

Tradition and Exclusion: Parochial Officeholding in Early Modern England, A Case Study from North Norfolk, 1580–1640¹

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Abstract This article suggests that there has been a tendency to understate the degree to which officeholding during the early modern period was embedded within the community, moulded by local influences and fulfilling a range of different functions in the parish. An over-emphasis upon national processes of social and cultural change has resulted in a failure to appreciate the complexity of the politics of officeholding. There has been only limited recognition of both the presence of constraints upon the actions of parochial elites and the mechanisms through which particular groups established and maintained control over parochial institutions. A detailed analysis of officeholding within seven parishes lying on the north Norfolk coast stresses the extent to which ‘parochial traditions’ determined the way in which things were done. It is argued that the effective linkage of officeholding to these shared understandings and to ideals of participation and inclusion created a powerful rhetoric through which the exclusion of a large minority of the populace and uneven distributions of officeholding were justified.

I

The villagers and townspeople who held local office in early modern England are no longer characterised as bumbling incompetents, scarcely capable of understanding their duties.² Rather, they are viewed as individuals exercising political power whose actions were instrumental in determining the course of local social relations. Indeed, their importance is enshrined in a model of social and cultural change which has become an historiographical orthodoxy.³

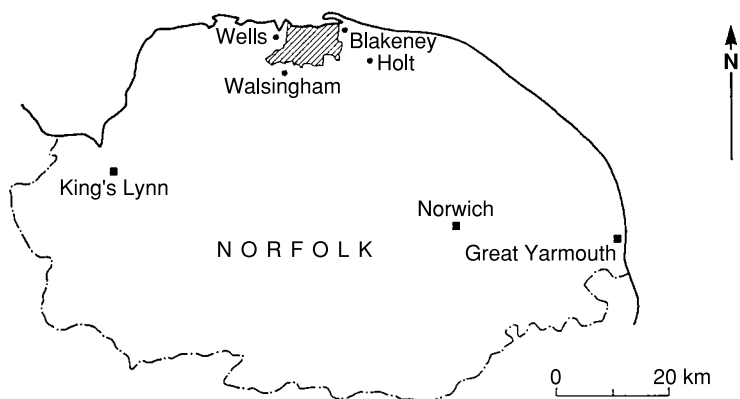
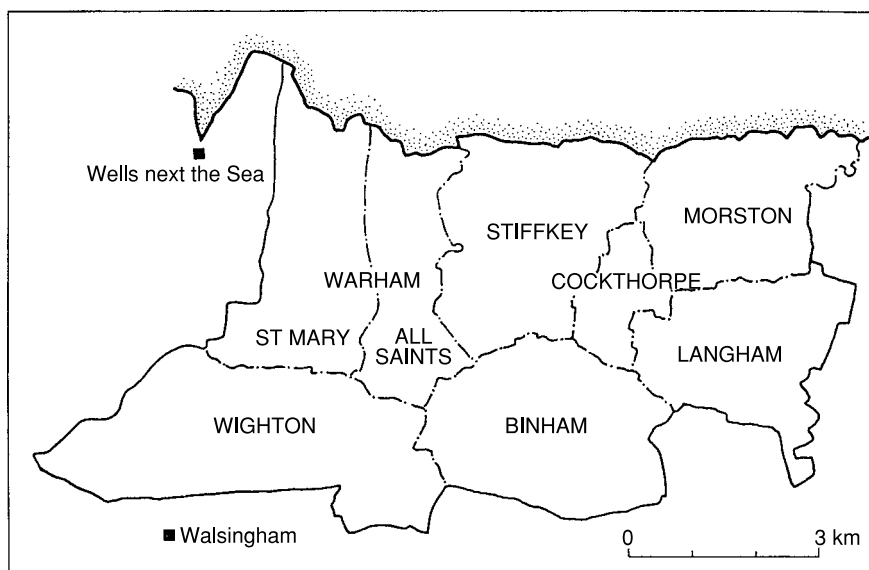
Early modern England was not a centralised bureaucracy. It was a participatory society in which the state relied upon the active cooperation of a broad range of the population to enforce legislation.⁴ This cooperation was not necessarily forthcoming. Although they were agents of the state, officeholders were also representatives of their communities whose authority rested as much upon their local social standing as upon holding office itself.⁵ As such, when the demands of the state conflicted with popular conceptions of neighbourliness and order, officeholders frequently chose a path of studied negligence, turning a blind eye to the strict enforcement of legislation and preferring to

exhibit replies of 'omnia bene' rather than present the faults of their neighbours to the courts.⁶

However, it has been argued persuasively that the localism which underlay these responses was undermined by social and economic change during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At this time, economic polarisation, accentuated by population increase and agrarian crises, acquired a social and cultural dimension as the wealthier parishioners were differentiated from their poorer neighbours through literacy, access to education, and participation in local administration.⁷ Over the course of the sixteenth century the responsibilities of local officials were systematically added to and their activities more closely monitored as successive governments, obsessed by threats to the social order, sought to extend their influence within the parish.⁸ These initiatives, which culminated in the poor law legislation of 1598 and 1601, enhanced the power and status of local officeholders and hastened the creation of parochial oligarchies.⁹ Furthermore, they encouraged parish elites to identify with the interests of central government and offer selective support for the state's attempts at economic and social regulation.¹⁰ In some parishes, notably those where the parish elites were swayed by radical Protestant belief, this was expressed by the active use of civil and ecclesiastical courts; officeholders were prepared to initiate action against the perceived threat that their poorer neighbours posed to the social and moral order as well as to their pockets.¹¹

This model of social change has been extremely influential. It has identified a critical period in the development of social relations, helped explain why government initiatives were successful in certain areas but less so in others and marked a point from which the participation of the 'middling sort' in a national political culture can be traced. Nonetheless, there remain considerable gaps in our understanding of officeholding. The focus of attention upon these important national themes has tended to direct attention from the locality itself. Despite evidence of considerable local variations in the socio-economic status of officeholders, there has been no systematic study of the relative importance of factors such as agrarian regime, socio-economic structure, or the tenor of local social and political relations.¹²

Furthermore, the stress which has been placed upon the political importance of officeholding may understate its role as a participatory institution. There remains an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the image of oligarchical domination by a parish elite and, on the other, the evidence from a number of studies which emphasises both the continued participation of a broad spectrum of the populace throughout the early modern period and the importance of local custom in the election of officials.¹³ One of the reasons why this remains unresolved is that historians have tended to view the development of oligarchy rather uncritically, relying upon the assumption that parish elites could exert their influence when and where they pleased. This presents a rather simplistic view of parish politics. Michael Braddick has emphasised the extent to which officeholding was embedded in local ideals of personal credit, neighbourliness and order which stressed the collective interest of the community.¹⁴ As such, although they were legitimised through reference to these local norms and values, officeholders were also constrained by them: they could be judged by the extent to which their actions lived up to these ideals. This appreciation of the extent to which the authority of the state



Map 1. The study area.

was inseparable from local expectations suggests that, rather than accepting oligarchy at face value, we should focus upon the mechanisms by which certain groups established and maintained control over officeholding. It illustrates the need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of parochial officeholding if we are to place this institution in its proper context.

This article addresses these concerns through the detailed study of officeholding in seven parishes lying on the north Norfolk coastline (see map 1).¹⁵ Evidence relating to three officials, churchwardens, questmen and overseers of the poor, survives in sufficient quantity to be subjected to detailed analysis. Approximately three-quarters of the churchwardens and questmen who were appointed between 1580 and 1640 can

be traced.¹⁶ Each parish appointed two churchwardens annually to make the twice-yearly presentations to the Archdeaconry courts.¹⁷ Churchwardens were responsible for the religious and moral behaviour of parishioners and for the maintenance of church fabric and furnishings, for which purpose they could raise a parish rate. In addition, the Elizabethan poor law of 1598 gave them responsibilities akin to those of overseers with respect to the maintenance of the poor.¹⁸ Two questmen, the churchwarden's sidesmen colleagues, were elected twice-yearly, each pair attending a different Archdeaconry court. There they shared the churchwarden's responsibilities for presenting the faults of their neighbours, though with a clear emphasis upon attendance at church, observance of the Sabbath and maintenance of order in service time. The poor laws of 1598 and 1601 established the office of overseer of the poor. Two overseers were to be elected annually from the substantial householders of each parish. They were charged with both maintaining and setting the poor to work and raising the funds to do so by means of a parish rate. Three-quarters of the overseers of the poor elected in these parishes can be identified, although only for the period 1600 to 1622.¹⁹

II

The nucleated parishes in this part of north Norfolk were predominantly agricultural, following a variant of sheep-corn husbandry known as the foldcourse system.²⁰ Nonetheless, the proximity of the North Sea ensured that agriculture was not the only source of income: salt-marsh and sea-shore provided both a living for specialist fowlers and inshore fisherman and a source of food and fuel for the poorer residents; a number of yeomen were ship-owners and traded with the continent; and the neighbouring ports of Wells to the west and Blakeney, Cley and Wiveton to the east encouraged all but the poorest residents to cultivate cash-crops such as labour-intensive saffron, alder and hemp. In addition, all groups were involved in a thriving cottage industry of spinning, sewing and knitting.²¹

The seven parishes in the study area shared many characteristics but they were not identical. The main features of their social and economic structures are detailed below and summarised in table 1.²² These profiles are based upon a scheme of seven economic ranks which grew out of the analysis and comparison of those documents, such as field books and taxation records, which provide an indication of wealth. This is not an exact science and additional nominal data from a range of different sources was taken into account in positioning each individual. The profiles provide a comprehensive view of the numbers of wealthier inhabitants but informed estimates must suffice for the less visible parishioners below the level of better-off husbandmen and craftsmen. In order to avoid confusing wealth with status these profiles were derived solely from economic indicators and references to status alone were deemed insufficient to position an individual. Nonetheless, status terminology has been employed in this article for convenience. This is acceptable because a comparison of wealth with status identified a close relationship between the titles of 'gentleman', 'yeoman' and 'husbandman' and particular levels of wealth. However, it must be emphasised that this terminology and the distinctions which have been drawn between 'wealthy' and 'poorer' gentlemen, yeomen and husbandmen

Table 1
Social and economic characteristics of parishes in the study area c. 1600

	Binham	Warham All Saints and St. Mary	Langham	Morston	Stiffkey	Wighton
Population c1600	c420	c360	c300	c180	c280	c400
Manorial Lord	Non-resident (Paston)	Non-resident (Doyly)	Non-resident (Bacon)	Non-resident (Bacon)	Resident (Bacon)	Resident (Bedingfield)
Social Structure c1600						
Wealthier 'County' Gentry	–	–	–	–	Bacon	Bedingfields/Taverner
Poorer 'Lesser' Gentry	2 or 3	–	1	1	–	–
Wealthier Yeomen [>100 acres]	3	3 or 4	1 or 2	2 or 3	1	1 or 2
Poorer Yeomen [32–100 acres]	6	4 or 5	7 or 8	5 or 6	3	6 or 7
Wealthier Husbandmen/Craftsmen [16–32 acres]	10	4 or 5	6	1	4 or 5	1 or 2
Poorer Husbandmen/Craftsmen [5–16 acres]	c20	c15	c15	c3	c8	c15
Speciality	Market, cloth, leather	Building trades				
Decline of Yeomanry/Lesser Gentry in c17th	Numbers reduced from 12 to 6	Unchanged, two yeoman estates expand	Numbers reduced from 10 to 3	Unchanged	Unchanged, one yeoman estate expands	Numbers reduced from 8 to 4

are for guidance only.²³ They should not be taken to imply the presence of groups with any sense of identity.

The manor of Binham was held by the non-resident Paston family who leased out its demesne lands. There was no dominant resident landholder and during the last decade of the sixteenth century two or three lesser gentlemen, three wealthy and six poorer yeomen farmed in the parish. Binham held a weekly market and annual fair which attracted numerous craftsmen; tanners, carpenters, smiths and tailors, to the parish. A number of these were relatively well-off and together with four or five wealthy husbandmen formed a group of ten individuals below the yeomanry. These were complemented by a large group of poorer husbandmen and craftsmen.

Like Binham, the demesne lands of the three manors of Warham All Saints and St. Mary's were held by a non-resident gentry family, the Doyly's, and much land was leased out.²⁴ This helped support a group of eight resident yeomen, three or four of whom were

wealthy. These parishes formed something of a local centre for the building trade and numbers of roughmasons, carpenters and joiners dwelt there. This trade supported a large number of poorer craftsmen and husbandmen in the parish but few were well-off and a group of four wealthy husbandmen were supplemented by a solitary craftsman.

The demesne lands of the manor of Langham cum Morston were leased to tenants on one-hundred year leases during the 1550s and, as was the case with Binham and Warham, benefited a large number of yeomen farmers. In Langham one lesser gentleman and one or two wealthy yeomen held sizeable estates and seven or eight other yeomen farmed in the parish. There were few craftsmen in Langham and none were particularly wealthy. As a result, six well-off husbandmen can be distinguished from a large group of poorer husbandmen and craftsmen. A wealthy husbandman group was almost entirely absent from Morston. In this parish lease lands supported one lesser gentleman, two or three wealthy yeomen and five or six poorer yeomen, but these sizeable holdings left little land for the other residents. One husbandmen who could be described as well-off and three poorer husbandmen were all that separated the yeomanry from the labouring population.

Gentlemen of some standing were resident in the other parishes in the area and as such there was less land to support substantial groups of yeomen. Nathaniel Bacon, a gentleman closely involved in the politics of both county and nation, was resident in Stiffkey during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.²⁵ Three yeomen families, one of whom held more than one hundred acres, were established in the parish before Bacon's arrival and remained throughout the period. These were periodically added to by certain members of Bacon's household whom he set up with land in the parish but who failed to lay down roots. A group of four or five wealthy and eight poorer husbandmen and craftsmen lived in the parish.

In Wighton two rival gentry families, the Bedingfields and their kin and the Smiths, squared up against each other.²⁶ The intra-parochial disputes between these families were resolved by the bankruptcy of the Smith family in the 1580s and their lands were leased out. As a result the number of yeomen in the parish increased from four to eight, of whom one or two were substantial farmers, during the last two decades of the sixteenth century. Like Morston, the socio-economic structure of the parish was somewhat unbalanced and a large group of poorer husbandmen were only separated from the yeomanry by one or two well-off husbandmen or craftsmen.

It is tempting to think that this area was cushioned from the worst effects of the late sixteenth century agrarian crises. There certainly were poor in these parishes, but their numbers do not appear to have over-stretched parochial resources and the pickings of salt-marsh and sea-shore may have alleviated the worst distress of impoverished residents. At the same time the threat of the mobile poor was somewhat reduced because these nucleated, sheep-corn parishes were relatively easy to police against unwanted settlement. Furthermore, there are few signs of pressures upon smallholders. The numbers of smallholders were maintained in Langham, the Warhams and Binham whilst in Morston, Wighton and Stiffkey they had largely disappeared before the start of the period.²⁷ Nonetheless, these parishes were not immune to change. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the land market was particularly active, perhaps as agrarian crises offered sizeable profits for those with large estates. Unusually, this had the effect of

Table 2
Socio-economic distribution of officeholding: Churchwardens, 1580–1640

Status/ Economic rank	Stiffkey		Morston		Langham		Binham		Warham Sts		Warham Mary		Wighton	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	–	–	5	9	4	5	5	7	–	–	1	1	3	4
Yeomen	63	62	49	83	42	47	25	35	21	21	18	24	20	25
Husbandmen	34	34	3	3	34	38	27	38	54	53	35	47	42	52
Labourers	2	2	–	–	–	–	3	4	11	11	1	1	5	6
Untraced	2	2	2	3	9	10	12	17	16	16	19	26	11	14
Total	101	100	59	100	89	100	72	101	102	101	74	99	81	101

reducing the numbers of yeomen within the area. Although the yeomanry had prospered from leases of demesne lands during the mid-sixteenth century, in a more profitable climate these leases were either not renewed or granted at higher rents to a single farmer. This, in combination with a process whereby individual yeomen's holdings were gradually purchased by a few wealthy farmers, had a considerable impact in some parishes.

In Wighton a large amount of demesne land, formerly held by the non-resident Sidney family, was bequeathed to their kinsman, Francis Jermy, following Sir Henry Sidney's death in 1612. Jermy settled in the parish and took possession of these demesnes. As a result, the number of yeomen was halved. In Binham demesne leases expired and were relet to a member of a local yeoman family, Samuel Money. By 1614 the number of yeomen in the parish had also been halved.²⁸ A gentleman, Robert Barnard, settled in Langham in the 1590s and rapidly accumulated a sizeable landholding. During the last decades of the sixteenth century and first decades of the seventeenth the number of yeomen in the parish was reduced from ten to three and the proportion of parish land they held fell from two-thirds to less than one-fifth.²⁹ Large landholdings also developed in Stiffkey and the Warhams, but in these parishes the more modest expansion of members of the Purland and Framingham families failed to precipitate a decline amongst other yeomen. It was only in Morston, where the continuity of yeoman and lesser gentry families throughout the period is marked, that the buoyant land market appears to have had no influence.

Although they shared an agrarian region, there were considerable differences in the socio-economic structures of the parishes in this area. These resulted from both the different roles that these parishes fulfilled within the local economy and the presence of particular individuals, such as wealthy gentry, in some parishes and their absence from others. It remains to be seen how these differences and similarities may be reflected in participation in officeholding.

III

The socio-economic distribution of officeholding within the study area is shown in tables 2 to 4. It must be stressed that an individual's visibility in the historical record depends greatly upon socio-economic grouping. The sources consulted in this study offer an

Table 3
Socio-economic distribution of officeholding: Questmen, 1580–1640

Status/ Economic rank	Stiffkey		Morston		Langham		Binham		Warham Sts		Warham Mary		Wighton	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	–	–	4	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	3	3
Yeomen	14	16	44	64	28	29	13	14	13	13	14	18	10	10
Husbandmen	46	52	5	7	40	42	54	59	37	37	46	59	35	34
Labourers	22	25	1	1	9	9	1	1	22	22	–	–	26	26
Untraced	6	7	15	22	19	20	24	26	27	27	17	22	28	28
Total	88	100	69	100	96	100	92	100	99	99	78	100	102	101

Table 4
Socio-economic distribution of officeholding: Overseers of the Poor, 1580–1640

Status/ Economic rank	Stiffkey		Morston		Langham		Binham		Warham All Sts. and Mary		Wighton	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gentlemen	–	–	3	20	1	6	1	5	2	6	6	18
Yeomen	28	74	8	53	13	72	10	50	13	39	12	36
Husbandmen	9	24	2	13	3	17	9	45	17	52	13	39
Labourers	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	3
Untraced	1	3	2	13	1	6	–	–	1	3	1	3
Total	38	101	15	99	18	101	20	100	33	100	33	99

accurate view of the resident gentry, yeomanry and better-off husbandmen and craftsmen during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries but they are far less forthcoming about the poorer parishioners. Although this is unfortunate, it does suggest that the great majority of officeholders whose economic position could not be identified were the less wealthy parishioners; modest husbandmen, poorer craftsmen and labourers.

There was a hierarchy of offices in these parishes which bore a clear relationship to hierarchies of wealth and status.³⁰ The office of overseer of the poor was the most prestigious and in each parish the involvement of the yeomanry and lesser gentry was pronounced.³¹ The churchwardenship lay somewhere between this office and that of questman, which was the office most likely to be held by the poorer residents.³² However, although this hierarchy of offices was evident throughout the area, there were, nevertheless, considerable differences between parishes. A distinction can be drawn between those parishes where the wealthier inhabitants dominated the offices of overseer and churchwarden and those where they did not. In Morston ninety-two per cent of churchwardens were yeomen or lesser gentry and in Stiffkey sixty-two per cent of these officials were yeomen. In both parishes three-quarters of overseers of the poor were yeomen or lesser gentry. By contrast, the role of the wealthier residents was far less apparent in the parishes of Wighton, Binham and the Warhams. In these parishes husbandmen and craftsmen participated in officeholding to an equal, if not greater,

extent than yeomen. In Binham husbandmen and labourers held forty-two per cent of churchwarden's offices, the same percentage as yeomen and lesser gentlemen combined, and in Wighton yeomen and gentry held only twenty-nine per cent of churchwarden's offices compared to husbandmen and craftsmen who held fifty-two per cent. In Warham St. Mary yeomen and lesser gentry held twenty-five per cent of churchwarden's offices whilst husbandmen and craftsmen held forty-seven per cent and in Warham All Saints yeomen held twenty-one per cent of these offices whilst husbandmen held at least fifty-three per cent. The involvement of yeoman and gentry as overseers of the poor was greater in these parishes. They accounted for fifty-five per cent of these officials in Binham, fifty-four per cent in Wighton and forty-five per cent in the Warhams. Nonetheless, husbandmen and craftsmen played a far greater role in this prestigious office than they did in Stiffkey and Morston.

Langham deserves particular mention. Although the role of yeomen and gentry as overseers of the poor was considerable, these groups holding almost eighty per cent of this office, their participation in the churchwardenship is less noticeable. Gentlemen and yeomen held just over fifty per cent of churchwarden's offices, little more than these groups did in Binham. However, this may be misleading. Alone of all the parishes in the area, it is possible to identify marked differences of behaviour within a particular grouping. In Langham the wealthier husbandmen can be distinguished clearly from their poorer peers. Although there were many poorer husbandmen resident in that parish, almost three-quarters of those husbandmen and craftsmen who acted as churchwardens were better-off husbandmen. This suggests that, like Morston and Stiffkey, officeholding was dominated by the wealthier parishioners in Langham.

Parochial variation was less in evidence with respect to the office of questman (see table 3). In each parish the role of the wealthier parishioners was limited whilst that of the poorer residents was marked. For instance, in Stiffkey, a parish which may be crudely characterised as 'oligarchical', sixteen per cent of all questmen were yeomen, whilst in Warham All Saints and Warham St. Mary, two 'egalitarian' parishes, the yeomanry accounted for just thirteen per cent and eighteen per cent of questmen respectively. The one exception to this more inclusive distribution was the parish of Morston, in which the offices of churchwarden and questman were combined. As such, the domination of the lesser gentry and yeomanry in the churchwardenship was reflected in the office of questman.

The extent of variation amongst these parishes is somewhat unexpected. In part, this stems from assumptions which are frequently made about the importance of agrarian region; an area defined by a range of common characteristics such as physical geography, farming regime, social and economic structure, and settlement type. It has been suggested that agrarian regions could have far-reaching social and cultural implications, influencing the strength of local institutions, the nature of association and identity within a community, and the ability of local government to exert its authority. Nucleated sheep-corn settlements such as those in this area, with their strong manorial institutions and pyramidal social structures, are frequently associated with close-knit communities and hierarchical forms of government in which oligarchy predominated.³³ The evidence from the study area, however, is suggestive of variation rather than uniformity. Only

three of these parishes exhibited what may be termed 'oligarchical' structures of office-holding, whilst four displayed markedly 'egalitarian' distributions.³⁴ Agrarian region may have been an important social and cultural influence, shaping the broad economic and social environment, but it did not dictate the nature of social interaction within the parish.

The degree to which even relatively humble residents participated in the more 'egalitarian' parishes is also noteworthy. The office of overseer is commonly viewed as the exclusive preserve of the wealthier parishioners, their domination being one aspect of the process by which the 'village elites, took financial and political responsibility for the communities which they represented'.³⁵ This was not the case in Binham, Wighton, Warham All Saints and Warham St. Mary. In these parishes participation extended well down the socio-economic structure and husbandmen and craftsmen who held no more than a few acres were frequently called upon to hold the most prestigious offices. Men such as Barnaby Browne, a husbandman of Binham, William Burrage, a joiner from Wighton or Thomas More, a husbandman from Warham, were as likely to be appointed overseer of the poor as were local yeomen.

How to explain this variation? Joan Kent's study of village constables in nine separate communities suggested that socio-economic structure had a major influence upon parochial officeholding. The distribution of officeholding could be explained by the fact that 'although the wealthiest men always held, and even dominated, parish office, some were wealthier than others.'³⁶ This explanation appears to have much to recommend it. It can surely be no coincidence that Morston, home to a large group of yeomen but few husbandmen of any description, was also the parish with the most oligarchical approach to officeholding. Unfortunately, socio-economic explanations do not bear closer scrutiny. It would be impossible to predict the distribution of officeholding in a given parish from analysis of its socio-economic structure alone.

The socio-economic structures of Warham All Saints and Stiffkey appear to have been similar. In each parish there was a small group of yeomen, four or five well-off husbandmen or craftsmen and a number of poorer husbandmen. Nonetheless, despite these similarities, the inclusive officeholding of Warham All Saints had little in common with the yeoman oligarchy which developed in Stiffkey. Although social structure may have helped mould officeholding, it did not actually determine it. In Wighton the absence of a group of well-off husbandmen and craftsmen left two possible approaches. Officeholding could become the preserve of a yeoman oligarchy or it could incorporate a relatively wide spectrum of the population. As we have seen, although in Morston a yeoman oligarchy developed under similar circumstances, in Wighton the latter course was adopted.

There are suggestions that, on occasion, changes in the socio-economic structure of these parishes could have a direct impact upon officeholding. As we have seen, in Langham the participation of the wealthier husbandmen may be clearly distinguished from that of their poorer peers. It is possible that the marked decline in the number of yeomen in Langham during the first decades of the seventeenth century somehow affected their ability or desire to dominate this office and encouraged the better-off husbandmen to become involved. However, such speculation should not be taken too far. It remains

to be explained why there was no comparable development in other parishes. Well-off husbandmen were also numerous in Binham and the decline of the yeomanry in that parish was equally dramatic but there is no evidence of differences between the wealthier and poorer husbandmen. Changes in socio-economic structure may have influenced officeholding, but they were accommodated in different ways in different parishes. In Langham participation remained exclusive whilst in Binham it retained its egalitarian flavour.

If parochial variation cannot be explained by agrarian region or socio-economic structure what about the local social and political environment? Although much of the detail of parochial politics is hidden from view there are few signs of differences in social relations, such as intra-parochial divisions or socio-cultural differentiation, which could help explain the development of oligarchy. Radical Protestantism was certainly established in this area but it is impossible to distinguish between the 'oligarchical' and 'egalitarian' parishes in this respect. The periodic flurries of presentments of particular offences to the church courts were experienced throughout these parishes and seem to have resulted from drives by the ecclesiastical authorities rather than from local initiatives.³⁷ There is also little evidence that individuals, such as active resident gentry or clergy, had a great impact. Although the presence of Nathaniel Bacon may have had a considerable influence upon Stiffkey, it is difficult to see why this should have extended to the other two oligarchical parishes, Morston and Langham, whilst leaving the neighbouring parishes of Binham and Warham unaffected.

It begins to seem that an understanding of parochial variation is beyond us, lost in a complex of different influences and obscured by the unrecorded minutiae of everyday interaction. However, before assuming that this is the case it is worth comparing officeholding with another form of participation. The great majority of officeholders were also contributors to the poor rate during the first decades of the seventeenth century. This is not particularly surprising. The poor rate drew clear distinctions between those who contributed, those who did not and those who received succour, and as such the status of contributor was likely to become an important criterion for officeholding.³⁸ However, the precise form of the poor rate was not imposed upon the parish by statute; it resulted from the decisions made by parishioners about who should be taxed and who should not.³⁹ This meant that the structure of poor rates differed considerably throughout the study area. The parishes of Morston and Langham rated a relatively small number of individuals and rarely called upon those below the level of well-off husbandman to contribute. Stiffkey and Binham incorporated a wider range of individuals in their rates but these were not as inclusive as those drawn up in the parishes of Wighton and Warham, which regularly included the better-off labourers. In part, these rates may have been influenced by the ability of residents to pay, but they were not dictated by social and economic structures. The limited numbers of husbandmen in Morston may have encouraged a more exclusive rate, but rates were only marginally less exclusive in Langham, a parish with an abundance of both wealthy and poorer husbandmen. Similarly, despite the considerable number of resident yeomen in Warham during the early seventeenth century, a decision was made to rate the poorer inhabitants. In each parish the structure of the poor rate was heavily influenced by pre-existing ideas about who was expected to contribute.

The similarities between the structure of poor rates and the distribution of officeholding within these parishes should be clear. They seem to indicate the presence of well-established ideas about who should participate and who should not which were particular to each parish.⁴⁰ There should be nothing surprising about this, it simply reflects the fact that when parishioners came to decide who should hold office or contribute to the poor rate they tended to refer to norms about the ways in which things should be done. Nonetheless, these local understandings, we could hesitantly term them parochial traditions, are seldom given such a prominent position by historians. Repeated emphasis upon the role of officeholding in processes of socio-economic differentiation has meant that tradition and custom are commonly relegated to the periphery, regarded as examples of local variation worthy of note but not of serious attention. This study suggests that these parochial traditions could be more than this. They were not absolute, as we shall see there were far too many other influences upon the choice of officeholders for that to be the case. Nonetheless, they exerted an active influence upon participation which could be significant. It is worth speculating that the presence of these well-established understandings could have a bearing upon the outcome of pressures towards social differentiation. It may have been far harder for oligarchy to develop in parishes where more inclusive forms of participation were ingrained. Furthermore, the presence of these parochial traditions emphasizes the extent to which the agencies of the state were enmeshed within local understandings and expectations.⁴¹ At a time when the state was expanding its influence in the parish, creating new officials and burdening existing ones with novel responsibilities, these parochial traditions may have been of critical importance. The extent to which overseers were able to wield effective authority and to which poor law legislation was successfully enforced may have depended upon the shared interests of a broad spectrum of parishioners, but success was far more likely if actions were justified in terms of existing ideas about how things should be done. Therefore, it was expedient that poor relief was, initially at least, interpreted through reference to these parochial traditions.⁴²

IV

Parochial officeholding rested upon the ideals of participation and inclusion. It was common for outsiders who married and settled in a parish to be chosen to hold office soon after their arrival. This was the case with individuals from a range of groups, though the poorest members of society were conspicuous by their absence. William Goldsborough settled in Stiffkey after his marriage to Julia Barney, the daughter of a local labourer, in 1606. He was elected questman in 1608. Similarly, William Harvey, a carpenter, married the widow of Christopher Hill of Warham All Saints in 1594 and was made questman in 1596. This was also common amongst incomers who were already married. Geoffrey Steele, a husbandman, was appointed churchwarden of Stiffkey the year after his return to that parish and Richard Life, another husbandman, held office soon after he moved to Warham St. Mary from Wighton.⁴³

Participation in parochial offices was also presented as a positive means of fostering responsibility and neighbourliness. In this respect it did not always work, as is illustrated

by a letter to Nathaniel Bacon written in the first decades of the seventeenth century, which begins:

Maye it please yo[u]r good Woorshipp to understand that whereas we thin[ab]itants of Wells whose names are underwritten at o[u]r last Courte did chuse Robert Jarye for one of o[u]r Cunstables thinking thereby to have somewhat restrained him from his former unrulynes in gaming and using the alehouses. But nowe perceyving that nothing at all it avayleth but that rather it doth encourage him to bolster out both his owne loose behavioure and alsoe the ill demeaner of others and therefore thinking him to be aman utterly unmeete for that office. . . .⁴⁴

Although the motives behind Jary's appointment can never be known, the fact that this rhetoric was employed is suggestive. A deep-seated desire existed to avoid conflict and re-integrate wayward individuals into the parish community as swiftly as possible.⁴⁵ An institution with connotations of cohesion and community was one means by which this could be achieved. These connotations were emphasised through the close association of officeholding with marriage. With very few exceptions, officeholders were both married and of independent means when they first held office. Indeed, for many individuals, officeholding began early in adult life. Of three hundred and thirty-eight officeholders whose date of marriage is known, at least one hundred and sixty-five (48.8%) first held office within three years of this event. As such, officeholding was inextricably linked to a ritual of inclusion through which individuals were accepted as adult members of the parish community.⁴⁶

The great majority of individuals began their officeholding careers as questmen.⁴⁷ This served the practical purpose of testing an individual's ability before exposing him to more taxing offices such as the churchwardenship and overseer which, if not actually requiring literacy, did involve the presentation of accounts. Peter Lounde of Warham, a husbandman, was married in the mid-1590s. He was appointed as questman in 1601 and churchwarden in 1603 but was only elected overseer in 1622. Clement Burdon, a roughmason from Langham was married in 1605, he acted as questman in 1607, churchwarden in 1608 and finally overseer in 1614, at the age of thirty-two. This path was common to all villagers regardless of social position. William Pope, a yeoman of Warham St. Mary, was married in 1590 and acted as questman in 1592, only being appointed churchwarden in 1598. Thomas Kinges of Morston, a lesser gentleman, seems to have been a questman in Morston before he acted as either churchwarden or overseer.

The office of questman was the most inclusive of the offices considered in this study. There was very little parochial variation in the socio-economic distribution of questmen and in each parish a substantial minority of labourers and poorer craftsmen were elected to this office. In this context it is no surprise that the office is frequently considered to be 'humblest of parish officials'.⁴⁸ However, this assumption may seriously underestimate the critical role this office played in reinforcing ideals of participation. Although in comparison with other offices the involvement of the wealthier parishioners was limited, there is little suggestion that the wealthier residents attempted to avoid participation in the office of questman. The great majority of yeomen seem to have held the office on at least one occasion and it may be that the involvement of this group was broadly

representative of their numbers. Viewed from this perspective the office of questman becomes essentially inclusive, encouraging the participation of a broad range of the population.

Parochial officeholding was an institution saturated with the rhetoric of participation and community. Its structure was greatly influenced by parochial traditions relating to the way in which things should be done and it referred to ideals of inclusion, reformation and marriage. However, it goes without saying that there was a significant gulf between these lofty ideals and more mundane realities. To a greater or lesser degree officeholding was exclusive within all of these parishes. The most generous estimate suggests that a large minority of men did not hold any offices during their lives. Of the most stable residents, those men who baptised more than one child in these parishes between 1596 and 1610, only 101 out of 202, fifty per cent, are recorded as having held office at some time. Participation was not even throughout social groups. Although it is extremely difficult to be certain, the analysis of those individuals for whom some record of status has survived suggests that whilst most yeomen held office at some time, perhaps only one-half of husbandmen and far less than one-quarter of labourers did so. Furthermore, those labourers who did participate were not representative of all members of the labouring sort. These officeholders tended to belong to a small group of labourers who are marked out by their visibility in the records. They were men like William Brigham of Warham All Saints who was chosen as churchwarden on three occasions. Brigham frequently appeared in Nathaniel Bacon's account books, supplementing his main income as a spadesman by helping with the saffron harvest and as a contract thresher. It seems reasonable to consider Brigham and others like him as members of a 'labouring elite', profiting from the possession of particular skills or developed social networks. The presence of this group can be placed in context by reference to a profile of Stiffkey families during the 1590s. This suggests that between fifty and sixty per cent of the population were labourers or poor craftsmen.⁴⁹ As such it may be that almost one-half of the population, those below this 'labouring elite', were almost entirely excluded from participation.

The exclusion of a substantial minority of the population was justified by the restricted participation of a small proportion of labourers and poorer craftsmen. However, it is important to stress that for the majority of those men who did hold office, involvement was extremely limited. For many of those fortunate enough to participate, a single office held shortly after marriage would serve as their sole experience of officeholding. Of 533 men who are recorded as holding office within the study area, 230 men, forty-three per cent, are recorded as holding office on only one occasion. These single officeholders were mostly labourers and poorer husbandmen and craftsmen and the great majority, three-quarters, were elected to the office of questman. Therefore, almost one-third of all officeholders' experience of officeholding was a single term in the office of questman.

Parochial officeholding contributed to the finely graded hierarchies of the parish community.⁵⁰ Although only thirty-seven per cent of officeholders held office on three or more occasions, they accounted for a total of sixty-eight per cent of all offices in these parishes. This inequality was effectively concealed behind a facade of participation which transformed the limited involvement of the labouring elite, most of whom held office only once, into a model of communal responsibility.

The precise make-up of the participatory communities who controlled local office-holding varied considerably throughout the area. In the parishes of Wighton, Warham All Saints and St. Mary, for instance, there is good reason to think that it was common for better-off labourers to be elected as churchwardens. In Morston by contrast, only the yeomanry and lesser gentry were involved. I have suggested that these differences were influenced by the presence of particular approaches to participation, distinct parochial traditions. Up until this point, the aggregate analysis of officeholding has given these participatory communities and the traditions which underlay them the appearance of stability. However, this was a period of economic and social upheaval, of agrarian crises and cultural differentiation. Therefore, it is important that some attempt is made to identify changes in the structure of officeholding over time. This is hampered by small sample sizes, only the office of churchwarden can be considered and the results are somewhat impressionistic. Nonetheless, the story they tell is of significance.

It was common for the poorer parishioners to act as churchwardens in Wighton during the late 1590s and 1600s. John Dericke, a carpenter, held the office twice, and Robert Fish and John Balls, both husbandmen, held once, as did William Cock, a labourer. However, for a parish which has been associated with a more 'egalitarian' approach to officeholding, the involvement of the village elites was impressive during these decades. William Thory, a wealthy miller held the churchwardenship three times and William Pope and George Walpole held the office for five consecutive years between 1603 and 1607. Indeed, in total, wealthier parishioners held almost three-quarters of churchwarden's offices during the late 1590s and 1600s. In the second decade of the seventeenth century, however, the involvement of the yeomanry declined. Yeomen such as Richard Kirby and Robert Mason held the office on occasion, as did George Feake, but the situation was reversed and perhaps three-quarters of offices were held by husbandmen, craftsmen or labourers.

This picture of yeoman participation in the churchwardenship during the 1590s and 1600s followed by a retreat from involvement can, to a greater or lesser extent, be observed in other parishes. In Binham, yeomen accounted for two-thirds of churchwardens between 1596 and 1610, less than one-third of offices during the 1610s and played an even more restricted role in the 1620s. In the first decade of the seventeenth century two-thirds of churchwardens elected in Langham were yeomen. This fell to one-half in the 1610s and one-third in the following decades.⁵¹ The role of yeomen was far less marked in Warham all Saints and St. Mary during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and between 1596 and 1610 they only accounted for one-third and one-half of churchwardens respectively. Nonetheless, this represented a high-point in the participation of the wealthy parishioners. Only one man with any pretension to yeoman status was elected churchwarden in Warham St. Mary between 1612 and 1629, and only two yeomen were elected in Warham All Saints between 1610 and 1630.

The most convincing explanation for this behaviour centres upon the influence of agrarian crises and the development of the poor rate. Although these coastal parishes may have been sheltered from the worst effects of dearth, their parish elites would have been acutely aware of the potential dangers. The towns of Wells and Walsingham provided numerous examples of poverty and it was with good reason that a regular poor rate was introduced throughout the hundreds of Holt and North Greenhoe during the late

1590s. The yeomanry's response to this initiative was straightforward; they attempted to control those offices which held the purse strings. Although overseers of the poor may have had primary responsibility for the execution of the poor law, churchwardens shared responsibility for making rates and submitting accounts, as well as enforcement of statute.⁵² It was very much in the yeomanry's interests to assert their influence over this office.

The outcome of these concerns was variable. In Morston the yeomanry continued to dominate the churchwardenship as they had done before the imposition of the poor rate. In Stiffkey, although it was common for husbandmen and craftsmen to act as churchwardens, they may have done so in the shadow of the wealthier parishioners. In only three of the thirty-one years for which records of churchwardens survive was a yeoman not elected to the office.

By contrast, in those parishes where the authority of the yeomanry was not established, change was more noticeable. In these parishes the yeomanry were stirred into action and used their influence to dominate the office. However, the perceived crisis was not to last. As the process by which the rates were levied settled down and contributions failed to spiral out of control, it became clear that any pressures could be contained. By the second decade of the seventeenth century the yeomanry in these parishes recognised that control of the churchwardenship was unnecessary and withdrew from domination of this office. This resulted in a return to traditions of participation which pre-dated both agrarian crises and poor rate.

These observations raise a number of issues which serve to draw together the strands of this article. They suggest that the parochial traditions identified in this study could be extremely vulnerable to social and economic change, and that parish elites were able to exert control over parochial institutions when it was in their interests to do so. This may be true enough, but it is not without qualification. The fact that the parish elite's control over the churchwardenship was relatively brief in duration may be interpreted in different ways. It may be that the yeomanry relinquished control over the churchwardenship once it became clear that it was not crucial to their interests. However, it may also be the case that they were encouraged to do so by the very resilience of these parochial traditions, which could be re-interpreted in the face of changing economic and social circumstances and as such retained some importance within the community.

The role of parish traditions has received little attention in other studies and further work is required before their typicality and longevity can be established. Nonetheless, this study makes it clear that officeholding must be viewed as a complex institution which, in addition to its administrative functions, fulfilled a number of important roles within the parish community. These went far beyond the simple exploitation of officeholding by any group in an overt expression of political power. In fact, the inseparability of officeholding from deeply-held ideals of participation and community illustrates the presence of considerable constraints upon the actions of the parish elites. There is no evidence to indicate that oligarchy developed through main force in these parishes. It was achieved through repeated emphasis upon a range of local expectations and understandings which were built into an extremely effective rhetoric through which inequality and exclusion could be justified.

The analysis of short-term changes in the distribution of officeholding has another important implication. The movement between more inclusive and more exclusive forms of officeholding in the parishes of Binham, Wighton, Langham and the Warhams during this period illustrates the extent to which the composition of the participatory community could alter over short periods of time. We may speculate that these changes to the constitution of the groups which dominated local administration offer a rare insight into the nature of the 'middling sort' during the early modern period. The 'middling sort' may have been at the forefront of processes of economic polarisation, social change and the development of political culture but it has been notoriously difficult to define. Henry French's survey of the historiography of the middling sort has illustrated the limitations of attempts to define this group through analysis of factors such as wealth, occupation, participation in local administration, consumption and shared values.⁵³ The evidence from this study may tentatively suggest that such definitions are problematic simply because the middling sort effectively defies definition. The fluctuations which this study has identified in the involvement of two groups, one comprising the parochial elite and the other a more inclusive group incorporating husbandmen and craftsmen, suggests that the middling sort should not be conceived as a stable entity. Rather, it was continuously formed and reformed by the interaction of clusters of individuals who coalesced around particular interests and issues. This had a variable impact upon officeholding. In some cases it enabled a broad group to participate; in others it ensured the domination of the parish elite.⁵⁴

Notes

1. I am indebted to Prof. A. Hassell Smith and Dr. Andy Wood for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.
2. For two important re-appraisals see K. Wrightson, 'Two Concepts of Order: Justices, Constables and Jury Men in Seventeenth Century England', John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1980), pp. 21–46, pp. 26–9; J. R. Kent, *The English Village Constable 1580–1642: A Social and Administrative Study* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 72–9, 139–44.
3. S. Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.1–36; M. J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, c.1550–1700* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.9–46.
4. K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London, 1982), pp. 150–1, 224–6; M. Braddick, 'The Early Modern English State and the Question of Differentiation, from 1550 to 1700', *Comparative Studies in Sociology and History*, 38 (1996), 92–111, 98–99; C. B. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and Criminal Law in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 68–71, 205.
5. Kent, *Village Constable*, pp. 21–3, 63–7; B. Kumin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c.1400–1560* (Guildford, 1996), pp. 42–6; Braddick, *State Formation*, pp. 72–82.
6. Keith Wrightson, *Two Concepts of Order*, pp. 21–32; Kent, *Village Constable*, pp. 222–81.
7. K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village, Terling 1525–1700* (London, 1995), passim; K. Wrightson, 'Aspects of Social Differentiation in Rural England, c.1580–1660', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 5 (1977–8), 33–47; D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 9–72.
8. Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, pp. 245–9; Kent, *Village Constable*, pp. 25–56.

9. Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, pp. 28–9; Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 222–8.
10. Hindle, *State and Social Change*, pp. 204–30.
11. Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 152–5, 164–71, 180–1, 211–12; Wrightson, *Two Concepts*, pp. 39–46; Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 231–2; Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, pp. 254–5; Kent, *Village Constable*, pp. 282–311.
12. Kent, *Village Constable*, pp. 82–122; Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, pp. 209, 223–5.
13. Herrup, *Common Peace*, pp. 68–71; J. S. Craig, 'Co-operation and Initiatives: Elizabethan Churchwardens and the Parish Accounts of Mildenhall', *Social History*, 18, 3 (1993), 357–80, 359–70; Kent, *Village Constable*, pp. 21–3, 63–7, 139; Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, pp. 42–6.
14. Braddick, *State Formation*, pp. 72–95.
15. References to officeholding in the parish of Cockthorpe are too few to allow analysis.
16. Norfolk Record Office, Archdeaconry of Norwich Court Records, General Inquisitions /1 /3 to 32, 1563–1666; Libri Visitationis and Libri Compertorus ANW /3 /1–35, 1563–1640.
17. Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 44–5.
18. Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, p. 248; Craig, *Co-operation and Initiatives*, p. 366.
19. NRO, Martyn 20–27; NRO, Bradfer Lawrence VIII, a, (I); NRO, RAY 113, 200, 223, 226, 229; NRO, NRS 20421, 20525, 20526; NRO, BCH 1 /96; RH, Box 6, 34, 42, 43.
20. K. J. Allison, 'The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Agricultural History Review* (1957), 12–30.
21. A. Hassell Smith, 'Labourers in Late Sixteenth-Century England: A Case Study from North Norfolk [Part I]', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), 11–52; A. Hassell Smith, 'Labourers in Late Sixteenth-Century England: A Case Study from North Norfolk [Part II]', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), 367–94.
22. For greater detail see J. Pitman, *Status and Participation in Early Modern England: A Case Study from North Norfolk, 1580–1640*, Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of East Anglia, 1999, pp. 21–101.
23. It should also be stressed that there were individuals within these groups who are not adequately described by this terminology. Not only are independent women included in these profiles but there were also many craftsmen of comparable wealth to husbandmen and labourers who were only ever referred to by occupational terminology.
24. Warham All Saints and Saint Mary were distinct parishes. However, since residents commonly held land in both parishes and they were unified with respect to the poor rate these profiles treat them as one.
25. A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Norfolk, 1558–1603* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 167–73.
26. PRO, DL 3 /70 /T1, 1557; PRO, DL 4 /18 /19, 1576; PRO, DL /4 /55 /47, 1609. My thanks to Dr. Andy Wood for making his transcriptions of these documents available.
27. It was these groups who were particularly susceptible to rising prices and an inability to profit from surpluses. M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 46–57.
28. RH, Box 6, 42, Binham overseers account 1613–14; NRO, Bradfer Lawrence VIII, a, (i), Binham overseers account 1614–15.
29. NRO, RAY 34 /22, Field Book of Langham 1577; NRO, RAY 114, Field books of Morston and Langham 1619–20.
30. K. Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England', P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 10–46, pp. 19–20.
31. The involvement of the gentry in officeholding was extremely restricted throughout the area and they accounted for only 10 out of a total of 273 churchwardenships. The majority of those who did participate were lesser gentry who had risen from local yeoman families such

- as the Framinghams of Stiffkey and Warham, the Purlands of Warham and the Moneys and Lamberds of Binham. These men are extremely difficult to distinguish from their yeoman neighbours, to whom they were frequently inter-related.
32. Unfortunately, evidence relating to village constables is limited. The evidence from Stiffkey suggests that the office stood below the churchwardenship but above the office of questman, being largely the preserve of husbandmen and craftsmen.
 33. Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 171; D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 73–105; Hindle, *State and Social Change*, p. 225.
 34. This terminology is used for comparison only. As we shall see, all officeholding was exclusive.
 35. S. Hindle, 'Exclusion Crises: Poverty, Migration and Parochial Responsibility in English Rural Communities, c.1560–1660', *Rural History*, 7 (1996), 125–49, p. 126.
 36. Kent, *English Village Constable*, pp. 103, 108–9, 119, 121–2; Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, p. 224.
 37. NRO, ANW/2, Act Books; NRO, ANW/6, Visitation presentments; NRO, ANW/1, General Inquisitions; NRO, ANW/3, Comperta Books.
 38. Hindle, *The State and Social change*, pp. 28–9; Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 222–8.
 39. J. V. Beckett, *Local Taxation: National Legislation and the Problems of Enforcement* (London, 1980), p. 8. It is clear that there was no single method by which contributions were assessed in this part of North Norfolk. NRO, NRS, Martyn 24, Fieldalling overseers accounts 1615; NRO, RH, 6 /42, 1613–14, Hindringham overseers accounts 1613.
 40. These understandings may have been mirrored in other arenas, such the choice of witnesses to wills. Although the involvement of clergy makes it difficult to compare witnessing actions with officeholding, there are similarities. In Stiffkey and Morston the yeomanry played an important role in the witnessing of wills whilst in Binham, Wighton and the Warhams the role of poorer parishioners was far more pronounced.
 41. Braddick, *State Formation*, pp. 72–82.
 42. It is important to stress that these traditions were not impervious to change. As a result of becoming intertwined with poor law legislation they would be experienced in terms of heightened social differentiation and consequently reinterpreted.
 43. This integrative role did not, however, mean that incomers would enjoy lengthy careers as officeholders. For the most part they were restricted to holding occasional office, frequently that of questman.
 44. H. W. Saunders (ed.), *The Official Papers of Sir Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey, 1580–1620* (Camden Society, 26, 1915), pp. 41–42.
 45. C. Muldrew, 'The Culture of Reconciliation: Community and the Settlement of Economic Disputes in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 915–42.
 46. S. Hindle, 'The Problem of Pauper Marriage in Seventeenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 8 (1998), 71–89, 77–8.
 47. A similar conclusion is reached by J. S. Craig. Craig, *Co-operation and Initiatives*, pp. 357–80, p. 365.
 48. Craig, *Co-operation and Initiatives*, pp. 357–80, p. 368; N. Alldridge, 'Loyalty and Identity in Chester Parishes 1540–1640', S. J. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion* (London, 1988), pp. 85–124, pp. 104–8.
 49. Hassell Smith, *Labourers II*, pp. 382–8.
 50. Wrightson, *Politics of the Parish*, p. 19.
 51. In this parish, however, it was the better-off husbandmen who controlled this office following the decline of yeoman participation.
 52. Craig, *Co-operation and Initiatives*, p. 366.
 53. H. French, "The Search for the 'Middle Sort of People' in England, 1600–1800", *The Historical Journal*, 43, 1 (2000), pp. 277–93.
 54. French, 'Search for the Middle Sort', p. 293.