent counsel and interventions of her brothers. ‘As you love me’, she begged one of them in 1608, ‘let not my mother know.’<sup>64</sup> In sum, the household was not a closed sphere of rigidly defined roles and unchallenged patriarchal authority. It was a sphere of mutuality and obligation, to be sure, in which members could hold together, ‘whether because of the head’s superior power, or as a result of multilateral negotiations, or—perhaps most commonly—for a combination of these reasons’. But it was also ‘an arena of struggle between individual members . . . pursuing their own strategies’, a ‘turbulent entity’, ‘a daily lived compromise’ in which ‘individual relationships were adjusted according to the tenor of the entire network of a person’s interactions’.<sup>65</sup>

That such turbulence was equally evident in less intimate and closely defined spheres has been amply demonstrated. Manorial tenants wrestled over their relationships to one another and to their lords, invoking in the process their differing interpretations of custom.<sup>66</sup> Clergymen and parish-

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young matured into independent adults: *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London, 1994), pp. 209–15.

<sup>62</sup> L. Pollock. ‘Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Journal of Family History*, 23 (1998), 6; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 155.

<sup>63</sup> Rushton, ‘Matter in Variance’, p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, Bagot Papers, L. a. 119–22, 568, 577, 593–607, quoting L. a.598.

<sup>65</sup> Quoting L. Fontaine and J. Schlumbohm, ‘Household Strategies for Survival: An Introduction’, in L. Fontaine and J. Schlumbohm (eds.), *Household Strategies for Survival, 1600–2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation*, *International Review of Social History*, Supplement 8 (Cambridge, 2000), p. 6, and Pollock, ‘Rethinking Patriarchy’, 19–20.

<sup>66</sup> For surveys of such disputes, see e.g., R. B. Manning, *Village Revolts. Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509–1640* (Oxford, 1988), chs. 1–6; A. Wood, *Riot, Rebellion*



ioners disputed their reciprocal obligations.<sup>67</sup> Guild brotherhood was disturbed by trade rivalries and personal animosities, as when the Newcastle cooper Thomas Dyckson responded to ‘evell words’ from Michael Hutton by ‘drawing a dagger . . . in the presence of the company’.<sup>68</sup> What Daniel Beaver calls the ‘imprecise or diffuse reciprocity’ of neighbourly relations was riddled with ambiguities regarding the extent of obligations, competitive rivalries and resentments.<sup>69</sup> As the extensive literature on defamation disputes amply illustrates, personal ‘worth’ and reputation were continually reassessed, and the merest slight (as when the Sedgfield woman Dorothy Dunne asked to borrow her neighbour Ann Stott’s ‘kirne’ — ‘which she denied’) could explode into violent abuse. The words involved commonly included allegations of sexual misconduct (‘pockie filthie whore’ in this instance), but, as Laura Gowing concludes, ‘the words of slander, ostensibly about sex, turn out to be about almost everything else’. Such incidents, which invariably drew in others, were a powerful means to pursue all manner of everyday conflicts, contributing ultimately to the reconfiguring of relationships between (and within) households, and a recasting of the hierarchies and networks of the neighbourhood.<sup>70</sup> They constitute one of the most visible aspects of the fact that the neighbourhood was a ‘negotiated community’.<sup>71</sup>

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*and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 82–95, 100–11; J. Walter, ‘Public transcripts, popular agency and the politics of subsistence in early modern England’, in Braddick and Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power*.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. J. Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 2; D. A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger. Parsons and Parishioners, 1660–1740* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 80. For the example quoted and similar quarrels, see Tyne and Wear Archives, GU/Co/2/1, Coopers’ Guild Order Book, 1576–1671, 17 June 1602, 5 July 1670; GU/GP/2/1, Company of Goldsmiths, Plumbers etc., 25 Nov. 1670, GU/GP/2/2, June 1672, June 1674.

<sup>69</sup> Beaver, *Parish Communities*, p. 50.

<sup>70</sup> DUL, DDR/EJ/CCD/1/12, fo. 140v; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, chs. 2–4, quoting p. 118; A. Wolfram, ‘Sex, Social Relations, and the Social Order in Early Modern England: Defamation Litigation in Cambridge and the Diocese of Ely, c. 1580–1640’, M.Phil. thesis (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 7, 46, 52. For other studies of defamation and its significance, see e.g. J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York*, Borthwick Papers, 58 (York, 1981); Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, ch.10; Amussen, *Ordered Society*, pp. 101–4; A. Shepard, ‘Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England, c. 1580–1640’, *Past and Present*, 167 (2000), 83 ff.; R. B. Shoemaker, ‘The Decline of Public Insult in London, 1660–1800’, *Past and Present*, 169 (2000).

<sup>71</sup> C. Muldrew, ‘From a “light cloak” to an “iron cage”’: historical changes in the relation between community and individualism’, in A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England* (Manchester and New York, 2000), p. 162.

Of course, there were limits to such negotiation; above all those set by relative power and authority. Husbands and fathers could be manipulated and browbeaten into compliance, but they still had the leverage of the cultural assumption of their ultimate authority, and their legal control of family property. Landlords had higher standing, stronger arms and deeper purses than their tenants. Some kin, 'friends' and neighbours wielded more clout than others. All of these relationships were conducted within particular social and institutional topographies, each of which provided 'a peculiar context of opportunity and constraint', and this must inevitably have affected peoples' choices and expectations.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, if negotiation had its limits, it remained not only possible, but in some contexts of life both normal and expected. This is not to deny that there were large areas of moral consensus in society and that people were schooled 'to accept hierarchical principles as natural, just, and true'.<sup>73</sup> But it is to insist that people also viewed their relationships pragmatically, that they were capable of reinterpreting conventional precepts to adapt them to their own circumstances, and that tensions and antagonisms are just as important as normative prescriptions in explaining how a society works.

People were all too aware of such tensions, and of their capacity to 'disrupt a whole range of interdependent social relationships'.<sup>74</sup> It was for this very reason that they laid so much cultural stress on the containment of that potential. On the one hand, this involved a preference for mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation in the settlement of disputes: the clergy's role as peacemakers among neighbours who were 'out of charity'; the 'earnest moving', 'entreatie and perswacons' used by the guilds to settle conflicts among members 'for quytnes sake'; the concerted action of friends, children and 'well disposed neighbors' that brought together Thomas Proctor and his estranged wife at Heselden church in the hope of achieving mutual forgiveness.<sup>75</sup> The instances of such behaviour are innumerable.

<sup>72</sup> Abrams, *Neighbours*, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> As recently re-emphasised by C. Marsh, 'Order and Place in England, 1580–1640: The View from the Pew', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 22, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Wolfram, 'Sex, Social Relations, and the Social Order', p. 54. For an excellent recent example, see Bernard Capp's analysis of the manner in which conflict between two rival families in Sibleby (Leics.) sucked in their kin and dependants, forced neighbours to choose sides, brought resentments and suspicions to the surface, and washed a great deal of dirty linen in public: 'Life, Love and Litigation: Sibleby in the 1630s', *Past and Present*, 182 (2004), 74–6, 79.

<sup>75</sup> C. Haigh, 'Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000); Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp. 303–6; DUL, DDR/EJ/CCD/1/11, fos. 4–7v.

merable. On the other hand, it involved the many means of exciting sentiments conducive to harmony and goodwill: the integrative rituals of hospitality and commensality;<sup>76</sup> the prohibition of ‘unneighborly dealings’ by manorial courts (‘over eating’ the pastures and meadows as at Weardale; ‘facing nor bracing amonges . . . neighbours’ at Cotherstone);<sup>77</sup> the continual emphasis on ‘corporate mutuality’ in the ordinances of the guilds and their compulsory ‘institutional sociability’;<sup>78</sup> the inclusive rituals of parish religion, which, as Donald Spaeth argues, ‘provided an important focus for negotiation between different groups in society’ and helped to mediate social relationships.<sup>79</sup>

Each of these ritualised expressions of mutuality had its particular ‘social referent’: the family, networks of kin and friends, the neighbourhood, the parish, the guild.<sup>80</sup> Cumulatively, they attest to the ubiquity of the forms of cooperation and group identity that they were intended to foster and the social-structural centrality of such relationships. They also demonstrate their *dynamism*. For, as we have seen, none of these relationships was a stable sphere of uncontested traditional authority in

<sup>76</sup> F. Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 17, 19–21, 31, 49 ff, 80; Ben-Amos, ‘Gifts and Favors’, 315–16.

<sup>77</sup> DUL, WCP/45, ‘Orders of the Forest Court of Weardale, 1602’; Winchester, *Harvest of the Hills*, p. 47. The court at Ashby de la Zouche ordered in 1620 that no person should ‘rayle and scold openly against [any] of their neighbors to ye provoking or greev[ing] of them’: Huntington Library, Hastings Collection, HAM Box 2/1, fo. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p. 302; R. King, ‘The Sociability of the Trade Guilds of Newcastle and Durham, 1660–1750: The Urban Renaissance Revisited’, in H. Berry and J. Gregory (eds.), *Creating and Consuming Culture in North-East England, 1660–1830* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2004), p. 58 and *passim*. The Carlisle butchers required every brother to be ‘faithfull to other in all things lawfull and honest’, not to go to law with one another without consent, to defend the trade against ‘out men’, to attend the funerals of brethren, to participate in quarter day commensality, and to avoid railing, scolding, indecent language, and ‘thumping on the table’ at meetings: Cumbria Record Office, D/Lons/L/1133, ‘Butchers’ Guild No. 1’.

<sup>79</sup> Beaver, *Parish Communities*, p. 34; C. Marsh, ‘“Common Prayer” in England, 1560–1640: The View from the Pew’, *Past and Present*, 171 (2001), 74–83; A. Hunt, ‘The Lord’s Supper in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 161 (1998); D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death. Ritual, Religion and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997); Spaeth, *Church in an Age of Danger*, p. 7. The post-Reformation popular religion characterised critically by puritan ministers like George Gifford or Arthur Dent had a good deal in common with the religious values revealed in the narratives of John Eliot’s converts among the Natick Indians of New England: an emphasis on ‘harmonious relationships and the need to restore them when disrupted’, on ceremony rather than orthodoxy, the sins of the Second Table rather than those of the First, and ‘interpersonal relationships, among people and between people and their God, rather than creedal belief or abstract faith’: D. K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country. A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2001), p. 128. Cf. Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England, 1550–1750* (Harlow, 1998), ch. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Beaver, *Parish Communities*, p. 17.

which the identities and aspirations of individuals were consistently subordinated to the duty of submission to others (however much contemporary moralists might have wished it to be so). On the contrary, individuals derived their identities from their place within a complex of interdependencies. Those relationships might constrain, but they also empowered and enabled; they were essential to the successful pursuit of individual goals. There was no categorical distinction to be drawn between selfhood and society, for the one was not meaningful without the other. All of these central social relationships included elements that were 'self-regarding' as well as elements that were 'other-regarding'. They inevitably threw up 'conflicts of inclination', and this is precisely why emphasis was placed on finding points of equilibrium in what could be an unstable field of conflicting interests and moral obligations.<sup>81</sup> That dynamism helps to explain 'the peculiar tension between normative frameworks and individual strategies' which has been described as characteristic of this period.<sup>82</sup> It also provided the friction that shaped and reshaped the content and meaning of social relationships over time.

#### IV

It is perhaps easier to characterise these relationships synchronically than to reconstruct their histories. Such characterisation, however, is essential, for it directs our attention to the features of their structures and dynamics that can help us to approach processes of change. To recapitulate: people occupied multiple roles. They acted within complex networks of relationships activated for different purposes. Each of these relationships could intrude upon the others, sometimes setting up conflicts of obligation. At the same time, however, they were not of equal importance, though their relative weight might vary from person to person and time to time. In any given instance, some might be more compelling than others; perhaps because they were more emotionally binding, or more central to self identity; perhaps because they presented different combinations of costs and benefits, material or emotional, actual or potential.<sup>83</sup> People had to navigate this complex grid as best they could in order to achieve

<sup>81</sup> These points are influenced by the discussion in Abrams, *Neighbours*, p. 31.

<sup>82</sup> Francesca Trivellato (personal communication).

<sup>83</sup> On the importance of the element of exchange even in apparently altruistic relationships, see Abrams, *Neighbours*, pp. 89 ff.; Ben-Amos, 'Gifts and Favors', 306.

particular objectives, be it economic security, a desirable marriage, or the advancement of a child. The evidence shows that like all human beings they could be highly creative in the conduct of relationships, in establishing, renewing, and modifying them.<sup>84</sup> The point to be emphasised now is that they could be equally creative in responding to changing circumstances of a more fundamental nature. For if patterns of social relations tend to become normative in a particular ‘defining context’—a set of conditions conducive to their maintenance—it is equally true that contextual changes of sufficient magnitude will stimulate, even compel, adaptive responses. Cumulatively, such responses can reconfigure a social order.<sup>85</sup>

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a well-known clutch of such contextual changes, which can only be alluded to here. Demographic growth and price inflation galvanised economic life. Urbanisation, the development of a more productive and capitalistically structured agriculture, and commercial and industrial expansion contributed to the gradual emergence of a highly sophisticated commercial economy in which market relations were central and impinged on the lives of all, not least through the complex credit relations that sustained the whole. These processes involved marked shifts in the distributions of wealth and power, and in ‘life chances’: growth in the numbers and collective wealth of the gentry, the expansion and elaboration of what was beginning to be termed ‘the middle sort of people’ (merchants, tradesmen, commercial farmers and professional men), a huge increase in the numbers of the population primarily dependent on wage labour in agriculture or in urban and rural industries; increased poverty and marginality. Meanwhile, from the 1530s the Reformation pushed the enforcement, defence, and definition of English Protestantism to the centre of the political stage, and entailed a long process of adaptation to the teachings and demands of the new religion. The growth of literacy and print culture, in conjunction with intensified communications networks, transformed the communicative capacity of society. The power and effective reach of central government were greatly enhanced, a process that not only transformed the relationships between the monarchy and the ruling class of

<sup>84</sup> Cf. M. Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures. Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (Oxford, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> For the notion of ‘defining contexts’, see J. Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers. The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York and Oxford, 2001), p. 6. For adaptive responses and role changes, see W. G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory. Vol. 2: Substantive Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 6, 8, 291.

noblemen and gentlemen, but also impinged on every township and parish, notably through the poor laws. By the later seventeenth century, English society was larger, more urbanised and commercialised, more diverse, more interconnected, more dynamic economically, culturally and politically, and more engaged with a larger world. This was a society undergoing gradual, but cumulatively transformative change. And central to these changes were the adaptive decisions made by individuals and families, acting in accordance with their lights and within the networks of social relations that framed their lives and influenced their choices and strategies. What implications did that have for relationships of mutuality and obligation?

To many contemporaries the implications seemed profoundly negative. The initial impact of change triggered a torrent of moral complaint, driven by the perception that ‘covetousness’, ‘self-love’, and the pursuit of ‘private commodity’ had ‘broken the link of charity’ that should bind the members of a commonwealth, and if that tradition became more muted over time, it never died.<sup>86</sup> Nor was it without justification, for our increasing awareness of the contours of social change in this period provides compelling evidence of the extent to which the bonds of mutuality and obligation were indeed under strain. We have long known that the pressures of inflation pitted the landlord’s rights over ‘his own’ against established customs and expectations of ‘good lordship’, and that enclosure and engrossing fostered the ambitions of enterprising farmers to the detriment of common rights and traditions of manorial communalism.<sup>87</sup> We are now far more aware of how the religious conflict introduced by the Reformation, and the long struggle over the definition of English Protestantism, encouraged the zealous, in Bacon’s words, to neglect ‘the laws of charity and of human society’ and ‘dash the first table against the

<sup>86</sup> A. McRae, *God Speed the Plough. The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 1, quoting p. 36; Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp. 274–8.

<sup>87</sup> The literature on these issues is immense and stretches back more than a century: see e.g. Ashley, *Introduction to English Economic History and Theory. Part 2*, ch. 4; R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912), Harper Torchbooks edn. (New York, Evanston, and London, 1967); J. Thirsk, ‘Enclosing and Engrossing’, in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. 4: 1500–1640* (Cambridge, 1967). Important recent works include McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, esp. chs. 1–2, 5–6, 8; J. Whittle, *The Development of Agrarian Capitalism. Land and Labour in Norfolk, 1440–1580* (Oxford, 2000); J. Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society. The Verneys and the Claydons, 1600–1820* (Cambridge, 2004), esp. chs. 4 and 6.

second'.<sup>88</sup> By the turn of the eighteenth century, this 'politics of distinction' had expanded to include a plurality of discrete and potentially antagonistic denominations, while holy communion, once the central rite of unity and reconciliation, became a token of personal faith, observed in severalty by the few, and 'ceased to be an important event in most people's lives'.<sup>89</sup> Our sense of the contours of the period has also come to include a variety of shifts in the institutional structures and dynamics of the neighbourhood. Religious fraternities were abolished.<sup>90</sup> Seasonal feasts and festivals were suppressed or abandoned in many parts of England.<sup>91</sup> The open hospitality periodically extended to all comers by the gentry, clergy and substantial inhabitants, gave way to more discriminating and less personalised forms of charity.<sup>92</sup> Communal funerals—the 'outbringing honestie amonge neighbours' accompanied by commensality and a dole to the poor—declined in favour of more selective gatherings of family and friends.<sup>93</sup> Urban craft guilds became 'more hierarchically articulated', and a 'changing conception of brotherhood' found expression in a 'widening cultural gap' between masters and journeymen, and the erosion of 'both the inclusivity and extent of guild sociability'.<sup>94</sup> The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries also witnessed

<sup>88</sup> Bacon quoted in N. Jones, *English Reformation*, p. 191. For religious conflict in local society, see e.g. P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982), ch. 5; P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England. Religion and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988), ch. 5; Beaver, *Parish Communities*, chs. 4–5. J. Craig, *Reformation Politics and Polemics. The Growth of Protestantism in East Anglian Market Towns, 1500–1610* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2001). The many contributions to the debate over the social impact of Puritanism are discussed in K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village. Terling, 1525–1700*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1995), pp. 197–220.

<sup>89</sup> Beaver, *Parish Communities*, chs. 6–8, quoting p. 262; Spaeth, *Church in an Age of Danger*; Hunt, 'Lord's Supper', 81–2.

<sup>90</sup> J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 666–7; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 454–5.

<sup>91</sup> D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion. Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985), ch. 3; R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England. The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), chs. 3–6.

<sup>92</sup> Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, pp. 93 ff; S. Hindle, *On the Parish: the Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 104 ff.

<sup>93</sup> C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (Beckenham, 1984), esp. chs. 2 and 7; K. Wrightson and D. Levine, 'Death in Whickham', in J. Walter and R. Schofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 162–5; R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 9.

<sup>94</sup> I. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability. Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 111 ff, quoting pp. 120, 124; M. Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT, 2000), pp. 14–15, 24, 38; King, 'Sociability of the Trade Guilds', p. 63.

enhanced levels of criminal prosecution in local courts—mostly for theft, but also including new and symbolically charged felonies like witchcraft and infanticide—and a marked increase in top-down social and moral regulation.<sup>95</sup> And the same period saw a massive increase in inter-personal disputes, rendering it perhaps the most litigious period in English history. Much of this involved disputes over debts, the fall-out of a more commercial economy, but it also embraced a higher incidence of ‘swearing the peace’ against neighbours, battles over the right to occupy particularly prestigious pews in church, and an extraordinary growth in litigation over defamatory words.<sup>96</sup> Whatever the causes of this plethora of contention (and much remains to be explained) it certainly bears witness to a greater willingness to involve public authority in the handling and settlement of disputes, and arguably such resort to judicial action was needed because informal mediation was no longer in itself a sufficient means of resolving personal rivalries and conflicts of interest.<sup>97</sup> Here, as in other forms of resort to the courts (by aggrieved tenants or landlords, ministers or parishioners, for example), we may have evidence of a shift in the balance between what James C. Scott calls ‘the role of mutuality as opposed to imperative hierarchical coordination in the creation of social order’.<sup>98</sup>

If so, it was arguably part of a larger process of normative adjustment. Change could pose real challenges to the expectations attached to particular relationships. The estate papers of the gentry, for example, reveal what Heal and Holmes describe as a growing ‘tension between social convention and market opportunity’, between inherited canons of

<sup>95</sup> J. S. Cockburn, ‘The Nature and Incidence of Crime in England 1559–1625: A Preliminary Survey’, in J. S. Cockburn (ed.), *Crime in England 1550–1800* (London, 1977); J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550–1750* (Harlow, 1984), esp. chs. 3–4; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, chs. 5, 7 and pp. 197–220; Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, chs. 5, 7. For the longer term perspective on enhanced social regulation, see M. K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>96</sup> C. W. Brooks, *Pettyfoggers and Vipers of the Commonwealth. The ‘Lower Branch’ of the Legal Profession in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), chs. 4–5; C. W. Brooks, ‘Interpersonal Conflict and Social Tension: Civil Litigation in England, 1640–1830’, in A. L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J. M. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society. Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989); C. Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation. The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), ch. 8; Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, ch. 4; Marsh, ‘Order and Place’, 7–24. Beaver, *Parish Communities*, chs. 4–5. For defamation litigation, see above, n. 70.

<sup>97</sup> As suggested by Muldrew, ‘From a “light cloak”’, p. 165. Court action was frequently accompanied by mediation, and was in some respects undertaken in order to provide pressure leading to informal settlement. The fact that it was undertaken so much more frequently, however, remains significant.

<sup>98</sup> Scott, *Seeing like a State*, p. 9.



paternalistic ‘good lordship’ and the imperative of maintaining the family estate, resulting sometimes in a ‘disparity between prescription and practice [which] is extraordinarily striking’.<sup>99</sup> The increase of litigation flew in the face of the cultural assumption that such action should be avoided, not just because of its potential costs, but because it constituted a breach of charity.<sup>100</sup> But norms, as Philip Abrams observed, ‘must be understood as at once fixed and fluid . . . they map the territory of relationships, but the map is one which the travellers concerned continually redraw as they travel’.<sup>101</sup> People enmeshed in the complexities of a changing socio-economic environment, and forced to cope with the pressures of competing demands and conflicting obligations, had to live where they were, and to adapt ‘in order to continue the business of living’.<sup>102</sup> It is hardly surprising that this might lead them to reassess the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining particular patterns of social relations, to adjust their ‘perceptions or beliefs about what behaviour is or should be normal’, and to redefine their obligations.<sup>103</sup>

Adjustments of this kind have now been identified in a variety of contexts. Andrew McRae has traced how socially controversial agrarian change was rebranded as ‘improvement’, while the endorsement of the landlord’s right to ‘know his owne’ by the emergent profession of surveying substituted ‘a rational definition of economic relationships’ for ‘the matrix of duties and responsibilities which had previously been seen to define the manorial community’.<sup>104</sup> Norman Jones has described how the conflicting messages of ‘a multivalent religious world’ led to increasing reliance on the individual conscience as a source of moral guidance; and how the seepage between conscience and self-interest facilitated the emergence, through ‘adaptive choices’, of ‘a modified social morality that placed the individual in a new relationship with those around him’.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>99</sup> F. Heal and C. Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 102–3, 112–13.

<sup>100</sup> Brooks, *Pettyfoggers and Vipers*, p. 133.

<sup>101</sup> Abrams, *Neighbours*, p. 35.

<sup>102</sup> The phrase quoted is from Jones, *English Reformation*, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> Quoting the definition of ‘norms’ in M. Anderson, F. Bechhofer, and J. Gershuny, ‘Introduction’, in M. Anderson, F. Bechhofer, and J. Gershuny (eds.), *The Social and Political Economy of the Household* (Oxford, 1994), p. 8

<sup>104</sup> McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, chs. 2, 5, 6, quoting pp. 171–2, 178. As he observes (p. 143) the new literature of improvement was characterised, in contrast to the older literature of agrarian complaint, by its ‘distinct lack of people’.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, *English Reformation*, pp. 5, 58, 134. Jones recognises that the primacy of conscience could entail enhanced scrupulosity and intense self-examination, but concludes that ‘For most

Daniel Beaver has explored how, with growing religious diversity, ‘the contraction of religious fellowship into networks of interrelated households transformed the boundaries of charity and social responsibility’.<sup>106</sup> Recent historians of the poor laws have amply demonstrated how their implementation from the seventeenth century involved a ‘redefinition of reciprocities as discriminatory and discretionary charity’, which had profound consequences for social relations within the parish.<sup>107</sup>

Such processes of ‘exploration and redefinition’, in which, as Ethan Shagan puts it, people ‘necessarily responded to new circumstances that were not assimilable to their former selves’, can also be detected in many particular instances.<sup>108</sup> Sir Ralph Verney’s heated justification of ‘my proceedings and the rules I walked by’ in his rental policies was provoked by his own steward’s moral qualms. It satisfied Sir Ralph’s own sense of equity, but his subsequent enclosures led his tenants to protest they had been ‘made as strangers’.<sup>109</sup> In 1697 the Common Council of Durham endorsed the curtailing of the commensality of guild funerals, since it was inconvenient for ‘persons of business’, obliged to participate but ‘thereby neglecting their owne necessary occasion and businesse’.<sup>110</sup> All of this bears witness to both a developing awareness of alternative normative criteria, and a growing willingness to accept their legitimacy. By the later seventeenth century many of the prescriptive norms that had characterised the sixteenth century had been reduced to what McRae terms ‘a significant residual influence’, ‘an established but no longer indisputable orthodoxy’. Their values remained familiar, but flanked, and sometimes

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people this conception of morality did not send them into their closets to check their consciences; it sent them into the world with lighter consciences’ (p. 161). Cf. Ethan Shagan’s view of the Reformation as triggering ‘a process of cultural accommodation’ in which people ‘forged new consciences to navigate the unprecedented circumstances in which they found themselves’, *Popular Politics*, pp. 7, 309.

<sup>106</sup> Beaver, *Parish Communities*, p. 326.

<sup>107</sup> Quoting J. Walter, ‘The Social Economy of Dearth in Early Modern England’, in Walter and Schofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order*, p. 128. See also: P. Rushton, ‘The Poor Law, the Parish and the Community in North-East England, 1600–1800’, *Northern History*, 25 (1989); Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, pp. 96–9; J. Boulton, ‘Going on the Parish: The Parish Pension and its Meaning in the London Suburbs, 1640–1724’, in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty. The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1800* (Basingstoke, 1997); J. Kent and S. King, ‘Changing Patterns of Poor Relief in some English Rural Parishes, c.1650–1750’, *Rural History*, 14 (2003), 136–7. Hindle, *On the Parish*, is a sustained exploration of this whole issue.

<sup>108</sup> Jones, *English Reformation*, p. 135; Shagan, *Popular Politics*, p. 309.

<sup>109</sup> Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society*, pp. 69, 77, 275–6.

<sup>110</sup> King, ‘Sociability of the Guilds’, p. 62.

outflanked, by what Tawney called 'new conceptions of social expediency' that drained their force, or rendered them strangely out of place in a radically altered social environment.<sup>111</sup>

## V

That the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed significant shifts in the expectations informing a range of central social relationships seems clear. But to focus upon forces corrosive of older patterns of mutuality, and in particular on the easing of constraints on individual choice and self-interested conduct, is to tell only part of the story. For it is apparent that change in this period also involved the strengthening and institutional entrenchment of other relationships of mutuality and obligation, and included collective, as well as individual, responses to the pressures and opportunities of the age.<sup>112</sup>

It has long been appreciated, for example, that economic change in early modern England gave increased scope for the expression of economic individualism. Recent work on the economic culture of the period, however, has provided a complementary awareness that commercial expansion, a rising volume of transactions (often over longer distances) and the increasing use of credit (in the absence of an adequate money supply) also led to the forging of more elaborate webs of economic and social interdependency, underpinned by 'reciprocal bonds of trust'. In this burgeoning sphere of interpersonal obligation, a premium was placed upon a reputation for personal integrity in the fulfilment of obligations, and economic transactions remained closely connected to other forms of social exchange.<sup>113</sup>

Similarly, preoccupation with the breakdown of the parish as a unified religious community should not blind us to the significance of new forms of religious association. Throughout the Reformation era religious movements not only spread through established social networks, but also generated new connections, often subsequently reinforced by bonds of friendship, service and marriage. This process can be discerned among early Protestants, continued in the networks of Catholics and Puritans

<sup>111</sup> McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, pp. 52, 72; Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, pp. xxiii, 231.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Rosser's interpretation of guild foundation as a communal response to the social conditions of the late middle ages: Rosser, 'Communities of parish and guild', pp. 30, 44.

<sup>113</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, pp. 2, 5–6, 97, 101, 327.

alike, was greatly enhanced by the sectarian affiliations generated in the Civil War era, and continued to characterise both old and new Dissent thereafter.<sup>114</sup> If all this compromised the integrity of the parish as a territorial unit of religious identity, it also promoted novel forms of interaction and bonds of obligation within denominational groups, the significance of which remains only partially explored.

If one aspect of the identity of the English parish was under threat, this period also saw its 'reinvention . . . as a unit of local government'. Recent historians of this dimension of 'state formation' have shown how the 'intensifying dialogue between centre and localities', and in particular the elaboration of the responsibilities of local 'chief inhabitants', facilitated the emergence of new forms of 'corporate identity' among parish notables, articulated through their participation in office, and extended into a broader social identity through their engagement with their peers in more extensive spheres of activity.<sup>115</sup>

Again, the trend towards urban residence by the gentry, and the elaboration of the urban season from the later seventeenth century, created 'a new sense of cultural community' among the elites of town and county, providing a range of 'controlled contexts' within which they could engage in 'a bilateral process of acculturation'.<sup>116</sup> In the exclusive districts of London's emergent West End, or such provincial counterparts as Newcastle's Westgate, or Durham's South Bailey and Elvet, residential

<sup>114</sup> See e.g. S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 408, 417–20; J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London, 1975), ch. 7; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 158–9, 165–71; P. S. Seaver, *Wallington's World. A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, 1985), ch. 6, esp. pp. 96–111; M. Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520–1725* (Cambridge, 1995), chs. 3, 5, 7, 9, 10; A. Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655–1725* (Oxford, 2000); Beaver, *Parish Communities*, pp. 219, 275–7, 305–7; D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700–1870* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 32–3. As several of these studies make clear, the formation of distinct religious communities did not necessarily involve alienation from the surrounding community in other respects.

<sup>115</sup> Eastwood, *Government and Community*, p. 13; Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, pp. 10, 218. See also, Braddick, *State Formation*, pp. 27–8, 337, 347; J. R. Kent, 'The Centre and the Localities: State Formation and Parish Government in England, c.1640–1740', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995); M. Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England', in T. Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, 1500–1850* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001). By more extensive spheres, I mean e.g. joint attendance at meetings of local courts, or meetings with other parochial officers to negotiate over settlement cases and other common concerns.

<sup>116</sup> P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 278–9, 282; R. Grassby, *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 393.

proximity and the sociability of the season enhanced the intensity of interaction, the visiting and the ‘gossaping’. Existing relationships were reinforced. New ones were formed: new sets of neighbours, new bonds of ‘friendship’, new opportunities for being ‘obliged’ to one another (especially, perhaps, among the women who were the principal permanent residents of gentry town houses).<sup>117</sup>

A further dimension of urban sociability was provided by the voluntary associations, clubs and societies which proliferated in English towns in the same period—at least fourteen were founded in Newcastle, six in Durham, and ten in lesser towns of the north east before 1750. Collectively they constituted what Peter Clark calls ‘a distinctive pattern of associational life in the Anglophone world’, characterised by regular, ritually conducted, meetings, strict codes of conduct, calendars of events (especially dinners), the welcoming of visitors, and the promotion of conversation and conviviality. Institutions devoted to ‘friendship and fraternity’, in which ‘friendship and affection mutually passed among all’, also, of course, allowed their members ‘to develop friendships and support networks among those who shared their interests’.<sup>118</sup>

Nor was such fraternity confined to the elite members of the more prestigious clubs and societies. For if the role of journeymen was gradually declining in the craft guilds, the seventeenth century also saw the emergence of journeymen’s associations, ‘box clubs’, and friendly societies—a trend initially most evident in London, but soon apparent elsewhere. Such associations of skilled workers were in some ways ancillary to the guilds, and in some ways formed in opposition to what were increasingly trade associations of masters—as with the Norwich craftsmen who gathered at the Unicorn in 1635, ostensibly to organise a

<sup>117</sup> S. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England. The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660–1720* (Oxford and New York, 1999), pp. 62–9, 87–109; A. G. Green, ‘Houses and Households in County Durham and Newcastle, c.1570–1730’, Ph.D. thesis (Durham, 2000), pp. 240, 253 ff., 248–9, 258, 272–3; R. F. King, ‘Aspects of Sociability in the North East of England, 1600–1750’, Ph.D. thesis (Durham, 2001), ch. 6, esp. pp. 271, 278, 280–6. King adds (pp. 293–304) that this elite sociability was further extended by the ‘virtual sociability’ of letter-writing—the growing practice that provides our principal point of entry to the dynamics of these elite social milieux.

<sup>118</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800. The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), p. 5 and chs. 2, 3, 7; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, p. 268; King, ‘Aspects of Sociability’, pp. 97, 102–16. When Isaac Thompson, a prominent member of the Newcastle and Gateshead horticultural society published his *Collection of Poems, Occasionally Writ on Several Subjects* in 1731, at least ten of his fellow members appeared on the subscription list, one of whom subsequently became his business partner.

journeymen's feast, but actually 'to know how the Journeymen would holde all together concerning the mendinge of their wages'. But whatever their nature, the proliferation of such institutions, and their spread to groups of workers never previously subject to guild organisation, serve as reminders that the associational innovations of the 'urban renaissance' and the emergent 'public sphere' were broader phenomena socially than is usually acknowledged.<sup>119</sup> Like the world of polite sociability, they provide evidence that individuals could respond to a changing social and economic environment by forming new bonds of mutuality and *collective* identity.

Taken together, these emergent social institutions present certain common features. In the first place, they often drew upon the experience and ethos of older associational traditions. Dissenting congregations, for example, shared some of the characteristics of pre-Reformation religious guilds, Lollard networks, and later forms of religious voluntarism both within and outside the Church of England, as well as incorporating elements of parochial worship.<sup>120</sup> Clubs and societies owed a good deal to the craft guild tradition in their organisational structures, rules, and rhetoric, an institutional legacy even more evident in the journeymen's associations of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>121</sup> At the same time, however, they also reflected a 'regrouping of social forces'.<sup>122</sup> Some of these relationships were formed and maintained over larger geographical areas: the regional (and for some, national) catchment areas of the urban season, extensive commercial networks, religious connections that transcended parochial and diocesan boundaries. Yet if they were sometimes less geographically confined, they were usually more socially selective. The new elite formed in the sociability of the 'urban renaissance' was 'at once more inclusive and exclusive than its predecessor': 'civilizing and social distancing . . . went hand in hand'. The London season was 'a predominantly upper class zone', that of provincial cities little less so, and the urbanity of polite society was 'principally expressed in the

<sup>119</sup> Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, pp. 9, 15, 17 ff, 39–40, 42; Norfolk Record Office, NCR 20A/10, fo. 60v. (I am grateful to Andy Wood for this reference).

<sup>120</sup> This is not to suggest a literal 'descent of dissent': the difficulties attending such an interpretation have been pointed out in Patrick Collinson's 'Critical conclusion' to Spufford (ed.), *World of Rural Dissenters*, pp. 393–6. It is simply to note the existence of structural affinities and probable influences.

<sup>121</sup> King, 'Sociability of the Guilds', pp. 69–70 (a direct legacy too readily dismissed in Clark, *British Clubs and Societies* pp. 20–4); Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, pp. 3, 23–8, 36.

<sup>122</sup> The phrase is from Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, p. 231.

conduct of social relations with each other'.<sup>123</sup> Clubs and societies brought together the local gentry and prosperous middling sort, but their openness varied considerably even among such people, and the costs of participation clearly excluded lower social groups.<sup>124</sup> Participation in parish government was socially circumscribed. If it helped to articulate the status and shared values of 'chief inhabitants' of the 'better sort', it also helped to distance them from those they governed: 'the inferior sort of people', 'persons of mean condition', 'objects of charity'.<sup>125</sup> More broadly, the associational world of the 'middling sort' was internally differentiated, and at, or beyond, its lower limits, journeymen's societies were confined to skilled men of particular trades.<sup>126</sup> The selectivity of nonconformist religious congregations was of an essentially different nature, being based in the first instance on shared belief. But they too could set over time, through the practice of intermarriage, selective apprenticeship of children, and the elaboration of denominationally preferential friendship networks, into 'exclusive fellowship[s] of spiritually sympathetic families', which also had distinctive social complexions.<sup>127</sup> Steve Hindle's observation (in the context of parish administration) that

<sup>123</sup> Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 282, 286. Cf. Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth*, p. 144; Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, pp. 113, 129–30, 133 ff.

<sup>124</sup> King, 'Aspects of Sociability', pp. 92–8.

<sup>125</sup> Eastwood, *Government and Community*, pp. 14, 28; S. Hindle, 'Hierarchy and Community in the Elizabethan Parish: the Swallowfield Articles of 1596', *Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 841–3 and *passim*; S. Hindle, 'A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish, 1550–1650', in Shepard and Withington (eds.), *Communities in early modern England*, pp. 98, 102–3. For 'chief' or 'principal' inhabitants, see H. French, 'Social Status, Localism and the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1620–1750', *Past and Present*, 166 (2000). For languages of differentiation and dissociation, see K. Wrightson, "'Sorts of People" in Tudor and Stuart England', in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People. Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994).

<sup>126</sup> J. Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort', in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People*, pp. 103–4, distinguishes particular associational milieux among the middle ranks. Cf. on social boundaries and 'mobility closures', H. French, 'The Search for the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1600–1800', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 287–8; Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, p. 25 and pp. 29–30 (the detailed example of the Coggeshall 'Comber's Purse', established 'for the managing of our trade and keeping out Intruders').

<sup>127</sup> Beaver, *Parish Communities*, pp. 263, 275–9, 303–7. That the particular 'social complexions' varied between denominations and localities, is well established. See e.g. M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities. English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 298–306; J. J. Hurwich, 'Dissent and Catholicism in English Society: A Study of Warwickshire, 1660–1720', *Journal of British Studies*, 16 (1976); W. Stevenson, 'The Social and Economic Status of Post-Restoration Dissenters, 1660–1725', in Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters*; Davies, *Quakers in English Society*, ch. 2.

the development of new patterns of association and institutional participation meant that 'traditional values of solidarity and reciprocity remained, and perhaps even thrived, but in more socially restricted ways', has a broader applicability.<sup>128</sup> Both hierarchical and lateral social bonds were being reconfigured in seventeenth-century England, and inevitably such shifts had implications for people's social identities.

Social identities are formed in relationships. They emerge from the ongoing dialectic between self-definition and the definitions of oneself offered by others. As such, they are 'neither remorselessly permanent nor frivolously malleable'.<sup>129</sup> Particular patterns of interaction and the roles that embody sets of expectations become institutionalised and stable, establishing patterns of practice which become normative for both individuals and groups. But such stability is always relative. It can 'liquefy into conflict and uncertainty' when people are prompted to adapt or adjust their relationships in order to confront new circumstances and resolve new problems.<sup>130</sup>

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England provides many examples of such processes. Some of the characteristic social institutions of the early sixteenth century ceased to exist, or persisted in severely attenuated forms that significantly modified their social meaning. In a more competitive, highly differentiated, and ideologically segmented social environment, established roles and their associated responsibilities were gradually redefined, often more narrowly, and sometimes in a manner that occasioned conflict between individuals and groups. There were changes in the boundaries of social recognition and identification. Yet from the turn of the seventeenth century, and more particularly from the mid-seventeenth century, new institutions, each with its associated roles and patterns of interaction and expectation, were coming into being and stabilising, often drawing upon older traditions and values, but in a manner adapted to new social contexts, and constitutive of new social identities.

Relationships of mutuality and obligation remained vital to individual and social identity throughout the early modern period. But they were changing. Some were eroded. Some were redefined. Some developed greater strength and centrality, albeit within different social boundaries.

<sup>128</sup> Hindle, 'A Sense of Place', p. 98.

<sup>129</sup> Jenkins, *Social Identity*, pp. 20, 62.

<sup>130</sup> I. Burkitt, *Social Selves. Theories of the Social Formation of Personality* (London, 1991), pp. 44-5.



The coordinates of identity were gradually being reset. If one seeks to identify dominant patterns in that process, my suggestion is that it was a resetting influenced less by the impact upon older solidarities of the corrosive forces of individualism, than by the crystallisation of the two forms of collective identity that were to be so prominent in English society in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—religious denomination and social class.

## VI

It is within this larger societal context that the intractable problem of change in the family can perhaps best be readdressed. For if the primary roles and identities central to the family—gender, parenthood, kinship—may well be more elemental and less subject to change than other social bonds, it is also the case that family relationships do change over time. And in a period when so many central social relationships were subject to redefinition it seems implausible that the family, that most basic of social units, should remain unaffected.

That the sixteenth-century family was a unit of patriarchal authority, in which the roles of its members were hierarchically defined, is clear; and the consensus is that it remained so throughout this period.<sup>131</sup> Yet it was also, as we have seen, a sphere of interdependence and personal intimacy in which—within the parameters of ideology and law—familial roles were more complex, less rigid, and considerably more emotionally demanding, than was once assumed, and in which the perennial friction of individual personalities could wear down the sharp edges of prescriptive categories. If this degree of flexibility and adaptability was in fact an enduring characteristic of family relationships, then the central issue becomes that of how families adapted to the opportunities and constraints presented by larger processes of social change, and in particular to those affecting their most fundamental obligations—the maintenance of the household in the present and provision for the future well-being of its members.

<sup>131</sup> For the prevalent view that patriarchal principles were virtually unchallenged in law and ideology, see e.g. S. Mendelson and P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550–1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 431–2; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp. 2, 16–17, 20. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp. 273, 275, sees the gender order as always in contest, but ‘negotiated . . . around the legal and social guarantees of men’s primacy’.

Achieving those objectives depended upon establishing and maintaining a viable household economy, and strategies aimed at defending or enhancing the economic security of particular families may have provided the driving force for many of the familiar processes of economic change in this period.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, however, it was arguably the demands of responding to a more commercialised, competitive, and insecure economic environment—in which institutions previously providing a modicum of stability were being eroded—that exerted the most powerful adaptive influence on family relationships in this period, and can best explain a growing diversity of family experience.

We already have many scattered indications of what that could mean: shifts in the marital opportunities and life-course expectations of different social groups;<sup>133</sup> the adoption of patterns of behaviour intended to protect the wellbeing and project the ‘worth’ and ‘credit’ of households, be it the self-discipline so prominent in the self-definition of the ‘middling sort’, or enhanced ‘industriousness’ more generally;<sup>134</sup> related changes in the socialisation, education and training of children;<sup>135</sup> modifications in the domestic division of labour;<sup>136</sup> change in the material culture of the household and the associated patterns of domestic life;<sup>137</sup> change in the contexts within which kin and ‘friends’ were called upon for assistance and in the likelihood of those calls being answered.<sup>138</sup> Yet the implications of such suggestive findings remain only partially explored. What constraints and rivalries were occasioned by the inflation of dowries among

<sup>132</sup> This is a central theme of K. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities. Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven and London, 2000).

<sup>133</sup> See e.g. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871. A Reconstruction* (London, 1981), pp. 257–65; A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. 6; Woodward, *Men at Work*, chs. 6–7; P. Sharpe, *Population and Society in an East Devon Parish. Reproducing Colyton, 1540–1840* (Exeter, 2002), ch 7.

<sup>134</sup> For the ‘middling sort’ see J. Barry, ‘Introduction’ in Barry and Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People*, pp. 15, 18, and M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort. Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680–1780*, pp. 147–9 and *passim*. For industriousness and the concept of an early modern ‘industrious revolution’, see J. de Vries, ‘Between purchasing power and the world of goods: understanding the household economy in early modern Europe’, in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 107 ff.

<sup>135</sup> Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, chs. 2–3; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, chs. 2–6.

<sup>136</sup> See below, n. 140.

<sup>137</sup> L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London and New York, 1988); M. Overton, J. Whittle, D. Dean and A. Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750* (London and New York, 2004), esp. chs. 5–7.

<sup>138</sup> Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 195–6; Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, pp. 26–9. See also the works cited below, n. 141.

the gentry and middle sort; what resentments and evasive strategies by the restrictions placed by parish authorities on the marriages of the poor?<sup>139</sup> What was the impact upon gender identities of the fact that a diminishing proportion of men were able to achieve the ‘self-sufficient economic mastery’ of the householder ideal, of the withdrawal of wives and daughters from the family workforce among those who aspired to gentility, or the deeper engagement of other women in independent employments which not only blurred the conventional gender division of labour, but also compromised the assumption that men were the principal providers for the family and the notion of property rights embodied in the legal doctrine of coverture?<sup>140</sup> Did the demands of the commercial economy lead the middle sort to make *more* use of kin—as partners, agents, facilitators, and sustainers—and did fluctuations in the proportions of households on relief reflect shifts in the capacities of labouring families to provide such assistance?<sup>141</sup> What tensions were produced by the constant need to market the reputation of the household as ‘an economically reliable unit’? Did the credit economy do more to bind the households of a community together, or to create new social divisions?<sup>142</sup> Which households acquired the utensils to make and serve tea? Who drank it, with whom, and in what contexts?<sup>143</sup>

The imperatives of the family economy, considered in its larger social setting, can thus provide a point of entry to shifts in the patterns of

<sup>139</sup> O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, ch. 6; S. Hindle, ‘The Problem of Pauper Marriage in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 8 (1998).

<sup>140</sup> Shepard, ‘Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy’, pp. 78–88, 90–100; P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class. Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London, 1989), ch. 6; J. Smail, *The Origins of Middle Class Culture. Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660–1780* (Ithaca and London, 1994), p. 167; Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, ch. 5. Peter Earle revealed sixteen years ago that over sixty per cent of the married women in a sample of London deponents at the turn of the eighteenth century claimed to be partly (27.4%) or wholly (36.6%) maintained by their own employment. That is a remarkable fact, and its implications for the actuality of marital roles in England’s increasingly urbanised population remain to be fully explored: P. Earle, ‘The Female Labour Market in London in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 42 (1989), 337–8.

<sup>141</sup> R. Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism. Marriage, Family and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580–1740* (Cambridge, 2001), chs. 6–7; J. Boulton, ‘“It Is Extreme Necessity That Makes Me Do This”: Some “Survival Strategies” of Pauper Households in London’s West End During the Early Eighteenth Century’, in Fontaine and Schlumbohm, *Household Strategies for Survival*, pp. 61–2, 68. Cf. Ottaway’s discussion of the changing balance between self-help, kin support and parish relief in the maintenance of the elderly in *The Decline of Life*, p. 9 and ch. 5.

<sup>142</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, pp. 150–7.

<sup>143</sup> Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour*, pp. 37–8, 158–9; Overton *et al.*, *Production and Consumption*, pp. 106–7, 166–7.

mutuality and obligation both within and between households. Such shifts, however, constituted not a single narrative of change, but rather a mosaic of adaptations, in which the variations that can be discerned were shaped by differentials in economic substance, social status, occupation, market situation, and life chances. This is not to deny that there were other influences upon family relationships—modified ideals of conduct, or changes in the mode of emotional expression, both carried by the growing power of print culture.<sup>144</sup> But it is to suggest that a focus *in the first instance* upon change in the domestic economy can provide an essential framework within which to place and understand the rest.

None of this had much to do with such ‘vast and elusive cultural changes’ as the rise of ‘Affective Individualism’.<sup>145</sup> If the middle sort embraced values that stressed the capacity of men to compete effectively, their cherished independence still rested upon, and was constrained by, complexes of ‘hidden dependencies’.<sup>146</sup> If a labouring man like Thomas Ridley of Simonburn endeavoured to ‘faithfully and honestly labor for the relieve and maintenance of his poor family’ without being chargeable to any, he did so within a context of unspoken support networks, and in the knowledge that if he faltered he would be stripped of all autonomy.<sup>147</sup> Change in the family involved not emancipation from, but a reconfiguring of webs of duty and mutual obligation. And ‘affect’ was always there, however simply expressed. Lionel Shipley and his wife surrendered their fate to the ‘Godly wisdoms’ of the Northumberland bench when they were both in their eighties, and become so infirm that ‘neither of us can helpe the other’.<sup>148</sup> His implied definition of the marriage bond speaks for itself.

<sup>144</sup> See e.g. Helen Berry’s analysis of the public discussion of readers’ anxieties regarding courtship, marriage, sex and other gender-related issues in the *Athenian Mercury*, and how this could have the effect of ‘disrupting and expanding notions of what constituted normal conduct’: H. Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England. The Cultural World of the Athenian Mercury* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2003), esp. chs. 6–10 (quoting p. 236).

<sup>145</sup> Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> S. D’Cruze, ‘The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker’, in Barry and Brooks, *The Middling Sort of People*, p. 183.

<sup>147</sup> Northumberland Record Office, QSB 13/17.

<sup>148</sup> Northumberland Record Office, QSB 83/23.

## VII

In seventeenth-century County Durham it became customary for remodelled houses to be decorated with a carved date and the juxtaposed initials of the master and mistress of the household. Adrian Green suggests that this practice commemorated the rebuilt house, which was in law the property of the husband, as 'an enterprise of the couple'. It had other meanings too. As Green puts it, 'houses were embedded in social process, and the ways in which houses were altered represents the ways in which people lived out social change'. They represented economic success, confirmed local social standing, and declared their owners' connectedness to others who shared their awareness of a stylistic repertoire that was both national and specific to certain social groups. Moreover, within the 'ordered space' of the household, the creation of new rooms and new spaces and the manner in which they were used, could involve what John Demos calls 'realignments in a whole network of human relationships'.<sup>149</sup>

Such realignments have been the central theme of this lecture. I have argued that relationships of mutuality and obligation were perennially dynamic, involving as they did the accommodation of individual needs and strategies within a broader framework of values and institutions. And I have suggested that this dynamism was the key not only to social stability, but also to social change. The further adaptation that was required when pressing problems could no longer be resolved within that inherited framework could subtly reconfigure social relationships, and redefine the values that informed them and gave them meaning: rendering some social institutions redundant, creating others; narrowing some spheres of interaction, opening others; enabling some, constraining others; and cumulatively reshaping social identities. The founders of the subject were not wrong when they detected profound change in early modern England. The process of change was certainly less linear than they imagined, and usually less dramatic, advancing not through a series of grand climacterics, but gradually and unevenly, 'as if by generational osmosis'.<sup>150</sup> But it was a connected process, for change in any one social institution or relationship set up resonances in others, reverberating through the networks that constituted the social order.

<sup>149</sup> A. Green, 'Houses and Households', pp. 16, 18, 127–56, 171, 172–6, 279; J. Demos, *A Little Commonwealth. Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford and New York, 1970), p. 48.

<sup>150</sup> The phrase is from John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 67.

Change of this kind is perhaps best imagined as a kind of ongoing ‘dialectic of the generic and the unique’.<sup>151</sup> It involved responses to general trends and common dilemmas, but was embodied in the decisions and practice of individuals and subject to the idiosyncrasies of individual personality and circumstance. Insofar as that involved choices, including the choice to reduce, or withdraw from, certain social obligations, this might appear to involve shifts in the direction of a more individualistic society. Yet this was still a society based on complex and ubiquitous webs of mutuality and obligation, some of which were strengthened and extended. The change that took place in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not so much in the whole tenor of the culture as in the boundaries, articulation, and meaning of such relationships. Whether that in itself might be described as a form of ‘modernisation’ very much depends on what exactly one understands by that contested term. Perhaps. But my objective here has been not to label a process of change, but to sketch its lineaments and to try to understand its mechanisms. For that purpose, the concept of modernisation seems too one-sided an approach to the complexities of social change if it so privileges the new as to suggest a once-for-all transformation of human experience. Norman Jones’s characterisation of post-Reformation cultural adaptation in England puts it better: ‘The reconstructed culture was, in most cases, an adaptation of older forms, but it was vastly different because of those adaptations.’<sup>152</sup> The same could be said of English society at the turn of the eighteenth century. Like the rebuilt houses of the period, it was new, but within its composite fabric it also contained layers of time.

*Note.* For the Newcastle lecture, I am grateful for the sponsorship of the University of Northumbria and for the hospitality of the North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers and the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (with particular thanks to Dr Bill Lancaster). I also owe thanks to Adrian Green, Rebecca King and Alice Wolfram for permission to cite their unpublished theses, and to the friends and colleagues who commented upon an earlier version of this text or upon the lecture: Helen Berry, Adam Fox, Steve Hindle, Norman Jones, Craig Muldrew, Linda Pollock, Alexandra Shepard, Naomi Tadmor, John Walter, Phil Withington, Alice Wolfram, Andy Wood, Nicholas Wrightson.

<sup>151</sup> Eastwood, *Government and Community*, p. 1 — ‘cultural formation is a dialectic of the generic and the unique’.

<sup>152</sup> Jones, *English Reformation*, p. 6.

The social structure of the United Kingdom has historically been highly influenced by the concept of social class, which continues to affect British society today. British society, like its European neighbours and most societies in world history, was traditionally (before the Industrial Revolution) divided hierarchically within a system that involved the hereditary transmission of occupation, social status and political influence. Since the advent of industrialisation, this system has been in a state of conflict and social tensions created by economic and religious change also led to increasing legalisation of society to resolve conflict. This legal structure was organized around centralised authority, and this expansion marked the beginnings of the modern state. New scientific developments also contributed to the growing diversity of intellectual culture.

General/Introductory \*M. Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914* (1980) R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (1984) \*N. Tadmor, "The concept of the household-family in eighteenth-century England" *P&P*, 151 (1996) \*K. Wrightson, "Mutualities and obligations: changing social relationships in early modern England"