Seats of Honor, Seats of Power: The Symbolism of Public Seating in the English Urban Community, *c.* 1560–1620[*]

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The use of anthropological methods and models to inform the conceptualization of social history is no longer a novelty by any means. Whereas the historian has long documented and interpreted the events and sometimes the material objects of past times, and placed them in causal relationships, in recent years anthropologists have helped historians to unveil the multiplicity of meaning in a particular sets of events or material objects. Common and effective applications of such collaboration have been made with regard to such concerns as kinship and marriage, the nature of personal honor, hospitality, and the ritualized expression of group identity. Yet historians have also employed an anthropological approach to the ritualistic or semiotic aspects of whole communities.

This description of the "layers" of meaning, what Clifford Geertz has labelled "thick description," guides us as historians to the shared and often symbolic assumptions, connotations, and implications—in short, the cultural forces—of human interaction: forces that often prove difficult to decipher through conventional historical methods. In Geertz's words, such description has often derived from "exceedingly extended acquaintance with extremely small matters," and has been used to reveal, layer by layer, the symbolic significance of such "matters" as recognized by members of specific societies or cultures.[1]

Most applications of these notions by historians and anthropologists alike have investigated the inner meaning of normative or traditional cultures. Geertz's own work on Javanese and Moroccan societies,[2] or studies by a widening circle of historians on, e.g., ritual and ceremony,[3] expose some of the inner meanings of complex and stable societies. Yet especially fruitful applica-

[1]Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), p. 21.

[2]E.g., Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980); Geertz, *Islam Observed, Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven, 1968); C. Geertz, H. Geertz and L. Rosen, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society* (Cambridge and New York, 1979).

[3]Representative examples would include Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1957); Roy Strong, *Splendour at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and Illusion* (London, 1973); Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978); Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, (Princeton, 1981); and Bob Busahway, *By Rite, Custom, Ceremony and Community in England, 1700–1880* (London, 1982).

tion of these ideas may also be devoted to societies in transition. Indeed, the observation of a changing symbolic pattern may well identify such points of transition even when they are not easily apparent to the casual observer.

Among historians of late Medieval England, Charles Phythian-Adams's work on the discontinuity in traditional forms of civic ritual provides an excellent example of a historical application of anthropological ideas to a set of community activities.[4] It is also a sound point of departure for exploring the transition in social patterns that marks the end of the Medieval epoch in the English local community. In the High Middle Ages, Phythian-Adams says, such civic rituals as the Corpus Christi processions played a vital role in identifying and reinforcing the social hierarchy of particular communities. Through a specific and pre-determined position in the annual procession, each participating member of the community demonstrated his standing relative to that of others. Non-participants, including women, children, and non-freemen, watched from the sidelines. This vantage point in turn symbolized the reality of their involvement, in the economic and political life of the community as well as in the procession itself, only at second hand and often through the auspices of those who marched. Other aspects of Corpus Christi Day celebrations, at least in Coventry, dramatized the relations between the rulers and the ruled. These rites demonstrated the social distance between the two groups and the deference due the former by the latter. On the other hand, they also emphasized the commonality shared by all as fellow communicants within the Body of Christ, Corpus Christi.[5]

A similar point has been made by Susan Brigden, in exploring the implications of the demise of officially sanctioned Roman Catholic practice for the ideal of social harmony in the community. Such communal activities as the mass, taking oaths, and common participation in fraternal and charitable organizations had imparted the sense of a community "in charity." In so doing, they encouraged harmonious interaction among community members while reinforcing the deferential tenor of traditional social relations.[6]

With the Reformation, these sundry observances came largely to disuse, and the way of life that they upheld became imperiled. Along with others who have explored the meaning of ritual and society in the late medieval community,

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[4]Charles Phythian-Adams, "Ceremony and the Citizen, the Communal Year at Coventry, 1450-1550" in Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (London, 1972), pp. 57-85, and Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City, Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), part 4.

[5]Phythian-Adams, "Ceremony and the Citizen," and see also Mervyn James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," *Past and Present* 98 (Feb., 1983): 3-30; V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (New York, 1966), and Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage, Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays* (Chicago, 1974).

[6]Susan Brigden, "Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth Century London," *Past and Present* 103 (May, 1984): 67-112.

Phythian-Adams has suggested that this particular episode of discontinuity removed the lubricant that had smoothed the relations between the status groups of local society, and thus led to increased social friction in the years immediately ahead. "By the seventeenth century," he tells us,

> the claims of community...were yielding first place to class loyalties. With this development, the annihilation of what had evolved into a ceremonial system in the late medieval period, was closely connected.[7]

Not only may the proscription of such ceremony have deprived town officials of a traditional ritualistic or semiotic means of facilitating social harmony, it also left them with a problem of deference and obedience.

The problem itself, of course, was hardly novel. After all, the ruling members of urban society, merchants and craftsmen of shallow social origins, shared little of the "natural" attributes of authority that we observe in those who ruled landed society, the normative society, of the same time. They could lay little or no claim to deference or obedience founded on lineage or estates, on title or even, as we learn from those who have studied mobility in medieval urban society, on lengthy family succession in a particular community.

These factors had of course pertained in English towns for a very long time. Yet this perpetual problem of deference grew even more acute in the mid-sixteenth century, and not merely because of the proscription of religiously oriented civic ceremony. In a complex series of developments, many of them encouraged by the legislation of the Henrician Reformation, it has been argued that we have here nothing less than a new era of urban autonomy, one that has been taken to mark "the end of the Middle Ages" in the English country town, and one in which the demands placed on town officials became greater than ever.[8]

Long dominated by feudal landlords, many of them churchmen acting *ex officio*, a great many towns seem to have gained anew or augmented the perquisites of self-rule in the decades following the Reformation. They did so by means of litigation, incorporation, and enfeoffment, legal devices that effectively conveyed practical governing authority from landlords to collectivities of townsmen, often in the form of trusts and corporations.[9] In addition, the intense social and economic upheavals of the mid-century and then of the 1590s placed par-

[7]Phythian-Adams, "Ceremony and the Citizen," p. 80.

[8]This concept is explored in Tittler, "The End of the Middle Ages in the English Country Town," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, 4 (Winter, 1987): 471-87.

[9]Though a case has recently been made by Dr. Marjorie McIntosh for greater community control amongst small towns of the southeast in the late fifteenth century, the evidence of borough incorporations, town trusts, litigation and even Crown intervention supports this trend over a wider geographic area and to a greater extent in the period especially from c.1540-1640. Cf. McIntosh, "Local Change and Community Control in England, 1465-1500," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, 3 (Summer 1986): 219-42; Tittler, "The Incorporation of Boroughs 1540-1558"; *History* 62, 204 (February 1977): 24-42; Alan Everitt, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce," in J. Thirsk, ed.; *The Agricultural History of England and Wales, 4: 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 502-06; Clark and

ticularly acute strains on local institutions. Finally, the Crown in those decades strove more than ever to rely on "small knots of reliable men" to maintain order in urban communities.[10]

Nonetheless, the ruling element of these towns, perhaps more so than ever, faced the problem of commanding deference and respect from their fellows, not merely for the sake of personal vanity, but for the much more serious business of government: maintaining law and order, ensuring just distribution of resources according to the lights of the day, satisfying standards of sanitation and safety, and providing appropriate functioning of the marketplace upon which so much depended.

This fundamental problem of government has also presented an important issue for the historian, and one to which conventional methodology has offered several approaches. Thus there are studies of how local governments attempted to regulate the influx of population (through such devices as the admission of freemen),[11] how they carried out legislation dealing with poverty, crime, and vagrancy,[12] and how the governing structures of early modern towns remained sufficiently flexible to accommodate a healthy degree of social mobility in and out of leadership ranks.[13]

Yet none of these issues relates directly to the necessity of creating deference. For this particular concern of governance we may do best to turn to our friends in Anthropology. It is they who have alerted us to the "sets of symbolic forms" that identify the governing role of the ruling elite. It is these forms, Geertz suggests, the "crowns and coronations, limousines and conferences" (Americans might well add presidential inaugurations) "that mark the centre as the centre...."

Slack, *Crisis and Order*, p. 22, and *English Towns in Transition* (London, 1976), pp. 126-28; Tittler, "The End of the Middle Ages in the English Country Town."

[10]Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order*, p. 22.

[11]E.g., R. B. Dobson, "Admissions to the Freemen of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 23 (1973): 1-21; G. D. Ramsay, "The Recruitment and Fortunes of Some London Freemen in the mid-Sixteenth Century," *Ec.H.R.*, 2 ser., 31 (1978): 526-40.

[12]E.g., John Webb, *Poor Relief in Elizabethan Ipswich* (Suffolk Record Society, 9, 1966); Paul Slack, "Social Policy and the Constraints of Government" in R. Tittler and S. J. Loach, eds., *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c. 1540-1560* (London, 1980); Slack, ed., *Poverty and Policy in Early Stuart Salisbury* (Wiltshire Record Society, 31, 1971); Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (1988); A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men, the Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London, 1985); J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London, 1984), and its bibliography; McIntosh, "Local Change and Community Control," and also "Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England," *Continuity and Change* 3, 2 (1988): 209-45.

[13]E.g., Carl I. Hammer, Jr., "Anatomy of an Oligarchy, the Oxford Town Council in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Journal of British Studies* 18, 1 (Fall 1978): 1-27; Valerie Pearl, "Change and Stability in Seventeenth Century London," *London Journal* 5 (1979): 3-34; S. Rappaport, "Social Structure and Mobility in Sixteenth Century London," Part I, *London Journal* 9 (1983): 107-35 and Part II, 10 (Spring, 1984): 107-34 and Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds, Structures of Life in Sixteenth Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. chs. 3 and 9.

"The very thing that the elaborate mystique of court ceremonial is supposed to conceal—that majesty is made, not born—is demonstrated by it."[14] This notion has been applied effectively to the study of national governments. It also seems strikingly appropriate to the study of local communities, and to those of the sixteenth century as well as those of primitive societies of more recent times, which are such common grist for the anthropologist's mill. It leads us to consider these communities not merely from the traditional (and of course quintessentially valid and necessary) viewpoint of the written record, but also from the viewpoint of the material object or artifact.

When historians have applied these concepts to their own questions, they have most often looked at activities, such as work, crime, play, ceremony, and ritual or social structures, such as kinship networks, voluntary organizations, and gender groups, rather than at objects. Yet a "layered description" of appropriate material objects may be made to serve similarly fruitful ends of social analysis. One such class of objects, which seems especially likely to hold symbolic significance for us, as it has for societies and cultural systems at many other times and places, is the seat, and especially what we might call the "public" seat.

If we apply Geertz's imperative to undertake an "exceedingly extended acquaintance" with this apparently mundane piece of furniture, we may hope to understand attitudes about power, authority, and deference that were commonly shared by townsmen of the Tudor Age, and which conventional historical methods may not easily reveal on their own. We may also be able to add the townsmen of Tudor England to the lengthy list of peoples who have employed the device of public seating in this manner.

This choice of subject does not come at random. It derives from the observation that in the decades following the Henrician Reformation, landmark changes arose in at least two forms of public seating: the mayor's chair and the church seat. It also emerges from the hypothesis that changes in the form and utilization of such potentially symbolic objects may well identify, and enhance understanding of, particularly significant points of social and political transition.

This begins with a consideration of the seating of governing officials, especially the mayor. In the council chamber of the fifteenth-century town hall, official seating consisted of a ring of benches around the walls of at least one side of the room. Surviving examples of some such benches may still be found either in museums or in a few of the better preserved halls themselves: e.g., Lewes, Aldeburgh, and Beverley. Here the councillors, often called aldermen, sat shoulder to shoulder, with the chief among them, already often called the mayor but sometimes still the lord's bailiff or some other chief official, sitting

[14]C. Geertz, "Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in J. Ben-David and T. N. Clark, eds., *Culture and its Creators* (Chicago, 1977), as reprinted in Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power, Symbolism, Ritual and Politics Since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 15-16.

at the same level and on the same bench as at least some of the others. The implication of this arrangement seems to have been that the mayor or equivalent officer was still considered more or less *primus inter pares* with his fellows.

Although this seating pattern seems to have pertained more or less undisturbed through much of the High Middle Ages in at least those towns with matured self-governing institutions, the evidence regarding civic furniture tells us that it changed markedly after the Reformation. By then, the mayor's own place began to grow more distinct from the seating of his "brethren." In some cases it gained prominence on the bench through the use of cushions, a canopy, or columns affixed to the wall behind the bench to mark his spot. In other cases it emerged from the bench altogether as a free standing seat, with back, arms, cushion, and often some form of heraldic device identifying the office of its holder.

Even as a mere development in the history of furniture, a first layer of description, the significance of this evolution in mayoral seating should not be overlooked. Historians of furniture now recognize that seats *per se*, as distinguished from benches or settles, were more common in the High Middle Ages than had once been assumed.[15] Yet seats—especially of the armchair variety— were still in our period very much "seats of honour...associated with dignity, with formal occasions, with power," likened to the bishop's throne in a cathedral.[16] They were also not as common as they would become. In houses of middling sorts of people in both Norwich and Oxfordshire, where the question has been studied through the use of household inventories, armchairs were still not entirely common at the turn of the seventeenth century.[17] Though at least one authority has suggested that only large, comfortable arm chairs remained rare this late,[18] an inventory of civic furniture in the guildhall of even such a substantial (if admittedly declining) town as Southampton refers only to "the

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[15]Penelope Eames, *Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1977), pp. xxi and 181. Compare this now current view with the traditions expressed in Ralph Fastnedge, *English Furniture Styles, 1500–1830* (1955, reprinted London, 1969), p. 8 or H. Cescinsky and E. R. Gibble, *Early English Furniture and Woodwork*, 2 vols. (London, 1922), 2: 145.

[16]John Gloag, *The Englishman's Chair* (London,1964), p. 41. See also S. W. Wolsey and R. W. P. Luff, *Furniture in the Age of the Joiner* (London, 1968), p. 69.

[17]Ursula Priestley and P. J. Corfield, "Rooms and Room Use in Norwich Housing, 1580-1730," *Post-Medieval Archeology* 16 (1982): 108-09; Pauline Agius, "Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Furniture at Oxford," *Furniture History* 7 (1971): 72, 76.

[18]Victor Chinnery, *Oak Furniture: the British Tradition, a History of Early Furniture in the British Isles and New England* (London, 1979), p. 39. Christopher Hill sees the common replacement of benches by chairs in the wealthier homes only in the Restoration period, though this may be something of an extreme view; Hill, *The Century of Revolution* (London, 1961), p. 250.

table, benches and fourmes their sett": it omits mention of any chair, much less an armchair.[19]

Despite the lack of attention to this subject, the evidence for such developments in the public seating of the mayor seems abundant and should be considered at some length. One of the few surviving early mayor's chairs may be seen in St. Mary's Hall, Coventry: the surviving third of a "triple throne" constructed to seat the masters of the three major guilds in Coventry sometime in the mid-fifteenth century.[20] This ornately carved piece, looking like a fugitive from a late gothic choir stall, had come into use as the mayor's chair or throne by the mid-sixteenth century. Some care about the customary seating of the mayor may be noted in the description of seating arrangements made to accommodate the visit to Coventry of the Princess Elizabeth in 1604. No fewer than three seats provided for her on that occasion, each in a different building, were designated as the mayor's accustomed seat: one (obviously a pew) in St. Michael's Church, a second in the Mayor's Parlour, and a third, the throne in St. Mary's Hall.[21] Only the last of these was truly a "mayor's seat" in our use of the term: the perch from which the mayor presided over the governing structures of the town.

If the Coventry example remains a distinctive source of local pride, it may also be a bit misleading for our consideration, as it was merely adapted, and not purpose-built, for mayoral use. In other towns the evolution from the mayor's place on the bench as *primus inter pares* with his brethren to a more distinctive location took different forms during the period under consideration. In most instances, and even where the mayor remained sitting on a bench with his fellows, that bench became raised up on a dais or on a step or two. A Star Chamber deponent testifying in 1586 about a hotly disputed parliamentary election in Chichester noted that the mayor "came down from the bench' to pacify unruly participants in the Guildhall. The Mayor himself, George Chatfield, deposed to the same effect.[22]

Something along these lines, an attached but still distinctive mayoral seat, survives at Leicester where, in 1637, the mayor's place on the long aldermanic bench was distinguished by the addition of two engaged columns, one on either

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[19]Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300-1600*, 3 vols. (1959-1981), 1: 146 and n. 105.

[20]Herbert Cescinsky, "An Oak Chair in St. Mary's Hall, Coventry," *Burlington Magazine* 39 (Oct. 1921): 170-77, summarized in Cescinsky and Gribble, *Early English Furniture*, 2: 154-163 and figs. 204 and 220; Gloag, *Englishman's Chair*, pp. 33-34; P. Eames, *Furniture in England...* pp. 196-97.

[21]R. W. Ingram, ed., *Records of Early English Drama, Coventry* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 364-365.

[22]Public Record Office, STAC 5/C23/37, deposition of James Cooke; STAC 5/C41/1, deposition of George Chatfield.

side of his place, against the supporting wall. The bench itself had a cushion at the mayor's place alone, and a carved depiction of the royal arms was placed on the wall above and between the columns.[23] The seat seems to have been constructed at the same time as other important civic furnishings and even a renovation of the Guildhall itself.

In Beverley by 1604 there was what is very likely a unique piece of mayoral furniture and one that should most properly be called a "settle and seat." Here a three-seat settle was built with the middle seat raised up above the level of the adjoining seats by some seven inches. Local tradition maintains that this was constructed by Roger Mack in 1604 for the sum of two pounds, commissioned by the newly elected mayor, Henry Farrar. Indeed, both the date and Farrar's initials are carved in the piece. Contemporary with this rare specimen are two long benches, one of 101 1/2 inches in length and the other of 109 inches, meant to accommodate the town's aldermen, while the deputy mayor and the town clerk presumably sat alongside the mayor. One may surmise that prior to 1604 this latter trio simply sat on the same benches as the aldermen: in terms of materials, construction, style, and ornamentation the aldermanic bench looks almost certainly to be the immediate ancestor of the settle and seat.[24] Not only is this rare and perhaps unique speciman in a perfect state of preservation in the current town hall, but it captures for us a fleeting evolutionary step in the history of an administrative office at a precisely known date.

The completed sequence whereby the mayor emerged from the common bench to a seat of his own is particularly well documented in York. Here the civic records yield a payment early in 1563 for an embellishment of the bench on which the mayor sat alongside his "brethren": cushions were provided for all twelve places on that long bench.[25] But by the end of the following decade payment was made for a "mete and convenient chaire for the Lord Mayor to sit on" (alone).[26]

[23]N. A. Pegden, *Leicester Guildhall, a Short History and Guide* (Leicester, 1981), p. 4; T. H. Fosbrooke and S. H. Skillington, "The Old Town Hall of Leicester," *Trans. Leicestershire Archeol. Soc.* 13 (1923-24): 1-72, *passim*.

[24]These furnishings seem first to have been noted in Robert Tittler, *Architecture and Power, the Town Hall and the English Urban Community, c. 1500–1640* (Oxford, 1991), plates 9 and 10. The author wishes to thank Mr. Raymond Grange and Ms. Margaretha Smith of the Borough of Beverley Tourist Office, and Mr. Arthur Coates of Beverley for access to this furniture and discussion thereof, and to Mr. Clive Wainwright of the Victoria and Albert Museum for his advice on the same.

[25]A. Raine, ed., *York Civic Records*, 6 (Yorkshire Archeol. Soc., Rec. Ser., 112, 1948 for 1946): 55.

[26]A. Raine, ed., *York Civic Records*, 7 (Yorks. Arch. Soc., Rec. Ser., 115, 1950 for 1949): 168. The reference also illustrates the usage "Lord Mayor," a designation exclusive, so far as is known, to the chief officials of York and London; *Oxford English Dictionary* (lst ed.), *vide* "Lord Mayor."

In addition to or instead of that physically exalted position there were numerous other ways of distinguishing the mayor's place in the hall. From the early seventeenth century, the Mayor of Totnes presided in the council chamber from a seat of some sort, no longer extant, covered by an ornately carved oak canopy, much like the testor over a pulpit from which it was surely modelled, and which has survived. Other members of the civic hierarchy sat, as they do today, in adjoining stall-chairs without canopies.[27]

In addition to these examples, each representing a different solution to the problem of distinguishing the mayor's place, there are two finely carved caqueteuse chairs in the Salisbury Guildhall, the first, dated 1583, commissioned and presented by the Mayor of that year, Robert Bower, and the second, commissioned and presented by Maurice Green, Mayor in 1622.[28] Except for the initials of the respective donors carved on the back panels, the latter is an exact replica of the former. The facts that both bore that City's arms carved on the lower portion of the back panels and that each was given by a mayor with his initials for official use, present strong circumstantial evidence that each was intended as a mayor's throne or chair of state. The date of the first chair coincides with the completion of a "new" Council House in Salisbury (an edifice that would itself be destroyed by fire in the year 1780). The four storey structure certainly had at least two "halls" or rooms in which the mayor presided, and hence the room and reason for more than one such chair.[29]

These examples of mayoral seating did not emerge simply from some evolutionary imperative among furniture makers or some emulative competition among neighboring town councils, conclusions which might well arise from surface appearances. These changes were integrally bound up with developments in town government. Two such developments are particularly significant. First, both the social and political distance between the governing elite (aldermen or councillors and the mayor) on the one hand and the citizenry on the other increased considerably. This phenomenon, often marked by the growth of a ruling oligarchy of a peculiarly non-hereditary nature, is now familiar as a dom-

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[27]Department of the Environment, "List of Buildings of Historical Interest, District of S. Hams, Devon" (1978), pp. 43–44 (notes by Michael Laithwaite).

[28]Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, pp. 448–49 and plate I.

[29]*Victoria County History, Wiltshire*, 6 (1962), p. 87. Hugh Shortt, ed., *The City of Salisbury* (1957), pp. 58 and 94; Salisbury City Muniments, Wiltshire Record Office MS. G23/1/3 ("Ledgerbook, 1571–1640"), fol. 61r. The fact that the Salisbury chairs were donated by individual mayors, a donation commemorated by the initials of the donor, should not be neglected. It suggests a parallel to the donation by prominent families of relics or other holy objects to Italian churches of the same era, or the tendency of monarchs in many past societies to redistribute gifts to the community. Such donations may be seen as efforts to gain notoriety and respect from the recipient community. See, e.g., Richard Trexler, "Ritual Behaviour in Renaissance Florence: the Setting," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 4 (1973): 128–29 and Geertz, "Centers, Kings and Charisma," *passim*.

inant tendency with English urban communities especially of the sixteenth century and after.[30] Its material expression may most broadly be found, or so it has been argued elsewhere, in the common emergence of the town hall at this time.[31]

Secondly, a similar gap emerged *within* the governing elite, between the political (if not the social) position of the mayor himself on the one hand and his "brethren," the aldermen and/or councillors, on the other. This distance was imposed on the mayoral office by the growing legal responsibility and authority conveyed by a great number of statutes, proclamations, and other fiats during the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.[32] It also had its material reflection in the expanding number and formality of mayoral paraphenalia: including the mayoral mace, the mayoral parlor, and especially the mayor's chair.[33]

Both of these developments had the effect of elevating the rulers of the post-Reformation town above their fellow citizens and of inducing the deference and obedience necessary for government under those circumstances. Both patterns may occasionally be observed at earlier stages in the centuries and decades prior to the Reformation. Yet it is precisely at that time when things began to change more quickly in English towns. In the face of this greater discontinuity and innovation, patterns of symbolic usage became more important than ever in sustaining order. And, where such traditional usage fell under censure, replacements had to be found to fulfill a constant need. Under these conditions the emergence of distinctive forms of mayoral seating seems a virtually logical and even imperative symbolic phenomenon.

[30] E.g., Derek Hirst, *The Representatives of the People? Voters and Voting under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 45–7; Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order*, Introduction; and Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, ch. 9; W. G. Hoskins, *The Age of Plunder, England in the Age of Henry VIII, 1500–1547* (1976), p. 42. The author is currently preparing an essay on this theme, entitled "The Apotheosis of the Mayoralty, c. 1500–1640."

[31] See Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, chs. 3–4.

[32] This point emerges from an examination of *Statutes of the Realm*, in which mayoral powers are frequently equated with those of the J.P., a survey of charters of incorporation as they appear in the *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, and in numerous town by-laws in which the blossoming of mayoral authority is almost ubiquitously reflected. Cf. also John G. Bellamy, *Criminal Law and Society in Late Medieval and Tudor England* (Gloucester and New York, 1984), chs. 1 and 2; E. G. Henderson, *Foundations of English Administrative Law...* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), chs. 1 and 2; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government, The Manor and the Borough*, 2 vols. (1908), chs. 2, 3, and 6; and M. Bateson, ed., *Borough Customs*, 2 vols. (Selden Soc., 1904 and 1906). The best contemporary description of the Mayor's role in a highly developed example of municipal government in this era is John Hooker's *Description of the Citie of Excester*, ed., W. J. Harte, J. W. Schopp and H. Tapley-Soper, (Exeter, 1919), 3: 804–06.

[33] Llewellyn Jewitt and W. H. St. John Hope, *The Corporate Plate and Insignia of Office of the Cities and Towns of England and Wales*, 2 vols. (1895), 1: xxiii–xl; R. Tweedy-Smith, *The History, Law, Practice and Procedure Relating to Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors* (1934), ch. 6; Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, pp. 35–7, 117–18.

It remains to be said that in this development of the mayor's chair as a symbol of the authority gained by that office during the course of the sixteenth century, English townsmen were not as culturally innovative as one might think. Even leaving aside, in this consideration of the urban scene, hereditary rather than selected officials, the chair (or throne) had long been a potent symbol of authority in societies of other times and places. It continues to be so today. As this suggests a degree of universality in the practice of specific English communities of the sixteenth century, it invites more of a comparative perspective than community studies sometimes receive.

In the Roman world even the generic armchair remained "an unusual object...and always a place of privilege"[34] and even without considering the thrones of [hereditary] kings, the same seems to have accrued throughout the Medieval West. The Florentines, for example, adopted a mayoral-type seating in their city-Republic at least a century before the townspeople of England. Thus, when in 1420 the members of the Florentine Commune strove to elevate the power of the Priors above that of other, competing, officials, they issued a decree forbidding the latter to sit at the same level. This has been taken as an important milestone in the gradual subordination of the *Podestaria* to the power of the *Signoria*.[35]

In Venice the doge's stool served as one of the seven symbols (*triomfi*) of that similarly non-hereditary office, though its full symbolic use post-dated five of the other six. By the sixteenth century, Venetians took it to represent "the stability, steadfastness, dignity and pre-eminence of the ducal authority." It was borne behind the doge in ducal processions: when the doge sat upon it, others stood.[36]

To place this in an even broader perspective, the same symbolism appears in non-European societies as well, perhaps most vividly in the mystical powers of the Black Stool of the Asante culture in what is now the state of Ghana.[37] This parallel is particularly strong because Asante kingship, like the Tudor mayoralty (but of course unlike the general run of European monarchies) rested on selection rather than heredity. The ruler had to be elevated "artificially," through some worldly device, to his exalted status. This comparison should not be taken to suggest an equality of rank between an Asante king and the mayor of a Tudor

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[34]P. Aries and George Duby, eds., *A History of Private Life*, (New York, 1987), 1: 8.

[35]Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), p. 258.

[36]Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* p. 205; cf. also pp. 191, 206, 253 and 274.

[37]Michelle Grant, "The Person of the King: Ritual and Power in a Ghanaian State," in David Cannadine and Simon Price, eds., *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 298–330. See also Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 110–112, 391, 430 and 661; and A. A. Y. Kyerematen, "The Royal Stools of Ashanti," *Africa*, 38, i, 2–5. My thanks to Prof. J. D. Esseks for his insights into Ghanian culture.

town. Yet both were rulers of a sort and—in contrast to European kings and queens—because of their common lack of inherited or innate authority both faced a similar problem of deference and obedience. This potential was certainly recognized in the Asante tradition where a ritual or emblematic formulation emerged to help solve that problem.

In this formulation (which still exists, though the action will be described in the past tense) the selectee was first ceremonially stripped of his former, common identity and then invested with the royal identity, with its full panoply of authority, in a specific ritual act. That act was literally the "enstoolment": a thrice repeated lowering of the candidate onto the seat of the Black Stool. This contact imparted powers stored in the stool itself to its new possessor. Ritually speaking, then, "enstoolment" made the ruler.[38]

Though the significance and authority conveyed by this ritual obviously exceeds by far that of the Tudor mayor taking his place on the mayor's chair in the council chamber or court room, both sets of symbolic forms demonstrate the use of seating at least to identify (if not, in both cases, actually to create) the holder of authority where it did not rest upon birth right. Both were intended to bring deference and respect to that official. Indeed, even if it fell short of the powers of the Asante Black Stool, the Tudor mayor's chair (as most chairmen of parliamentary assemblies or corporate boards, though not necessarily of mere university departments, would appreciate) provided an important transcultural and symbolic device for solving a pressing and universal problem of government.

To put it another way, the example of the English mayor's chair appears as part of a very broad historical pattern, repeated (with obvious variations) from time to time over centuries and from place to place across continents. Its advent demonstrates a familiar necessity of governance in its reinforcement of hierarchy and authority. Its emergence at this particular time in the long historical development of English towns—a time when feudal domination had begun much more rapidly and widely to give way to local autonomy, and when inherited authority ceded to authority conferred by yearly selection—signals a particularly pressing need for structure and authority. Interestingly enough, that need and the symbolic development of seating to indicate authority seems to have been experienced elsewhere in the English local community at the same time. This may be gleaned from the roughly contemporaneous appearance of the master's chair in the school room,[39] in the strict concern for precedence in university

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[38]Gilbert, "The Person of the King," pp. 318-19.

[39]Master's chairs are depicted in numerous contemporary woodcuts, including those reprinted in Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London, 1989), p. 72; John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London, 1973), pp. 101 and 138 and Craig R. Thompson, *Schools in Tudor England* (Ithaca, New York), p. 40. It is worth noting that these conventionally show the master wielding a birch: a symbol of authority

degree granting ceremonies, and even in the analogous use of *private* seating in the appearance of the armchair of the *pater familias* in households of increasingly more modest social levels.[40]

A similar and closely related need of English townsmen of the same period raises a second symbolic role of "public" seating. This is the need to denote not only political authority within a governing structure, but also social status within a community. This shift in focus turns our attention from the mayor's chair in the council chamber and court room to the reserved seat (and eventually the whole pew) in the parish church.

Here it is useful to recall the description and analysis of the pre-Reformation Corpus Christi procession offered by Charles Phythian-Adams and Mervyn James for the City of Coventry which, by implication, had parallels elsewhere as well.[41] This is not to suggest that a class of furniture resembles in any literal sense a procession of citizens, but rather that both served as ritual devices recognizing and legitimizing social divisions within the community. Furthermore, since the custom of reserving church seats, much less whole pews, for the dignitaries and worthies of the community seems roughly contemporaneous with the waning of the civic religious procession, the two devices performed this function in more or less sequential periods.

The church seat was in itself a relatively new form of furniture at the Reformation. There seems to be no evidence of congregational seating in English parish churches until the mid-fourteenth century, and no evidence that they had yet become common even a century later.[42] Even at that, most such references in these early years have been taken to denote seating for members of the clergy

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akin to and held in the same manner as the mayor's mace. A master's chair may be dated from c. 1531 at Newark-upon-Trent School, and from c. 1541 at Berkhampstead School; Malcolm Seaborne, *The English School, its Architecture and Organization, 1370–1870* (London, 1971), pp. 14–16. My thanks to Prof. Kenneth Charlton for his help in identifying appropriate depictions and his discussion of the issue.

[40]Pauline Agius, "Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Furniture at Oxford," *Furniture History* 7 (1971): 72–76; Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, p. 19; Alan Nelson, *Records of Early English Drama, Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Toronto and Buffalo, 1989), 1: 507–08. For a presentation of patriarchal authority in the family during this period, see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1977), especially ch. 5. It is probably superfluous to note the importance of priority seating at court. When the Duchess of Alba, accompanying the entourage of Philip II of Spain following his marriage to Mary Tudor, came to court, both Queen and Duchess insisted on the courtesy of sitting lower than the other. In the end they both sat on the floor! David Loades, *Mary Tudor, a Life* (London, 1989), p. 33.

[41]See n. 5 above. Corpus Christi pageants have been documented in Wakefield, York, Coventry, Chester and in an unidentified city which sounds much like Lincoln, but numerous other pageants performed elsewhere undoubtedly often served a similar social function. See Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage, Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays* (Chicago, 1974), *passim*.

[42]Alfred Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, 2 vols. (1872), 1: 30–31.

rather than for the congregation. As a general rule until at least that time and often later, church-goers stood or knelt, for, as John Mirc tells us in his *Instructions for Parish Priests* (c. 1400):[43]

> No non in chyrche stonde scahl,
> Ny lene to pylar ny to wal,
> But fayre on Kneus they schule hem sette.
> Knelynge doun vp on the flette [floor]
> And pray to God wyth herte meke
> To zeue hem grace and mercy eke.

When seats did appear they seem to have been moveable rather than fixed, perhaps to facilitate cleaning,[44] perhaps because it required more effort and expense to affix them, or perhaps because moveable chairs meant a more flexible use of space in an edifice often used for a variety of purposes. As we might imagine, innovations in furnishing seem to have come first in the larger and wealthier communities, as for example in Exeter or Bristol,[45] leaving many others far behind.

In general, though the adoption of seating seems to have been well precedented (especially in the environs of London and Westminster) prior to the break from Rome, developments subsequent to that milestone had the effect of accelerating its use in at least two respects. First, the emphasis on the sermon, which imposed long periods of silent and passive attention, all but necessitated the universal provision of seating. In addition, as for example, the churchwardens of St. Lawrence, Reading, noted laconically in 1573, rental of seats was also expected to provide an important source of parish revenue at a time when church ales and sundry traditional holiday collections went out of favor, and after valuable chantry properties had been removed from parish control as well.[46]

In many, though not all, towns the practice of such reservations seem to have undergone three distinct phases whose chronological boundaries, though approx-

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[43]John Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. by John Peacock (Early English Text Society, rev. ed., 1902, repr., 1975), p. 9, lines 270-276, as cited in Heales, *Church Seats*, 1: 11. See also A. H. Thompson, *The Historical Growth of the English Parish Church* (2nd ed.; Cambridge, 1913), p. 109.

[44]Heales, *Church Seats*, 1: 11-12.

[45]W. J. Hardy, "Remarks on the History of Seat Reservations in Churches," *Archeologia* (2nd ser., part i, 53, 1892): 104; B. R. Masters and E. Ralph, eds., *The Church Book of St. Ewen's, Bristol, 1454-1584* (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archeol. Soc., Records Section, 6, 1967), pp. xxvi, *et passim*.

[46]Churchwardens' Accounts, St. Lawrence, Reading, 1498-1626, Berkshire Record Office MS. D/P 97/5/2, p. 349. I am indebted to the Records of Early English Drama project at the University of Toronto for access to microfilms of these and other Reading churchwardens' accounts noted below, and especially to Dr. Alexandra Johnston for her advice concerning these records.

imate, appear widely applicable. In the first phase, beginning even in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, some parishes carried out the rental of a few seats, typically at 4d. or 6d. *per annum*, to wives and infirm men without apparent regard for social standing. Early examples include St. Ewen's, Bristol from at least 1454, St. Lawrence's, Ludlow, from c. 1548, and St. Edmund's, Salisbury from c. 1477.[47]

Beginning roughly at the time of the Henrician Reformation and running on into the 1560s, there was a new emphasis on the rental of seating with both a wider differentiation of rates and clearer signs of priority for men of stature. St. Michael's, Oxford, where rules on priority of seating seem to have been laid down c. 1561, St. Mary's, Cambridge, Holy Trinity, Chester, and again St. Lawrence's, Ludlow, provide good examples of these tendencies, while the issue of assigning seats received statutory attention for the first time in 1551.[48]

Finally, in a phase beginning as early as the 1570s in some places and not until the early years of the seventeenth century in others, there was a marked acceleration in the number of seats rented and on the social prestige attached to their possession and location within the church. Here, too, appears the rental not just of seats, but of whole pews to specific families, and the physical embellishment of such pews with, e.g., panelled "box" walls, doors, and the like. With this stage, exemplified at, e.g., St. Mary the Great, Cambridge, St. Michael's, Worcester (where there were 216 new seat rentals just between 1595 and 1602), St. Michael's, Oxford, and St. Botolph's, Boston, all the characteristics of church seating which would be followed widely well into the Industrial Era have fully appeared.[49]

As the three parishes of the borough of Reading illustrate perhaps better than any other in a single community, this sequence was far from universally applied. In St. Giles the practice of renting seats was already in progress when accounts were first recorded in 1518.[50] But (in those days when men and women sat

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[47]Masters and Ralph, *The Church Book of St. Ewen's, Bristol*, p. 25; J. Charles Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1913), pp. 67 and 189.

[48]Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 189; Public Record Office, SP 14/112/83; Rev. J. R. Beresford, ed., "The Churchwardens' Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532-1633," *Jour. Chester N. Wales Archit., Archeol. and Hist. Soc.* 38 (1951): 112-17; J. E. Foster, ed., *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Mary the Great, Cambridge from 1504 to 1635* (Cambridge Antiq. Soc., 35, 1905), *passim*; 5 Edward VI, c. 4.

[49]Foster, *Accounts of St. Mary the Great, Cambridge*, pp. 572-73, *et passim*; Joseph Amphlett, ed., *The Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Michael's in Bedwardine, Worcester, 1539-1603* (Worcester Hist. Soc., VII, 1896), pp. xv-xvi; Orders of 9 and 23 Elizabeth cited in SP 14/112/83; John Bailey, ed., *Transcription of the Minutes of the Borough of Boston*, 3 vols. (1980-), 1: 81, 643.

[50]Churchwardens' Accounts, St. Giles, Reading, 1518-1642, Berkshire Record Office MSS D/P 96/5/1, 1518-1642, *passim*.

apart) these were rented to townsmen for the use of their wives, or occasionally to widows, and only in a few cases were they for the use of men themselves. In addition, though a few went to the wives of prominent citizens, and though there appear at least a few civic leaders resident in this particular parish in the sixteenth century, there is little to suggest that seats were employed to indicate social standing here.[51] Perhaps at least partly because of this dearth of men and no doubt for other reasons as well, the practice of renting seats at St. Giles actually seems to have ceased altogther by the end of the century, or at least (though this is unlikely) to have gone unrecorded in the accounts.

St. Lawrence Parish, which seems to have hosted at least some of the town's ruling elite, also rented pews to men for their wives, though there were more rentals per year and the practice continued throughout the century and well beyond.[52] Here there was some degree of correlation between seat rental and office holding, which may be an indication of status and wealth. The rental value of seats depended on their physical position in the church, a few renters came from the ranks of the ruling elite (as measured again by membership lists of the two ruling councils of Reading) and there are occasional payments for changes in the seats assigned. Thus, in 1575 there were five men paying from 4d. to 6d. to have their wives moved to seats in a more desirable (and presumably more prestigious) position nearer the pulpit. These new seats also bore a higher rental value. The employment of seating as a measure of prestige seems to have emerged.

Yet it is in St. Mary's, the parish holding the majority of the town's better (and governing) sort, where the use of seating as a measure of prestige developed most completely and precisely. These accounts survive only from 1550, and we pick up the first recorded rental of seating as late as 1563.[53] Even then the practice is either followed or recorded in a desultory manner until the 1580s. But from that latter point it developed very rapidly, and into a very long and precise order of seating. In 1584 forty-nine men paid fees for seat rental on their own account rather than for their wives. The sums ranged from 12d. down to 1d., with the more expensive seats, those nearest the pulpit and running from north side to south, almost invariably held by members of the ruling elite of the day. These men alone were denoted as "Mr.," and they included former mayors and members of Reading's two governing councils. As might be ex-

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[51]This and subsequent conclusions about the identity of prominent citizens rests on the correlation of the names of Reading office holders, especially its Capital and Secondary Burgesses, with those listed as renting seats in the same years. The reprinted lists of officials may be found in J.M. Guilding, *Records of Reading*, 4 vols. (Reading, 1897-), 1: *passim*, for the appropriate years.

[52]Churchwardens' Accounts, St. Lawrence's, Reading, 1498-1626, Berkshire R.O. MS. D/P 97/5/2.

[53]Churchwardens' Accounts, St. Mary's, Reading, 1550-1642, Berkshire Record Office MS. D/P 98/5/1.

pected, the least expensive seats went to people whose status was obviously inferior. None of them appear in lists of councillors, their occupational status, when given, was manual (e.g., no. 40, "Ellis the Smyth" and no. 41, "Payne the Wheler"), some of them were obviously men of great age and little prominence (no. 42, "father Dennys" and no. 43, "father Baker") or of sufficient standing only to be called by their surname ("Darnne," no. 46).[54]

Fortunately for us the clerk for the years of the mid-1580s proved exceptionally diligent, and he continued to list for three successive years all those who rented seats by name, position, and fee.[55] The first observation to be made about these subsequent listings is that the numbers grew sharply in the third and fourth year: from forty-nine names in both 1584 and 1585 to fifty-eight in 1586 and sixty-five in 1587.

Eight of the original top ten seat-holders, all those denoted in 1584 as "Mr.," remained in the top ten (most of them in the same order) throughout the four yearly listings, while the other two disappeared (perhaps through death or migration) from the list altogether. Some of middling ranks moved up toward the top positions, while most in the middling or lower ranks, if they remained listed at all, remained within a few places of where they had been in 1584. In all, twenty-three of the original forty-nine remained on the list for all four years, with the least degree of continuity, as expected from modern studies of migration, coming at the bottom of the list. Thus, only five of the eighteen bottom-most names of 1584 are to be found in 1587. With the number of names growing rapidly, there were no less than eight newcomers in 1585, twenty-one in 1586 and seventeen in 1587. The fact that many of these appeared only once supports a good deal of research that has suggested rapid geographic mobility in English towns of the Elizabethan era.[56]

Unfortunately, we do not have any more listings of the names of those who held seats in St. Mary's. We do not know why this great explosion in the rental of seats levelled off thereafter, as it evidently did, any more than we know what started it. We do have almost annual totals of revenue brought in by such rental on into the following century, and these remained at a steady level roughly equivalent to that of 1586. We must assume that the wardens of St. Mary's continued to rent something on the order of sixty seats annually for some time thereafter. And, though there is no indication that any particular seat went *ex officio* to the mayor, it seems clear that seats were offered for rental in a specific order and that such an order corresponded in some commonly understood way

[54]Berkshire R.O. MS. D/P 98/5/1, p. 90.

[55]Such listings seem not infrequently to have been kept, though most have not survived. Berkshire R.O. MS. D/P 98/5/1, p. 92 for 1585, p. 94 for 1586 and p. 96 for 1587.

[56]E.g., Peter Clark, "The Migrant in Kentish Towns, 1580–1640" in Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700*, pp. 117–63. J. Patten, *Rural-Urban Migration in Pre-Industrial England* (Oxford U. School of Geography Resch. Ppr., 1973), *passim*.

to office holding and other attributes of social standing. It also seems evident that fees varied directly with both status and the physical position of the seat in the church.

In other communities the correlation of specific seating assignments in church with office holding appears to have been even more direct. By the mid-Elizabethan period the mayor of Stafford had his own church seat for the term of his office, though he paid for it himself.[57] In Boston's St. Botolph's, famous as "The Stump" both to sailors at sea and to worshippers ashore, there was by 1593 a "lofte wheare ye Maior useth to sytt in sermons tyme," and where those who dared sit in it in his absence were fined heavily for their presumption.[58] A decade later the Boston Borough Assembly ordered the churchwardens to provide seating for the members of the common council as well as for the mayor.[59] In rival King's Lynn a wealthy merchant and one-time mayor bequeathed money in 1602 to build church seats for members of the town council in St. Margaret's.[60] Especially in these last years of the sixteenth and early decades of the seventeenth century, other examples abound.[61]

Though there are some precedents from earlier times,[62] seats were clearly being employed as indicators of social standing by the mid-Elizabethan period in some and perhaps most urban parishes, and had commonly evolved to use as seats of honor for town officials by the turn of the century. Indeed, by that time disputes over precedence in seating seems also to have become fairly common.[63] Looking further ahead to the time that Richard Gough of Myddle, in

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[57]Borough Order Minute Book, 2: 56, as cited in K. R. Adey, "Aspects of the History of the Town of Stafford, 1590–1710" (M.A. Thesis, University of Keele, 1971), p. 97.

[58]Bailey, *Transcription of Minutes of Boston*, 1: 81.

[59]Bailey, *Transcription of Minutes of Boston*, 1: 643.

[60]Henry F. Hillen, *History of the Borough of King's Lynn*, 2 vols. (Norwich, n.d. [1907]), 1: 310, as cited in S. M. Battley, "Elite and Community, the Mayors of Sixteenth Century King's Lynn," (Ph.D. Diss., S.U.N.Y., Stony Brook, 1981), p. 207. I am indebted to Dr. Battley for permission to examine her thesis.

[61]E.g., H. E. Salter, ed., *Oxford Council Acts, 1583–1626* (Oxford Historical Soc., 1928), p. 408; F. A. Carrington, "The Old Market House and the Great Fire at Marlborough," *Wilts. Archeol. and Nat. Hist. Mag.* 3 (1957): 112; Rev. J. R. Beresford, "The Churchwardens' Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532–1633," *Jour. Chester N. Wales Archit., Archeol. and Hist. Soc.* 38 (1951): 149; Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 68.

[62]Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, p. 193; Mark Knight, "Religious Life in Coventry, 1485–1558" (Ph.D. Diss., Warwick University, 1986), pp. 132–34.

[63]D. M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth, England under the Later Tudors, 1547–1603* (London, 1983), p. 84 and PRO, SP 14/112/83; John Addy, *Sin and Society in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1989), pp. 50–51 *et seq.*

Shropshire, wrote about church seating at the turn of the eighteenth century, the possession of church pews had become protected by the common law.[64]

Once again the emergence of traditions involving public seating effectively mirrored, and thus reinforced, the hierarchical nature of urban society in Early Modern England. The assigned seat and, eventually, pew joined the mayor's chair in the demonstration and legitimation of rank, power, and privilege in a rapidly changing social milieu where other, more traditional, indicators (including the medieval civic procession) had fallen off considerably.

These seats served first as symbols of status and then, when they came to be reserved for the mayor and aldermen *ex officio*, also as symbols of authority. Along with such phenomena as competition for precedence on commissions of the peace among shire gentry, or even for prestigious burial space in the church nave,[65] the frequent disputes regarding church seating reflect the intensity of English social relations at that time: the striking potential for social mobility, the constant quest for respect, the emulative competition for symbols of status, and indeed the evolving nature of such symbols themselves.

[64]Richard Gough, *The History of Myddle* [c. 1702, 1834], David Hey, ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981), p. 77 *passim*. For the rules governing the issue, well established even in the Common Law by Gough's time, see H. Prideaux, *Directions to Church Wardens*, (London, 1692), pp. 111 *et seq.*, and Richard Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, 2 vols. (London, 1763), 1: 254-59.

[65]A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court, Government and Politics in Norfolk, 1558-1603*, (Oxford, 1974); for burials see Vanessa Harding, "'And One More May Be Laid There,' the Location of Burials in Early Modern London," *London Journal* 14, 2 (1989): 112-29.