

**Continuity and Change: The town, people  
and administration of Nottingham  
between c.1400 and c.1600**

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## **Abstract**

This work is a study of continuity and change in Nottingham between 1400 and 1600. It looks first at the property, market, streets and common lands of the town before examining population trends. It investigates the social structure of the town, the wealth (or otherwise) of the people and the occupations they followed. The administration of Nottingham is also considered, in particular its institutions: the Council, the courts and presentment juries, and the networks and relationships which bind them together. It also looks at real and potential challenges to the authority of these institutions and incidents of social unrest.

Finally, the research also identifies some of the stimuli to change, such as national economic and demographic trends and the mid-sixteenth century imposition of the Reformation.

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## Abbreviations

NA	Nottinghamshire Archive
Foulds online	Trevor Foulds, translation and calendar of the <i>Nottingham Borough Court Rolls 1303-1457</i> , <a href="http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/history/cuc/research/Online_Sources.php">http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/history/cuc/research/Online_Sources.php</a>
PRO	Public Record Office
Statutes	<i>The Statutes of the realm: printed by command of His Majesty George III</i> , (London, 1810-1822)
Stevenson	Stevenson, W H, (ed), <i>Records of the Borough of Nottingham</i> , Vols. I-IV (Nottingham, 1882-99)
TNA	The National Archive



## Introduction: Continuity and Change

Research for this thesis was predicated on a simple truism that the world in 1600 was a very different place to that of 1400. This, of course, begs a number of questions: what changed, and its opposite, what did not change? How did it change? Why did it change? How quickly did it change?

Broad-brush answers to these questions are provided by the way the years 1400-1600 are described and labelled by historians, although these descriptions vary according to the focus of their work and the time they were writing. In the 1950s, F J Fisher, an economic historian, described the years between 1350-1450 as a period of stagnation, while 1450-1750 were the 'Dark Ages' of economic history because of lack of evidence.<sup>1</sup> Forty years later, writing in particular on the development of towns, Christopher R Friedrichs also claimed that these years saw little development, asserting that urban infrastructures – physical, administrative and social – were all in place by 1450 and that 'the truly creative and transforming epochs in the history of the European city took place not during the early modern era, but before and after it'.<sup>2</sup> He justified his argument by saying that while these years saw some transformation, such as the growth of cities, the development of modern modes of government, the rise of science and the spread of capitalism, 'town-dwellers were only dimly conscious of what we can now recognise as unidirectional changes'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> F J Fisher, 'The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. The Dark Ages in English Economic History?', in P J Corfield and N B Harte (eds), *London and the English Economy, 1500-1700* (London, 1990), p.134, first published in *Economica*, new series, 24 (1957), pp.2-18.

<sup>2</sup> C R Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450-1570* (Burnt Mill, 1995), p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrichs, *Modern City*, p.333.

In other words, these centuries did undergo change but at a level which did not affect the everyday experiences of townspeople, whose frames of reference remained constant, thus justifying claims of stagnation.

There are, however, alternative views. Catherine Patterson argues that 'urban places lay at the centre of much of the dynamic change occurring in the sixteenth century.'<sup>4</sup> Unlike Friedrichs, Patterson's focus is not on overarching movements such as the development of the modern state, but on changes which, although long term and national, if not global, affected daily life. She summarises those changes and their consequences as

Population rise, economic tensions, and increasing mobility ... Religious reformation introduced new divisions into civic life and significantly altered many traditional expressions of civic unity and governance. At the same time, central government placed increasing demands on urban officials, requiring, above all, that good order be kept, despite forces of disorder in their midst.<sup>5</sup>

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, according to this argument, saw many aspects of traditional life amended, if not overturned, in what Eugene F Rice describes as 'an intricate counterpoint of tradition and innovation, catastrophe and promise'.<sup>6</sup>

These differences in opinion are reflected in the manner in which the years between 1400 and 1600 are divided up for study. Patterson's comments are directed at the Tudor period, that is after 1485; Friedrichs' at the early modern, which he places as beginning in 1450. Both follow the medieval, although when that ended is also open to question. Jan de Vries states that the modern, or more

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<sup>4</sup> C Patterson, 'Town and City Government', in R Tittler and N Jones (eds), *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p.116.

<sup>5</sup> Patterson, 'Town and City Government', p.116.

<sup>6</sup> E F Rice, jnr, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe* (London, 1971), p.ix.

specifically the 'early modern', era began in 1500, fifty years later than Friedrichs.<sup>7</sup> A contrasting, if perhaps extreme, view is expressed by G R Elton who, writing about the Renaissance, claimed that 'Some historians of thought trace the middle ages right through to the sixteenth century ... [to the point where] ... predominately religious thinking is replaced by secular attitudes of mind',<sup>8</sup> while Paul M Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen-Lees refer to the years 1300-1800 as 'proto-industrial', reflecting their focus on economic rather than intellectual development.<sup>9</sup> Something of a compromise is offered by Richard Britnell who describes the years 1471-1529 as an 'epilogue to the Middle Ages, or a prologue to the Early Modern period'.<sup>10</sup> This division, he regards as having 'more to do with the way in which historians specialise than with any intrinsic characteristics of these particular years',<sup>11</sup> a sentiment which develops Susan Reynolds's assertion, made twenty years earlier, that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had rarely been studied together so as to explain the changes and continuities between them.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the pace, all approaches recognise that change happened. Perhaps, in the framework of this study, the most apt description is provided by Christopher Dyer who suggests that the later Middle Ages were an *Age of Transition*.<sup>13</sup> This period was, he argues, a time when urban populations finally recovered their strength after the ravages of the fourteenth century, entrepreneurialism and commercialisation advanced, and men and women no

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<sup>7</sup> J de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500-1800* (London, 1984), p.3.

<sup>8</sup> G R Elton, 'The Age of the Reformation', in G R Elton (ed), *New Cambridge Modern History, Vol. II: The Reformation 1520-1559*; second edition (Cambridge, 1990), p.1.

<sup>9</sup> P M Hohenberg and L Hollen-Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1950* (Cambridge, 1985), p.102.

<sup>10</sup> R H Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages? England, 1571-1529* (Oxford, 1997), p.1.

<sup>11</sup> Britnell, *Closing*, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> S Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977), p.141.

<sup>13</sup> C Dyer, *An Age of Transition? – Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005).

longer fitted easily into traditional definitions of the social order;<sup>14</sup> he also recognises that this transition was a long-term event or experience which ‘began before 1300 and was complete only after 1800’.<sup>15</sup>

These different approaches emphasise two important points. First, that a ‘grand narrative’ such as that given by Friedrichs and Dyer, which spans time and space, is necessary to reveal the pace and scope of change at a level that was not comprehensible to contemporary observers, but is important to later understanding of the course of history. Such a narrative must, by its nature, overlook the details that are the focus of more specific studies. Such detailed studies, which chop history into digestible chunks and focus on short periods or particular events, are vital to the identification of influences on and mechanisms of change, but they, perhaps inadvertently, place a stress on discontinuities rather than continuities. The tension between these two viewpoints is one of the justifications for the approach taken in this study, which is a meticulous analysis of events and small changes over a long period that allows their cumulative effect to be understood and appreciated.

One of the characteristics of the years 1400-1600 is demographic decline and recovery. Its consequences for the English economy and the urban environment is the subject of a keen debate that began in the 1930s when Michael Postan affirmed that ‘the decline of the corporate towns ... [was] ... another familiar feature of the period’.<sup>16</sup> This statement was reinforced in a later study by R B Dobson of forty towns which, in 1377, had a taxable population of 1000 or

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<sup>14</sup> Dyer, *Age of Transition*, pp.11, 41, 242-43.

<sup>15</sup> Dyer, *Age of Transition*, p.246.

<sup>16</sup> M Postan, ‘Revisions in Economic History: IX – The Fifteenth Century’, *Economic History Review*, 9:2 (1939), p.163.

more.<sup>17</sup> Dobson considered that the ultimate cause of this decay was a ‘prolonged and remorseless demographic attrition’ that reduced civic income from rents, tolls and other sources of income, as well as personal wealth as the demand for consumer goods diminished.<sup>18</sup> The converse of this argument, however, was made by A R Bridbury who, while not denying the demographic problems, maintained that there was considerable wealth held by urban communities and individuals. Using the same sources as Dobson, he argued that taxable wealth had in general risen virtually everywhere by 1524 compared to 1334.<sup>19</sup> He also contended that the wealthy would not have chosen to live in the ‘provincial towns of later medieval England when they might so easily have exchanged it for the patrician splendours and prospects of county society’.<sup>20</sup> Another argument made by Bridbury was that the re-edification Statutes of the 1530s and 1540s, rather than being official recognition of the depression of medieval towns, were evidence of property speculation at a time when urban populations were beginning to grow and legal title to dilapidated property was unclear.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, these comments provoked considerable debate over the detail. Bridbury’s analysis of lay subsidies was questioned by S H Rigby who argued that these taxes either exaggerated the degree of growth or that their evidence produced ‘an impression of a re-distribution of wealth towards the towns, which would reflect the decline of the rural economy ... rather than any urban vigour’.<sup>22</sup> Robert Tittler attacked Bridbury’s contention that the grant of a charter of incorporation ‘added far more

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<sup>17</sup> R B Dobson, ‘Urban Decline in Late Medieval England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 27 (1977), p.2.

<sup>18</sup> Dobson, ‘Urban Decline’, p.20.

<sup>19</sup> A R Bridbury, ‘English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages’, *Economic History Review*, second series, 34:1 (1981). p.18.

<sup>20</sup> Bridbury, ‘Provincial Towns’, p.19.

<sup>21</sup> Bridbury, ‘Provincial Towns’, p.23.

<sup>22</sup> S H Rigby, ‘Late Medieval Urban Prosperity: The Evidence of the Lay Subsidies’, *Economic History Review*, new series, 39:3 (1986), p.416.

to the lustre and prestige of a town than to its substantive power and influence',<sup>23</sup> arguing that 'many towns sought incorporation precisely as a means of regaining past prosperity or forestalling a slide toward further economic decay'.<sup>24</sup> A compromise between this views is offered by, for example, T R Slater and James Higgins, who affirm that while towns were in physical decline, their smaller populations could create opportunities and enhance individual living standards and that, although the period 1340 to 1530 was 'bioculturally instable' due to repeated outbreaks of plague, there were individuals of considerable wealth.<sup>25</sup> Likewise Jennifer Kermode challenges not just Dobson's but also David Palliser's contention that the evasion of office holding by York burgesses in the fifteenth century, and a similar claim by Geoffrey Dickens for the early sixteenth century, was a symptom of economic depression. Her own study of office holding in York between 1470 and 1530

suggests that the evasion of office-holding was not at all straightforward ... [and]... that far from being deprived of the services of the top rank of its citizens, York continued to be governed, as before, by a mercantile plutocracy<sup>26</sup>

Where evasions did occur it was by the less wealthy, who held the second rank of posts, not those at the top of the hierarchy. She also contends that at no point did the cycle of office holding indicate that there was a shortage of candidates while, at the same time, the council 'tried to ensure that men of common or vulgar occupations did not proceed beyond the level of chamberlain'.<sup>27</sup> Charles

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<sup>23</sup> Bridbury, 'Provincial Towns', p.11.

<sup>24</sup> R Tittler, 'Late Medieval Urban Prosperity', *Economic History Review*, new series, 37:5 (1984), p.552.

<sup>25</sup> T R Slater and J P P Higgins, 'What is Urban Decline: Desolation, Decay and Destruction, or an Opportunity?' in T R Slater (ed), *Towns in Decline AD100-1600* (Aldershot, 2000), pp.1 & 2.

<sup>26</sup> J I Kermode, 'Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York', *Economic History Review*, new series, 35:2 (1982), p.181.

<sup>27</sup> Kermode, 'Urban Decline?', p.193.

Phythian-Adams in his in-depth analysis of recession in Coventry in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, however, perceived the opposite situation, claiming that there was a 'glaring shortage of really substantial citizens' and that the resulting breach was filled by 'hitherto mistrusted victuallers' and an 'increased reluctance of leading citizens to serve locally'.<sup>28</sup>

The arguments about urban and economic decline during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century are complicated. All towns show symptoms of decline but some may have prospered, or declined and prospered at different times, and some individuals prospered whatever the fate of the town. The causes of decline or growth may be national, such as the overall reduction in population or, as in Coventry, a combination of poor harvests, epidemics and a failure of the textile industry.<sup>29</sup> Palliser's warning not to accept conventional wisdom, and even when convention works not to accept that all the causes are the same, is perhaps timely.<sup>30</sup> There were short and long term variations, regional changes and shifts in wealth and he suggests that the fifteenth century saw not decay, but a restructuring of towns that was the basis of urban and industrial growth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>31</sup>

The assertion that some individuals prospered whatever the prevailing economic conditions raises the question of entrepreneurial, if not capitalist, activity. Christopher Dyer has proposed that 'capitalists and potential capitalists lived in the fifteenth-century' and their emergence was due to the need to 'organise

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<sup>28</sup> C Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), p.47.

<sup>29</sup> Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp.52-63.

<sup>30</sup> D M Palliser, 'Urban Decay Revisited', in J A F Thompson (ed), *Towns and Townspeople* (Gloucester, 1988), p.16.

<sup>31</sup> Palliser, 'Urban Decay Revisited', p.18.

production in the midst of a market recession' such as has been described above.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, these foundations of capitalism were given 'freer scope' in the sixteenth century by Protestant doctrines which emphasised frugality and hard work, supported by economic recovery.<sup>33</sup>

A beneficiary of this economic recovery in the latter part of the sixteenth century was the revival of market towns. Alan Everitt's work has shown that although, overall, there were fewer market towns than previously, those that survived into the later sixteenth century were expanding, and sometimes even specialising, in order to meet new demands from internal trade. In parallel with this expansion, local authorities were exerting greater control over market activity.<sup>34</sup> Also, linked to this expansion was a shift in trading patterns. Nigel Goose's study of Colchester, for example, identified that while international trade became concentrated on London, the town's coastal and internal trade prospered and that Colchester, like other provincial centres, benefitted from its enhanced roll as a market centre where goods were collected, processed and distributed.<sup>35</sup> At the same time that commercial activity was developing, however, it is argued that industrial production, especially in textiles, moved from the urban environment

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<sup>32</sup> C Dyer, 'Were There Any Capitalists in Fifteenth-Century England?', in J I Kermode (ed), *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England* (Stroud, 1991), p.21.

<sup>33</sup> C Hill, 'Protestantism and the Rise of Capitalism', in F J Fisher (ed), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England in honour of R H Tawney* (Cambridge, 1961), p.21.

<sup>34</sup> A Everitt, 'The market towns', in P Clark (ed), *The Early Modern Town: A Reader* (London, 1976), pp.168-69 & 184-91.

<sup>35</sup> N R Goose, 'In Search of the Urban Variable: Towns and the English Economy, 1500-1650', *Economic History Review*, new series, 39:2 (1986), p.175.



into the countryside, although its control remained in the hands of urban magnates.<sup>36</sup>

Discussions of economic and demographic fluctuations are often referred to as 'crises' but as Friedrichs points out, this is an ambiguous term.<sup>37</sup> For some 'crisis' refers simply to economic change, and therefore the economic crises of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were brought to an end by the economic revival of the 1570s. Others see a continuance which lasted well into the seventeenth century. Palliser notes in an article dealing with York between 1460 and 1640, that when this crisis occurred is, in itself, subject to debate.<sup>38</sup> Paul Slack and Peter Clark suggest a period between 1520 and 1660, Pythian-Adams identified 1520 to 1570 after which some recovery occurred, or even 1450 to 1570; dates which clearly overlap with the discussion of late medieval decline or growth.

Clark and Slack, however, also introduced the concept of a different sort of 'urban crisis' through a series of publications during the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> They argue that despite improving economies, the overall urban condition did not recover because for the mass of English towns there was still an underlying economic weakness which resulted in political and social instability. Dyer's potential capitalists are referred to as 'tycoons who monopolized large fractions of personal wealth' so that, exacerbated by the influx of 'subsistence migrants' attracted to towns by the 'promise of employment, charity or crime' the gulf between rich and poor

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<sup>36</sup> P Clark and P Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English towns 1500-1700 : essays in urban history* (London, 1972), p.8

<sup>37</sup> Friedrichs, *Modern City*, p.275.

<sup>38</sup> D M Palliser, 'A Crisis in English Towns: The Case of York 1460-1640', *Northern History*, 14 (1978), pp.109-110.

<sup>39</sup> for example, Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order*; P Clark and P Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700* (London, 1976).

widened bringing with it serious social problems.<sup>40</sup> For Clark and Slack this crisis of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not economic depression but social and political conflict. This conflict so thoroughly affected urban society that towns

underwent major changes which transformed and to some extent vitiated traditional urban life, affecting not only their economic and demographic structure but their political and cultural make-up.<sup>41</sup>

The consequence of these changes was a ‘major collision of continuity and change’.<sup>42</sup> Potentially this collision was serious and sometimes resulted in confrontation between townspeople and the ruling elite.

This raises the question of power and status, things which, according to Clark and Slack, in early modern towns almost invariably coincided with wealth.<sup>43</sup> But this was also the case in medieval towns. Fifteenth and sixteenth century urban residents were well aware of social divisions. In fifteenth-century Lynn townspeople were divided into *potentiores*, *mediocres* and *inferiores*; Lincoln employed the same tri-partite division of great, middling and lesser, while Beverly chose the simpler *menes comunes* and *potentiores*.<sup>44</sup> Traditionally wealth and status was derived from the ownership of land, but this criteria could not apply to urban communities; in 1577, William Harrison identified four categories of urban resident: gentlemen, who studied the law or medicine, citizens and burgesses who ‘serve the commonwealth in their cities and boroughs, or in corporate towns’, yeomen who were freemen, farmers or gentlemen with sufficient wealth to

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<sup>40</sup> Clark and Slack, *Towns in Transition*, pp.92-93, 103, 114.

<sup>41</sup> Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order*, p.30.

<sup>42</sup> Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order*, p.40.

<sup>43</sup> Clark and Slack, *Towns in Transition*, p.115.

<sup>44</sup> D M Palliser, ‘Urban Society’, in R Horrox (ed), *Fifteenth-century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in late medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), p.140.

educate their sons, and ‘the fourth sort’ who were day labourers, some retailers and artificers.<sup>45</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, Lawrence Stone described a six fold social order, based on rural hierarchies, but which recognised four urban, ‘semi-independent occupational hierarchies, whose precise relationship to the basic reference groupings was never fully clarified’.<sup>46</sup> More recently, these groups have been described as the ‘middling sorts’, a term which draws on contemporary terminology but is recognised by early modern historians ‘as meaningful and important a social category as, say, the poor or the gentry’.<sup>47</sup> Medieval societies were not equal and social divisions were usually based on wealth which, as Dobson points out, ‘must have been fundamental to the way in which fifteenth-century townsmen visualised their own social status and political power’.<sup>48</sup> This is an important point because, as alluded to in the discussion of the evasion or otherwise of civic office by mercantile plutocrats, the urban measure of status was wealth which brought with it civic responsibility; this introduces the topic of town government and oligarchy.

Oligarchy had always been a feature of urban administration and its nature has been debated amongst medieval historians, particularly the quality of the relationship between an urban government and the townspeople. Peter Fleming succinctly described the debate as being between historians, such as Susan Reynolds and Gervase Rosser, ‘who argue for essentially harmonious urban relations’ and others like Stephen Rigby and Rodney Hilton who ‘characterise

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<sup>45</sup> G Edelen (ed), *William Harrison, 1534-1593: The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life* (Washington and New York, 1994), pp.113-119.

<sup>46</sup> L Stone, ‘Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700’, *Past and Present*, 33:1 (1966), p.18.

<sup>47</sup> J Barry, ‘Introduction’, in J Barry and C Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Houndsmill, 1994), p.2.

<sup>48</sup> R B Dobson, ‘Urban Europe’, in C Allmand (ed), *New Cambridge Medieval History Vol. 7 c.1415-1500* (Cambridge, 1998), p.140.

medieval towns as being inherently factious' because of the steep gradations of power which existed in urban communities.<sup>49</sup> Social disharmony was avoided, according to Rosser, by the leavening of social organisations, particularly guilds, which emphasised fraternal harmony and reconciliation and provided the mechanisms through which conflict could be resolved.<sup>50</sup> Rigby, while not necessarily disagreeing with this view, places greater emphasis on the potential for conflict that was inherent in the oligarchic system. Medieval townspeople did not expect social equality, indeed the consensus was for rule by the 'better sort' for the good of the community, but that rule could only operate with the consent and co-operation of the community; local government was a balancing act between oligarchic government and a community's right to consultation.<sup>51</sup>

Clark and Slack, as discussed above, perceived the later sixteenth century as a time when the balancing act broke down and the social order changed. There were many contributing factors, one of which was the relationship between the Crown and local government. Just as local administrations relied on the co-operation of the community, so the Crown relied on the support and co-operation of local governments staffed by 'small knots of reliable men in every town' for the application and maintenance of the law.<sup>52</sup> Tudor governments in particular were quick to bolster the power of civic oligarchies and interfere in town

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<sup>49</sup> P Fleming, 'Telling Tales of Oligarchy in the Late Medieval Town', in M Hicks (ed), *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2001), p.177.

<sup>50</sup> A G Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33:4, Vill, Guild and Gentry: Forces of Community in Later Medieval England (1994), p.432-33.

<sup>51</sup> S H Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Houndsmill, 1995), pp.171-72.

<sup>52</sup> Slack and Clark, *Crisis and Order*, p.22.

administration, giving corporations ‘new official powers in regard to economic and social policy’.<sup>53</sup>

An important factor in the redefinition of the relationship between the Crown and local government was, according to Robert Tittler, the state imposition of a Reformed church which put in place the mechanisms and processes which eventually led to greater centralised control.<sup>54</sup> As a consequence of this reliance and the greater powers given to local government, local oligarchies became smaller and the social status of those in power became greater. In what he describes as a ‘new perspective’, Tittler claims that the destruction of institutions which had promoted social harmony, exacerbated by the social and economic problems of the middle years of the century, resulted in ‘hierarchy, structural rigidity and political as well as economic and social polarization’.<sup>55</sup> Prior to the Reformation, Tittler argues, town officials – even aldermen and mayors – were not ‘decisively different from the general run of freemanry’.<sup>56</sup> The Reformation was a threshold which led to greater social polarisation as

Political activity came to be characterized by more formally defined labels, structures and constraints than by informally shared identities. Vertical lines of social and political interaction while never absent, proved more emphatic and forceful than ... [the] lines of an earlier age.<sup>57</sup>

This more rigid hierarchy led to conflict, which often found its outlet in attacks on members of the ruling oligarchies who ‘blurred the distinction between public

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<sup>53</sup> P Clark, ‘Introduction’, in P Clark (ed), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. II, 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p.5.

<sup>54</sup> R Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture c.1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), p.19.

<sup>55</sup> Tittler, *Reformation and the Towns*, p.13.

<sup>56</sup> Tittler, *Reformation and the Towns*, p.19.

<sup>57</sup> Tittler, *Reformation and the Towns*, p.19.

trust and private advantage'.<sup>58</sup> Civic elites, collectively and individually, were accused of leasing civic property to themselves on favourable terms, using their regulatory powers to promote their own business, or simply dipping into the city treasury, actions which ordinary citizens were quick to denounce.<sup>59</sup>

These social, political and economic crises are, according to the Clark and Slack and Tittler arguments, 'universal problems' which undermined the stability of cities throughout early modern England, and indeed riots and civil discord were prevalent across urban Europe.<sup>60</sup> Steve Rappaport's work on London, however, draws a rather different picture. Instead of the instability for which London was supposedly notorious, he found

a city inhabited by people and ruled by men whose response to those problems was characterized more by adaptation than inflexibility, by a willingness to undertake remedial action rather than the unresponsiveness of an insensitive elite.<sup>61</sup>

He has suggested that a task for urban historians is to 'explain why London, and perhaps other English cities as well, subject to the same pressures, did not suffer similar consequences'.<sup>62</sup> One reason put forward by Ian Archer, is that 'the country had stumbled into the Reformation ... [which] ... was peaceful because it was piecemeal'.<sup>63</sup> This is an interesting comment to compare with Tittler's contention that the statutory imposition of the Reformation had led to social polarization and increased tension between local elites and the general run of townspeople.

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<sup>58</sup> Friedrichs, *Modern City*, p.309.

<sup>59</sup> Friedrichs, *Modern City*, p.309.

<sup>60</sup> S Rappaport, 'Social Structure and Mobility in Sixteenth Century London', *London Journal* (1983), 9, part 2, p.107.

<sup>61</sup> Rappaport, 'Social Structure', p.108.

<sup>62</sup> Rappaport, 'Social Structure', p.108.

<sup>63</sup> I W Archer, *Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1991), p.45.

Archer also questions the degree to which the commons and the elites were separated. Recent research has concentrated less on elites and more on the

the substructures of government, the parishes, wards and companies, the cooperation of whose rulers was essential to the successful implementation of the elite's policies.<sup>64</sup>

upon which local government was reliant. While not disputing that there were great disparities in wealth, Archer contends that the Aldermen of London were not cut-off or ignorant of the social problems of the city. Rather, since a high level of social mobility allowed individuals into an elite which contained few urban dynasties, most members of the elite were first-generation residents with relatives of lower social status.<sup>65</sup>

Archer's work, of course, centres on London which, because of its size, wealth and political significance, needs to be viewed as a special case. This does not mean, however, that his arguments do not apply elsewhere, only that they might apply on a different scale. In a study of seven north-Norfolk parishes, Jan Pitman argues that England was 'a participatory society in which the state relied upon the active cooperation of a broad range of the population to enforce legislation'.<sup>66</sup> This, however, is very close to the argument made by Rigby that medieval oligarchy was a balancing act between rule by the better sort and the co-operation of the commons, and therefore suggests a continuity of intent to maintain harmonious communal relationships which bridged the medieval into the early modern town. The difference being, perhaps, that Rigby's medieval elite depended on the support of the community while Archer's early modern civic

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<sup>64</sup> Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, p.14.

<sup>65</sup> Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, p.51.

<sup>66</sup> J Pitman, 'Tradition and Exclusion: Parochial Office Holding in Early Modern England, a Case Study from North Norfolk, 1580-1640', *Rural History*, 15:1 (2004), p.27.

leaders were supported by sub-groups which separated them in the social hierarchy from the common townsmen and women.

This discussion of local politics and the relationship between the Crown and local government must take account of the Reformations of the mid- to late-sixteenth century, which although intended to amend religious practice had far wider implications. The political consequences of the imposition of religious change have been discussed above. The Reformations also brought greater civic responsibilities, particularly for the care of the poor and the control of migrants and vagrants, which as part of a circular argument about social relationships, further emphasised the status of the ruling elites and the economic gulf between rich and poor. Urban communities enlarged their property holdings through the acquisition of former ecclesiastical property, the income from which helped meet the economic demands made by growing urban populations.<sup>67</sup> There were also cultural implications, whether these concerned attitudes to work mentioned above or the development of new forms of drama.<sup>68</sup> There were probably many others.

Looking from the national to the local, the first history of Nottingham was published in the eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup> It was, however, an antiquarian record of places and monuments, an approach also adopted by John Blackner for his early nineteenth-century history, although he combined it with a description of Nottingham's commercial development.<sup>70</sup> The mid-nineteenth and early twentieth

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<sup>67</sup> Tittler, *Reformation and the Towns*, p.65.

<sup>68</sup> A F Johnson, 'Tudor Drama, Theatre and Society', in R Tittler and N Jones (eds), *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp.430-447; P W White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> C Deering, *Nottinghamia vetus et nova or an Historical Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Nottingham* (Nottingham 1751, reprinted 1970).

<sup>70</sup> J Blackner, *The History of Nottingham: Embracing its Antiquities, Trade, and Manufactures, from the Earliest Authentic Records, to the Present Period* (1815, reprinted Otley, 1985).



centuries saw a flurry of histories of Nottingham all written, unsurprisingly for the time, from the point of view of political history – that is the relationship between Nottingham and the king – or a ‘great men’ standpoint with a focus on individual notables.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, a history of Nottingham written in 1920 reported the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as ‘a singularly fruitless period in the history of the town’.<sup>72</sup> The War of the Roses apparently ‘passed lightly over the town’; the Tudor period was ‘very disappointing’, when

Nothing of any note occurred locally during the reign of Edward VI and Mary and only one event of importance can be recorded in the long and peaceful reign of Elizabeth – and that an event which never took place.<sup>73</sup>

Notwithstanding the growing interest in local history during the twentieth century, the medieval and early modern periods are given little space in more recent publications. In 1974, Emrys Bryson summarised the development of the town from Henry II’s Charter of 1155-1165 to the reign of Charles I in two pages.<sup>74</sup> It is no wonder, therefore, that in 1984 Trevor Foulds wrote ‘Whilst other local [history] societies were busily engaged in their county’s medieval past ... the medieval history of Nottinghamshire languished’ and by implication, so did the history of the town.<sup>75</sup>

This does not mean that medieval and early modern Nottingham has been totally neglected. Between 1882 and 1899 the first four volumes of a nine volume set of borough records were published; these have been a vital resource for this

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<sup>71</sup> for example, W H Wylie, *Old and New Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1853); W H Wylie and J P Briscoe, *A Popular History of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1893).

<sup>72</sup> E L Guilford, *The Story of English Towns: Nottingham* (London, 1920), p.33.

<sup>73</sup> Guilford, *Nottingham*, pp.35-37.

<sup>74</sup> E Bryson, *Portrait of Nottingham* (London, 1974), pp.49-51.

<sup>75</sup> T Foulds, ‘Some “Medieval” Thoughts’, *Nottinghamshire Historian*, 33 (1984), p.16.

research.<sup>76</sup> The interests of W H Stevenson, who edited these volumes, tended towards the ‘constitutional’, that is the town’s relationship with the crown, government, local administration and customs. As editor, Stevenson was not writing an history of Nottingham but his comments in the Introductions to the first four volumes influenced succeeding writers. For example, he devoted eight pages of the Introduction to Volume IV to describing the evolution of the town’s council and what he described as

the long contest between the Common Council and the commonalty of the town, the Council endeavouring to exclude the burgesses from all control over their constitution, and the burgesses constantly opposing these attempts.<sup>77</sup>

His lead has been followed by, for example, Duncan Grey and later by David Marcombe who identified a ‘ruling cabal’ in opposition to ‘the broad mass of citizens’ who waged ‘guerrilla warfare’ against civic leaders.<sup>78</sup> These latter remarks were made in *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, the most recent, and most far reaching, history of Nottingham.<sup>79</sup> The scale and format of this work, which begins in the Neolithic and ends in the 1990s, however, inevitably means that no one subject or period is discussed in detail. Trades and occupations from the fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries, for example, are described by Trevor Foulds but not raised again until Adrian Henstock’s discussion of social and economic life from the end of the sixteenth into the eighteenth centuries. David Marcombe’s discussion of the late medieval town concentrates on political change

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<sup>76</sup> W H Stevenson (ed), *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* (BR), Vols I-IV (Nottingham, 1882-99).

<sup>77</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.ix.

<sup>78</sup> D Grey, *Nottingham Through 500 Years: A History of Town Government* (Nottingham, first published 1959, reprinted 1960); D Marcombe, ‘The Late Medieval Town, 1449-1560’, in J Beckett (ed), *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), p.92.

<sup>79</sup> J Beckett and others (eds), *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006).

and institutional religion, with a short discussion of the economy which focuses on the 1523-24 lay subsidy and burgess admissions.<sup>80</sup> These understandable limitations are acknowledged by John Beckett who, as editor, describes the *Centenary History* as a city biography which ‘must be, like biographies of people who are still alive, an interim statement’.<sup>81</sup> In other words, there is still much work to do on the history of Nottingham.

One of the themes of this current study is continuity, but as pointed out at the beginning of this Introduction, breaking down history into digestible chunks emphasises discontinuity. This review has tried to some extent to reconcile these discontinuities. Although treated separately in the literature, both medieval and early modern towns were, for example, oligarchic and their elites dependent on the support of the men lower in the social ranking in order to rule. The maintenance of social harmony seen in medieval communities is also perceivable in the willingness, identified by Rappaport, of early modern administrations to compromise and co-operate. Urban social structures and social status remained hierarchical and predicated on wealth and the ability to hold civic office, while wealth was generated by individual entrepreneurs who were to be found in both medieval and early modern communities.

The other theme of this work is change, and changes have also been identified in the historiographic detail. The economy of medieval towns suffered from depopulation, and the movement of industry into the countryside. Early modern

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<sup>80</sup> T Foulds, ‘Trade and Manufacture’; A Henstock, S Dunster and S Wallwork, ‘Decline and regeneration: Social and Economic life’; D Marcombe, ‘Medieval Town’, in J Beckett (ed), *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), pp.72-83, 143-164, 84-106 respectively.

<sup>81</sup> J Beckett, ‘Introduction’, in J Beckett (ed), *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), p.1.

towns, on the other hand, had a growing population and, while manufacture declined, the economic trend was towards local, domestic commerce and distribution. Poverty, the fear of social unrest, the implementation of central government legislation and a greater administrative burden led to an expanded role for local government which became even more hierarchic, and social distinctions between rich and poor became wider. The potential for conflict was greater, and such conflict could be directed at both institutions and individuals.

This thesis looks in detail at three aspects of Nottingham: the town, its people and its administration, over a long period, in order to trace continuity and change and increase historical understanding of the town during the transitional years of 1400-1600. It is hoped that this current research will add to the valuable work already carried out and bring to light new aspects of Nottingham's history. Inevitably, there are obstacles and limitations to research of this type, one of which is the availability of records which must to some extent dictate what it is possible to research. Work for this thesis concentrated on the civic records of Nottingham and because of lacunae in the record series which are described below two major national events are not dealt with directly. The first parallels the dates of the Wars of the Roses so there is little evidence of the affect on the town of these politically unstable years. The same can be said of the second lacunae which coincides with the major events of the religious Reformations of Edward VI and Mary I, and the settlement brought about in the early years of the reign of Elizabeth I. This loss is emphasised by the Churchwarden's accounts of St. Peter's Church, which are the only parish records to pre-date the Protestant

Reformation.<sup>82</sup> As summary accounts they provide little specific information, but do run in an almost complete sequence from 1522 through to the 1540s. The accounts for years of Edward VI's reign (1547-1553), which saw significant changes to traditional religion, are packaged together into a single statement of total receipts and total expenditure, and the sequence only recommences in 1560 after the accession of Elizabeth. This implies a significant impact on parish affairs, but does not reveal the detail. This lack of direct evidence does not mean, however, that the Reformations have been totally ignored as what might be described as the 'side-effects' of religious transformation are discussed as indicators of administrative and cultural change.

## **Sources and Methods**

### *The Documents*

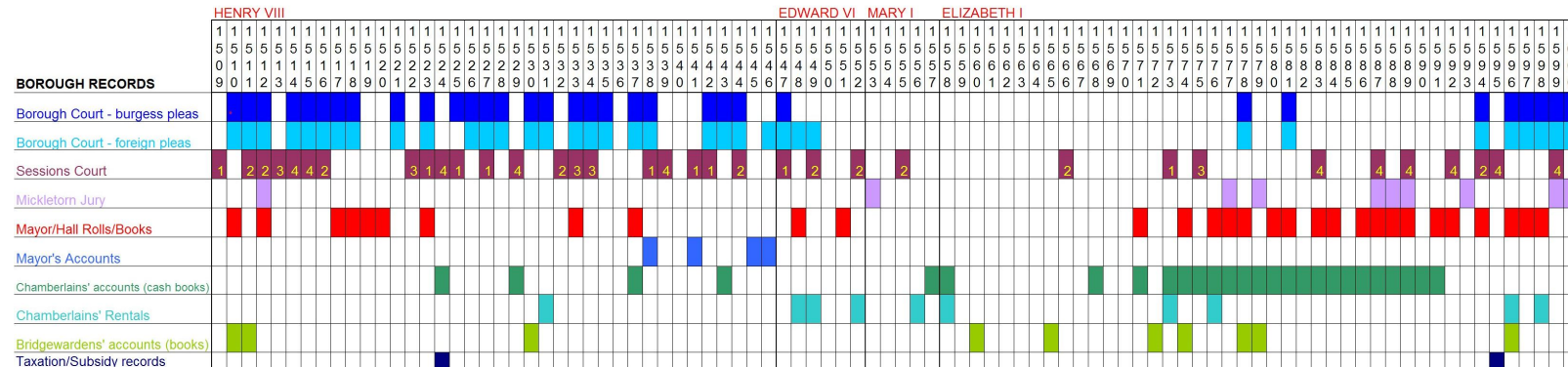
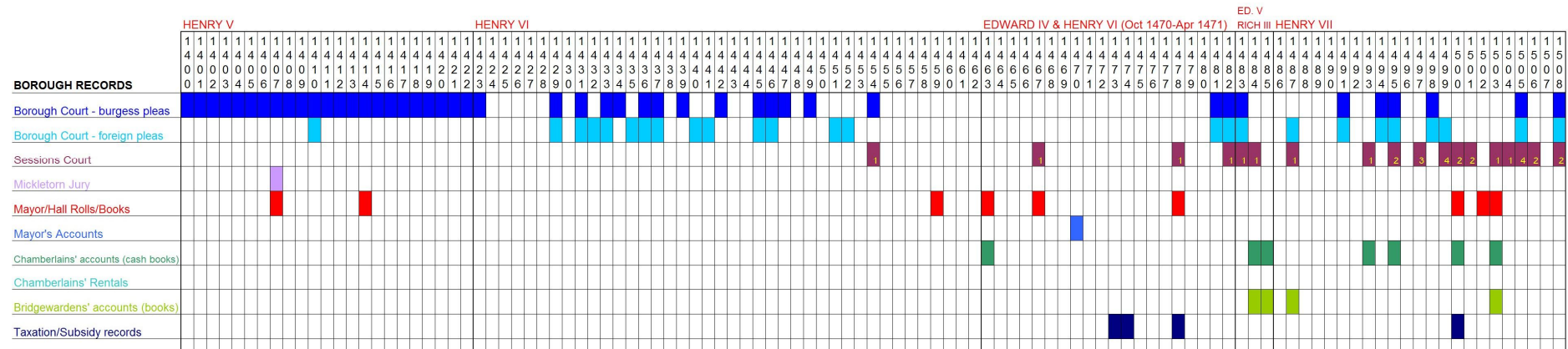
The majority of the documents examined during this research are Nottingham's administrative papers held as part of the Nottinghamshire Archive (NA) collection of Borough Records. The major categories of papers are shown in Chart 1 which also highlights the increase in the number of available documents over time, particularly of Hall books and financial records.

The survival rate of some of the document series, also indicated in Chart 1, is patchy with two major lacunae especially in the Court records which form the bulk of the collection.

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<sup>82</sup> NA PR 21599.

### Chart 1: Nottingham Borough Records - Document Survival



**Notes:** 1. Borough Documents generally (but not always) run from Michaelmas to Michaelmas, but are recorded on the chart for the first year of the record, e.g. Borough Court of 1429 is Oct 1429 to Sept 1430  
2. Some documents only cover part of the year, e.g. 1401 Borough Court is for Oct to July; 1412-13 is April to September

The first of these, from c.1450 to c.1481 followed by another short break to 1491, corresponds to a period of economic instability and recovery for Nottingham (see Chapters 1, 3 and 5). These years, though, also parallel the years of the Wars of the Roses, and for this reason, very little is known about the effect of these politically unstable years on Nottingham.

The second break in the records begins in approximately 1550, mid-way through the reign of Edward VI until c.1571, after the Rising of the Northern Earls which signalled greater national political and economic stability for Elizabethan England. These were also problematic years which not only experienced religious see-sawing, but also poor harvests and famine, epidemics of sweating sickness and smallpox, and civil unrest. Again, because of the lack of records it is impossible to discover what direct effect these events had on Nottingham. Even so, as long-running series, all the documents examined are indicators of continuity and change so that even when there are gaps, the records either side provide useful before-and-after ‘snapshots’ of the town.

It is not possible to say if these breaks in the record series, which coincide with significant national instability, are simple accidents or if they are in any way connected to the economic and political circumstances of Nottingham during the missing years. It is, however, also impossible to totally discount this proposition.

In addition to the document series, there are manuscripts relating to individual matters, such as a Royal Inquiry into the condition and maintenance of Leen Bridge, agreements on tolls and a collection of documents relating to property transactions. Also part of the Borough Records are some late-sixteenth century

Churchwardens' accounts for St Mary's Church, probably included because the mayor and aldermen audited the parish accounts. For the same reason, the accounts of St Peter's Church were also examined, although these are held as part of the Parish not the Borough collection.

Another supplement to the Borough Record collection is fifteenth and sixteenth century tax records held at The National Archives, an inclusion justified because they were produced in Nottingham, by Nottingham officials and are about Nottingham people.<sup>83</sup> It was also possible to draw on work already carried out on the accounts of the Guilds of St George and St Mary at St Peter's Church.

Many of these documents have, of course, been published in the first four volumes of the *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, either in full but more usually as extracts. Stevenson gave his editorial criteria for selection as 'not only what is of interest to the curious, but whatever seemed to be of value for the history of the town, its institutions, customs, etc.'<sup>84</sup> Even so, he was only able to publish a fraction of the available material. Until 1450 the main source of information was the Borough court rolls, yet in 1401-2, for example, when there were 170 suits, only two are published.<sup>85</sup> He also frequently drew on the 'foreign' rather than burgess pleas as these tend to be more interesting. There is, therefore, a considerable amount of unpublished material, although it is often the unexciting, routine and sometimes dull information which, nevertheless, has provided vital evidence for this research.

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<sup>83</sup> TNA, Medieval tax records database, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/>

<sup>84</sup> Stevenson, 'Introduction', I, p.viii.

<sup>85</sup> NA CA 1299; Stevenson, II, pp.16-17.



Despite the amount of published material, the majority of documents were examined in the original, the exceptions being a few which fall outside the time-frame of the project and some one-off documents such as the Leen Bridge inquiry which are both transcribed and translated in full in the published volumes. Stevenson's appendices of civic officials and street names, compiled from the Borough documents, have also been used for simplicity. Since the publication of the *Borough Records* a few documents have been re-dated and the Mickletorn jury rolls have been re-catalogued with new reference numbers. These are cited using the current NA reference number, not that given by Stevenson. When only the published version of a document has been consulted, it is cited in the footnotes by the NA reference followed by the published volume and page number; documents examined in the original are cited by NA reference only. In addition to the published Borough Records, the Borough court rolls to 1457 have been translated by Dr Trevor Foulds and sometimes these have been used rather than the original Latin rolls. When this is the case it is indicated in the footnotes as 'Foulds online' followed by the Nottinghamshire Archives catalogue number.<sup>86</sup>

Special mention has to be made of two sets of documents compiled by William Gregory and William Greaves. Gregory was the Town or Mayor's Clerk at the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Many of Nottingham's early customs and ordinances have been lost because the town's Red Book was destroyed in the mid-eighteenth century. Gregory's notes on the book, and notes or copies of other documents, are therefore valuable, as are a similar set

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<sup>86</sup> Originally these documents were consulted as typescripts and I am grateful to Dr Trevor Foulds for allowing access these. They are now available on-line at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/history/cuc](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/history/cuc).

of notes made by his great-nephew, William Greaves, in the 1670s. These collections of papers are catalogued under the Nottinghamshire Archive references CA 4770 and 4771. Many have been published, but as with other collections, originals have been consulted where appropriate.

Another set of documents which have been lost to Nottingham are lists of burgesses; Greaves' notes include a list of the total number of burgesses enrolled each year but not their names. For that reason, a terrier drawn up in 1604 which includes a list of all burgesses living in that year, arranged by the year in which they were enrolled starting in 1533-34, is another useful resource.<sup>87</sup>

More detailed descriptions of all these records are given below and within the main text where relevant.

### *Methodology*

The quantity of documentary evidence required a rigorous and systematic approach to recording which was managed in two ways, to meet different demands of the research.

Technical details about each document were first recorded using a pro-forma document to ensure consistency and prevent accidental omission of detail. These included the condition of the document (damage, conservation, legibility), whether it was written in Latin or English on parchment or paper, the size of the document (a slip, a single membrane or page, or a large book) and also whether all or any part had been published and if so the volume and

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<sup>87</sup> NA CA 4635b.

page number(s). These were followed by transcriptions and/or translations of relevant examples and illustrations. The pro-forma was also useful for recording non-personal or anonymous information, such as payments to travelling players or unnamed paupers. Finally, the pro-forma was used to make notes for future reference, such as suggestions for cross-referencing with other documents or potential uses of the information gathered. These notes not only ensured that an accurate record of each document was kept but allowed documents to be compared, the evolution of record keeping to be tracked and idiosyncrasies noted and accounted for. An example of how these notes were used is the Sessions court presentments which, prior to 1505-6 were written up by the Mayor's Clerk, William Easingwold, in Latin. After his death the presentments were written in English by a member of the jury. An early example of these, in October 1505, was so badly written it is illegible – it is one of the few unpublished presentments until mid-century.<sup>88</sup> By 1587-88, the foreman of each of the juries was named, and it was he who probably wrote up the now, highly legible, presentments.<sup>89</sup> This small example illustrates not simply a change in clerical practice but greater court organisation and improved literacy.

The second approach was to record personal information about Nottingham people in a comprehensive Access database which at the time of writing comprises 6,790 individual names. A broad range of data was collected including occupations, places of residence, tenancies and rents paid, property ownership, tax assessments and payments, civic and other office holding (guild

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<sup>88</sup> NA CA 13a.

<sup>89</sup> NA CA 51a, 52b.

officer, church official), appearances in court as plaintiff or defendant including details of suits, memberships of juries, and some approximate dates of death (usually derived from court appearances by executors or a change of status from wife to widow). There has been no attempt at family reconstruction in this study, but family relationships – husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter – have been recorded when this information is available and are used when relevant.

The database was interrogated using both simple queries, such as a list of all jurymen, or through compound queries; the list of jurymen found through a simple query could be, for example, combined with details of their occupations, civic offices, tax payments, or any other permutation. These analyses have been used extensively throughout the thesis in a variety of ways: to track concentrations of occupations within certain streets as discussed in Chapter One, the analysis of tax records in Chapter Two, and it also provided a large amount of information for the discussion of courts and juries in Chapter Six. The occupational analysis which is the subject of Chapter Three was carried out using database queries, but for presentation purposes the data were entered into Excel worksheets organised by occupational group linked to a ‘master’ table of all occupations (Table X).

Working with a complex database is not unproblematic, particularly one that was constructed well before it was clear what analysis would have to be carried out. For example, if a man was mayor on three occasions and a plaintiff in the Borough court ten times, a query searching for mayors who were plaintiffs would return thirty entries against his name. With hindsight, a slightly different

design would have generated a more practical result. The problem was overcome by exporting the data to Excel and manually editing the duplicate entries. Although time-consuming, this had the advantage of providing a double check for accuracy and the opportunity to remedy any anomalies that had crept into the data collection.

All documents provided a range of information: tax lists supplied not just names but assessments of wealth (but see Chapter Two for the drawbacks of these lists), frequently where men and women lived and occasionally occupations and family relationships. The changing form of the Mayor's and Hall books suggest developments in administrative processes (as do the Borough court books) as well as containing many lists of town officials, juries, burgesses and traders, while financial records indicate how the sources of income and areas of expenditure altered according to changing economic circumstances. The survival rate of individual documents within most of the series meant that it was possible to examine each in reasonable detail, but the quantity of the Borough court and Sessions court rolls and books, combined with the often repetitive nature of their contents, caused different strategies to be adopted.

*Borough court rolls and books:* these are the longest running series of documents. Until 1457 each roll comprises up to twenty-six parchment membranes which record not only civil suits but also documents, mainly property transactions, brought to the court to be enrolled. Until 1419-20 minor court officials, known as 'affeerers' were listed at the end of many of the membranes and until 1422 appraisers, who valued goods *in lieu* of fines were

similarly recorded. This practice died out after these dates, although later court books occasionally list appraisers. For most years, the records are divided into two courts: the burgess court for suits between Nottingham burgesses and the *forinsec* or foreign pleas court for suits when one or more of the parties was not a burgess, although they may or may not be resident.

After 1481 the court pleas were recorded in book form, one for burgess and one for foreign pleas, bound into one volume. Some of the volumes also include slips of paper which are bills or accounts for debts, often for every day commodities such as fish or bread, but sometimes for loans or money expended on behalf of others. From 1596-97 the books contain very little detail of the suits but they are indexed by name of plaintiff, indicating a development of clerical practice.

Because of the volume of data, it was decided to make detailed records of the Burgess court rolls and books at roughly ten-year intervals, survival rates permitting. Particular attention was paid to those documents immediately before and after the lacunae discussed above and in years such as the 1520s which the experience of other towns suggested would have been particularly difficult.

The records for the intervening years were also examined for occupational details, revealing suits and interesting information, while specific individuals, usually civic officials and other prominent burgesses, were given special attention. The foreign pleas rolls were not recorded in detail, but were examined using the same criteria.

Associated with the court records are jury lists. Some of the earlier court rolls list jurors 'in default' because they had not returned a verdict, but the majority of jury lists are in bundles of up to sixty slips of parchment, pierced through the middle and bound together with a leather lace. Some are tucked into the bindings of the later court books but many have been separated from their original court record. As well as listing up to twenty-four jurymen, each slip is headed by suits that the jury was to hear, which could be as many as five, and occasionally verdicts were noted on the reverse, although this is not common. The bundles for 1494-95 were examined in detail, but this exercise proved to be time consuming and revealed little information except the considerable workload jury members had to deal with (discussed in Chapter Six), and was not repeated.

*Sessions court rolls:* this court was instituted in 1449 when the town's aldermen were created Justices of the Peace. Although it could deal with the most serious felonies, the majority of its business was generated by three juries which made presentments at each sitting. Each roll contains several documents including writs or summonses to attend court (these are more frequent in the early years and almost completely absent from later rolls), lists of presentments and jury members, and occasionally lists of fines and pledges. Some rolls comprise only one or two documents, while others consist of many more; the roll for 1589-90, for example, has twenty-eight separate pieces of paper and parchment.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> NA CA 51b.

Most of the presentment lists comprise only a few entries, so it was possible to record all of them in the database, as were the names of all jurymen included in the rolls up to 1500. Between 1500 and 1550 when the documents are more prolific, and lists repetitive, the jury lists were sampled at roughly five year intervals, again depending on survival rates. Although there are fewer surviving rolls for the later sixteenth century they are more complete, usually containing four lists for each jury. As these generally named the same group of individuals with few variations only two of the four were entered into the database.

### **Research questions**

The review of literature on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries revealed a number of areas or research questions through which continuity and change in Nottingham can be studied. The shifting economy featured heavily in the historiographical discussions, and therefore the first question to be asked is what affect economic change had on Nottingham's commercial activities such as markets, occupations, entrepreneurial enterprise, and on personal wealth? The second, which is related, is to examine if these economic factors, combined with demographic fluctuations, affected characteristics such as the physical appearance and social structure of Nottingham? The third area to be investigated is the town's local government and here the question must be to ask if Nottingham was more oligarchic at the end of the sixteenth century than it was in the fifteenth and if so, what were the stimuli? The answers to these first three questions underlie the fourth which asks if there was latent, if not actual, social and political tension in Nottingham, and if there were



opportunities for co-operation between the burgesses and council? The final question concerns continuity and change, and whether change was evolutionary or if it came in abrupt shifts caused by specific influences?

The literature review also indicated that these areas of interest are interlinked, so that the answer to one question is often dependent on the answers to others. For this reason, no one chapter can answer a single question. The first two research questions, which investigate economic and demographic change, are the focus of Part I of this thesis which discusses the town and people of Nottingham. Chapter One looks at the effect of economic and demographic change on both the fabric of the town and common land, and on commercial aspects of town affairs such as markets, shops and property rentals. Chapter Two looks more closely at communal and personal wealth and population, and the relationship between wealth, civic office and social structure. Chapter Three considers the occupations followed by Nottingham people and how and why the patterns of employment changed over time. Chapter Six in Part II of the thesis contributes further information on the town's economic standing through an examination of legal suits brought to the Borough court. In a similar way, and reflecting the interdependencies of the topic, there are hints in Part I of social discord within the community, which is the subject of the fourth research question.

The third and fourth research questions are the heart of Part II which focuses on the institutions of local government and challenges to authority. Chapter Five looks at the development of Nottingham's ruling institutions and considers the effect of economic and demographic change identified in Part I,

on their constitutions. This chapter also considers the impact of the Reformation on workload of these bodies, as well as changes to their authority and responsibility. It also looks at social structure in relation to civic office and personal relationships and how these contribute to oligarchies. Social structure is also discussed in Chapter Six, which examines the development of the court system in Nottingham and the institutional relationship between the courts and particularly the presentment juries. All these topics are returned to in Chapter Seven in relation to challenges to the authority of the Council, including tensions between different sections of the community, incidents of direct opposition and opportunities for co-operation between them. The final question which concerns the pace of change, pervades all chapters.

Because all the five research areas are interdependent there is no one answer to each question, but, it is hoped that collectively they provide some further understanding of the town, people and administration of Nottingham in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

## **Part I**

### **Town and People**

## **Chapter One: The town – boundaries, buildings and spaces**

### **Living space: boundaries and buildings**

Physically Nottingham was not a large town, measuring approximately 1100 metres from west to east and about 500 metres from north to south, although it probably extended to 750 meters by the middle of the sixteenth century. Its western boundary was limited by the proximity of the Castle and its eastern edge by the village of Sneinton, the boundary marked by the Long Hedge.<sup>91</sup> To the south it was bounded by the River Leen, with Broadmarsh and Narrow Marsh being the most southerly streets. The northern boundary, however, was less well defined. Official documents such as tax returns compiled by street in both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries<sup>92</sup> or the Ward boundaries defined in 1577<sup>93</sup> suggest that Chapel Bar, Long Row, Great Smith Street and Goose Gate were the most northerly occupied streets. As Map 1 indicates, though, the north-south roads of Cow Lane and Stoney Street projected beyond this line and the Mayor's books and presentations of affrays show decennaries for Stoney Street and Cow Lane throughout the fifteenth century. As only parts of these streets were south of the Chapel Bar-Goose Gate line, it can be inferred that there was some occupation to the north.<sup>94</sup> In 1539, Margery Mellers, widow of Thomas Mellers, bequeathed to John Williamson a 'close and one house lying in the Beck Lane' which also lies to the north of Goose Gate.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> NA CA 1607.

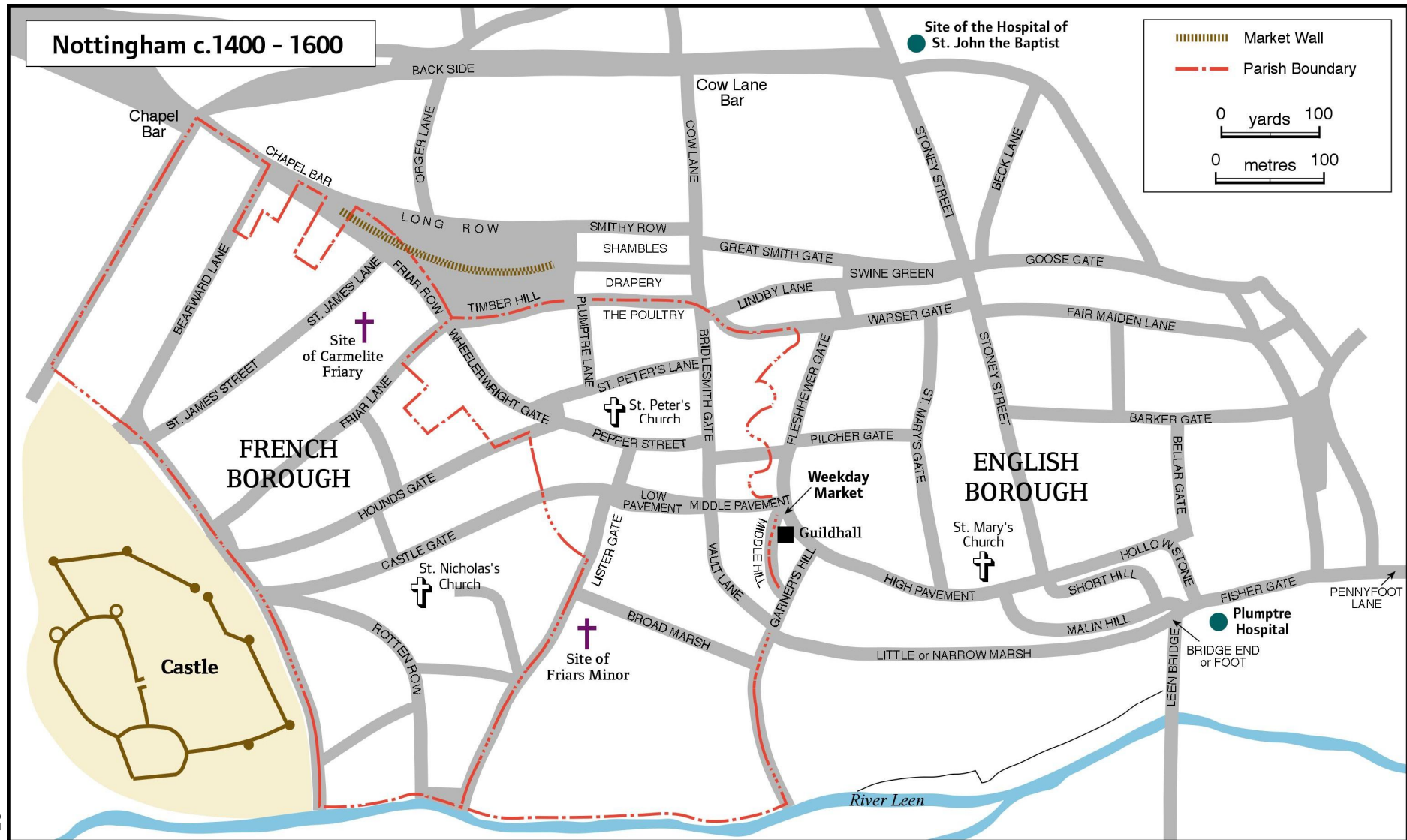
<sup>92</sup> for example NA CA 8019; TNA C179/159/155.

<sup>93</sup> NA CA 3362.

<sup>94</sup> for example NA CA 3942, 3955, 3350.

<sup>95</sup> NA CA 4771.

### Map 1: Nottingham c.1400 – 1600



Richard Banke's map of Nottingham dated 1609 and John Speed's map of 1610 both show housing along a road parallel to the Chapel Bar-Goose Gate line which Deering notes was called Back Side in the eighteenth century.<sup>96</sup> When this name came into use is uncertain. In c.1631 Thomas Abbott was presented for laying manure 'by the malt milne on the Backsid',<sup>97</sup> but the late sixteenth century Chamberlains' rentals refer to the malt mill being on Chapel Bar.<sup>98</sup> If this is the same mill it was probably at the junction of the two roads and its change of address suggests urban development after 1600, but not before.

There is some evidence that there was many undeveloped spaces in Nottingham. In 1400 William Spicer released his right to waste land in French Gate<sup>99</sup> and Cow Lane; a piece of vacant land in Stoney Street called 'the Wardhall' was granted by John Ewer to William Clerk in 1402, and in 1416 John Tannesley's property on Stoney Street shared a boundary with a piece of vacant ground owned by Lenton Priory.<sup>100</sup> In 1401 and 1415 the mayor and community made grants of vacant land in Malin Hill and Castle Gate<sup>101</sup> and in 1446 John Dorham was granted a grange with a vacant piece of ground, again in Cow Lane.<sup>102</sup> Castle Gate, Cow Lane, Malin Hill and the north end of Stoney Street, as Map 1 shows, are all at the extremities of the town and point to the occupied area of Nottingham having contracted at some time. The fact that transactions of vacant land were occurring,

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<sup>96</sup> C Deering, *Nottinghamia vetus et nova or an Historical Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Nottingham* (Nottingham 1751, reprinted 1970), Plate 1, front. Now called Parliament Street.

<sup>97</sup> NA CA 3055, dated by Stevenson to c.1575 and published in Stevenson, *IV*, pp. 160-62, but now re-dated to 1631-35.

<sup>98</sup> for example NA CA 2172.

<sup>99</sup> later called Castle Gate, Stevenson, 'Appendix', *II*, p.438.

<sup>100</sup> NA CA 4425, Stevenson, *II*, p.401; Foulds online CA 1313; NA CA 1299.

<sup>101</sup> NA CA 4425b, 4435b, Stevenson, *III*, pp.425-26.

<sup>102</sup> Foulds online CA 1336.

however, implies a demand for more land caused by an increase in population or by trading conditions which encouraged consolidation and investment.

In 1408 the Mickletorn Jury made fifteen presentments against townspeople for encroaching on common land, most commonly by marking off areas with tree trunks but occasionally with walls, and there are four presentments for building houses and another for a croft.<sup>103</sup> Some named town officials, for example, Henry Wilford (mayor 1398-99 and 1412-13) was presented for building a house on common ground, Robert Glade (mayor 1404-5, 1413-14 and 1419-20) for building a wall. Thomas Mapperley (mayor 1402-3) was presented for using tree trunks to mark out common ground on Orger Lane and Swynebarre and for diverting the watercourse of the nearby Beck, presumably into this newly marked out territory.<sup>104</sup> While these incursions indicate a demand for land, for them to have occurred in the first place hints that the areas had been under-used in the recent past.

There is more substantial evidence for new building in the middle years of the century. The most prestigious private enterprise was Thurland Hall, built in about 1458 for Thomas Thurland, a wealthy Staple merchant, whose role as mayor and MP will be discussed later.<sup>105</sup> The town also invested in new building. In 1479 John Pool bequeathed to the town a piece of unused land (*unum vacuum solum sive peciam terrae vastatae*) fifty-five feet in length next to the Guild Hall between the highway and land owned by Robert English.<sup>106</sup> The detailed chamberlains' books of 1484-85 and 1485-86 both include sums of money paid to

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<sup>103</sup> NA CA 3011.

<sup>104</sup> NA CA 3011.

<sup>105</sup> J P Briscoe, *Bypaths of Nottinghamshire History* (Nottingham, 1905), p.3.

<sup>106</sup> NA CA 4513, Stevenson, *II*, p.306.

build new tenements on this land. The first development was a tavern. Lath and plaster for the walls, stone for the floors, and an iron grid and two stones of lead to make a window cost 31s 3¼d including labour.<sup>107</sup> The following year 76s 4d was paid for materials and labour to build houses; the number of houses is not given but there were five doors and at least one house had a chimney and a bay window.<sup>108</sup> This investment, however, was in property near the centre of town adjacent to a market place, not the periphery of the town where there is evidence that property was still unoccupied. Throughout the 1470s and 1480s St George's Guild accounts record unpaid rents and in 1493-94 a loss of 3s was reported on a tenement in Hounds Gate for three quarters of a year 'for want of a tenant'.<sup>109</sup> By 1499-1500 the Chamberlains' town rental show rents in decay for 'want of tenants' for tenements in Chapel Bar, a piece of land called 'the Roper Stakes',<sup>110</sup> a common lane between Bearward Lane and St James's Lane, a common lane near St John's Hospital and a garden near the Bug Hills (near the Leen), again all areas on Nottingham's boundaries.<sup>111</sup>

This trend continued into the sixteenth century. In the early 1520s the rental value of property owned by St George's Guild was 81s, but the Guild accounts record losses of between 20s 1d and 41s, that is between a quarter and a half of its rents lost. From 1526-27 until 1532-33, however, the Guild also spent between 5s 10d and 37s 3d per year on property repairs.<sup>112</sup> These repairs just precede the Re-edification Statutes passed by Henry VIII between 1534 and 1544. Nottingham's,

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<sup>107</sup> NA CA 1602.

<sup>108</sup> NA CA 1603.

<sup>109</sup> NA PR 21599.

<sup>110</sup> possibly the Rope Walk, bordering the Castle grounds, Stevenson, 'Appendix', *III*, p.475.

<sup>111</sup> NA CA 1660c.

<sup>112</sup> NA PR 21599.



granted in 1535-36 was one of the earliest of these, preceded only by Norwich and Lynn.<sup>113</sup> These statutes, as Robert Tittler has pointed out, have been interpreted by, for example, Charles Phythian-Adams, as evidence of economic decline but also by A R Bridbury and Alan Dyer as proof that the demand for housing was increasing and therefore that they mark a shift in urban economies.<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, pages in the Chamberlains' account books for 1537-38 headed 'Reparations', 'Dekays' and 'Rents' are all blank and there are no further accounts until 1549, so there is no evidence of building work and it is, therefore, impossible to test either of these arguments against Nottingham records.<sup>115</sup>

There is, though, evidence of increased building after mid-century, presumably in response to demand from a growing population. The demand for lime, necessary for new building and repairs to existing property, increased. In 1549-50 the chamberlains leased eight lime pits; twenty-five years later in 1576-77 there are eighteen recorded in the Chamberlains' rental.<sup>116</sup> There was also some new building, even on the peripheries. In 1573 the town rental records a 'house new buylded where a pynfolde was in the Narowe Marshe' let to William Burton, two pieces of ground 'new buylded' let to Thomas Carne, a new shop let to John Townrow while Edward Stanhope paid 8d for a building 'upon a piece of ground of the high street on St Mary Gate' and Robert Quarneby gave 4d for 'void ground parcel whereof ye lately buylded a newe gallery at the Swyne Green'.<sup>117</sup> St Mary's Gate was reasonably central, but Narrow Marsh and Swine Green were on

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<sup>113</sup> *Statutes*, Vol.3, part 2, pp.531-32.

<sup>114</sup> R Tittler, 'For the "Re-Edification of Townes": the Rebuilding Statutes of Henry VIII' *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 22:4 (1990), p.592.

<sup>115</sup> NA CA 1607.

<sup>116</sup> NA CA 2168, 2172.

<sup>117</sup> NA CA 2172.

the town borders so this new building suggests at least in-filling if not expansion in response to a growing population.

The growth of Nottingham was most likely due, as in other towns, to in-migrants attracted by greater prospects for employment and marriage, facilitated by kinship networks.<sup>118</sup> Migration in the early sixteenth century, though, was stimulated by a number of factors including, according to John Pound, ‘thousands of people’ who became unemployed after diplomatic relations with the Low Countries were severed. This mobility of large numbers of people led, in 1531, to the passing of the first of a series of Acts against vagrancy.<sup>119</sup> The motivation for this legislation was a fear of insurrection and disorder by poor, unattached migrants and concern for the spaces that might allow such problems to ferment. In 1574-75 it was reported in Nottingham that

... ther his a great many of alle hosses in the backe lannes and vacand  
plases in this town that might be away and putt downe for they harber  
noughti persons and many men [servants?] there fore we dayssyre of  
the menndell of thos same<sup>120</sup>

Such complaints about ale houses and fear of public disorder were a consequence of national legislation combined with a Protestant concern for immorality, but they also indicate that the vacant places were being occupied by less than welcome residents. Similar concerns are found elsewhere: in the same year four men, including two aldermen, were presented at the Sessions court for building ‘pawltre houses’ to the detriment of the town and one of these, Peter Clarke, was

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<sup>118</sup> P Clark and P Slack, ‘Introduction’, in P Clark and P Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History* (London, 1972), pp.17-18; P Clark, ‘Migrants in the City: the Process of Social Adaptation in English Towns, 1500-1800’, in P Clark and D Souden (eds), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (London, 1987), pp.269-71.

<sup>119</sup> J Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London, 1971), p.39; *Statutes*, 3, part 3, pp.328-32.

<sup>120</sup> NA CA 49.

also presented for turning his barns into dwelling houses and ‘taking souch pepell in as is a gret decaye to the towne’.<sup>121</sup> Such developments indicate both some commercial interest in renting property to in-migrants, but also social concerns about their impact on the respectability of the town.

Plainly, the problems associated with poor in-migrants were beginning to make themselves felt in a town with a rising population, but as yet, there seems to have been no significant over-crowding. This was probably because the earlier reduction in population had left sufficient space to accommodate this growth, causing only a small expansion northwards into the street called Back Side. The size and nature of the growth in the population of Nottingham will be discussed in Chapter Two and some of the consequences, both positive and negative, of the influx of outsiders into Nottingham are raised below and throughout the thesis.

The town, of course, was not the only landlord in Nottingham, but there are no accounts relating to private owners to give a comparable picture of fluctuations in income and investment. There is, however, a tax assessment made in 1504, which lists ninety-two individuals and thirteen religious organisations with property in the town.<sup>122</sup> The greatest amount of property, valued at £33 15s 10d, was owned by Thomas Samon. The Samon family had been prominent in Nottingham in the early fifteenth century, but by 1500 had retired from the town and acquired something of gentry status. Thomas Samon, who is given the title *armiger* or ‘gent’,<sup>123</sup> did not live in Nottingham and employed John Keterick as his warden or

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<sup>121</sup> NA CA 52.

<sup>122</sup> S N Mastoris, ‘A Tax Assessment of 1504 and the Topography of Early Tudor Nottingham’, *Transactions of the Throton Society*, 89 (1985), pp.37-56.

<sup>123</sup> both terms found in NA CA 1383b.

bailiff to manage his property.<sup>124</sup> Thomas Thurland, grandson of the builder of Thurland Hall, was another absentee landlord owning tenements in Castle Gate, Long Row, Goose Gate, Bridlesmith Gate, Fletcher Gate, and other places, valued at £18 17s 4d.<sup>125</sup> There were others, including members of the county gentry: Sir Henry Willoughby owned tenements in Chapel Bar and lands in the fields valued at £4 17s, Sir Gervase Clifton had land in Bridgford pasture and Sir William Pierpont tenements in Hollowstone, both valued at £2.<sup>126</sup>

William Hegyn, the second largest property owner after Thomas Samon, was a resident. Mayor of Nottingham on four occasions, he owned tenements in Castle Gate, Friar Row, Swine Green, Stoney Street, Bridlesmith Gate, Wheeler Gate, Hen Cross, Fletcher Gate, Walser Gate, by the town Dyke and at the Tithebarns as well as four acres of arable land.<sup>127</sup> He was also a Calais Staple merchant whose goods were valued in 1500 at 300 marks.<sup>128</sup> Whether resident, like Hegyn, or non-resident, like Samon, these men provide evidence for commercial investment in urban property and therefore of entrepreneurial activity.

In 1517, only thirteen years after this assessment, the Inclosure Commissioners found fifteen houses and three cottages which had been allowed to become ruined, including four owned by Thomas Clerk, one of Nottingham's burgesses, three belonging to Thomas Willoughby, an aldermen, and two by Richard Samon, later, Sir Richard, and descendent of Thomas.<sup>129</sup> Such neglect must have been prompted by the lack of tenants, discussed above, and is another indication of the

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<sup>124</sup> NA CA 1384.

<sup>125</sup> Mastoris, 'Tax Assessment', p.44.

<sup>126</sup> Mastoris, 'Tax Assessment', p.39.

<sup>127</sup> Mastoris, 'Tax Assessment', p.44.

<sup>128</sup> NA PR 21599, CA 7480i.

<sup>129</sup> I S Leadam (translator), *The Domesday of Inclosures for Nottinghamshire*, Thoroton Society Record Series, 2 (1904), pp.48-49. Samon has been transcribed as Gamon.

depressed economy of these years at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It also suggests that the re-edification of Nottingham in the 1530s was much needed.

### **Trading places: markets and shops**

Buying and selling happened in many places within Nottingham, but the main outlets were the town's two market places. The smaller, called the Daily or Weekday market, was held at Weekday Cross on the border between the English and French boroughs near the Guild Hall and at the end of Fletcher – originally Fleshhewer (butcher) – Gate where it met with Middle Pavement. It is possible that this market specialised in the sale of beef as the town's bull ring abutted Weekday Cross.<sup>130</sup> In 1580 Laurence Worth was paid 3s 6d for mending the bull ring and a further 2d for letting the bull's blood, and John Oakland, the town's neatherd (cowherd), received 3d for 'dressyng the bulle aft[er] the dog'.<sup>131</sup> Presumably the bull ended up in the butchers' stalls in the Weekday Market. This association with butchers was not new, however, as 'Gregory's Notes' on the contents of the Red Book include an order or ordinance that in 1463 butchers were 'tyed to a certenty of tyme to stand in theyr shoppes in Weekday Shambles'.<sup>132</sup> In 1553 the Mickletorn Jury reported that two butchers' shops on the Weekday Market were fouling the street; in this case 'shop' may mean 'stall' as the proposed solution was to move them to the other side of the street next to 'Barytts by the new wall'.<sup>133</sup> This was probably Richard Barrett, a barker,<sup>134</sup> who paid 12d to the chamberlains' for a chimney on his house in 1552, which he must have extended by 1575 because his payment increased to 2s for 'a chymney and ij. out

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<sup>130</sup> NA CA 1619. Bears may also have been baited here.

<sup>131</sup> NA CA 1619.

<sup>132</sup> NA CA 4771, Stevenson, *II*, p.425.

<sup>133</sup> NA CA 3013.

<sup>134</sup> an alternate term for tanner.

castes or purprestures to his house agaynst Wekedey Crosse taken of the c[om]mon ground’;<sup>135</sup> another example of investment in property, this time as an indication of personal wealth and status.

Mentions of a shambles or meat market in Nottingham records are usually taken to refer to the shambles in the Saturday Market but some may actually mean the Weekday shambles. The chamberlains’ accounts for 1485, for example, show a payment of 4d for repairs to a shop ‘at þe westende of þe Shamulles late in þe holdyng of John Howett’.<sup>136</sup> In 1478-79 John Howett was the decennary for Middle Pavement, to the west of Weekday Cross, and therefore west of the Weekday shambles.<sup>137</sup> In 1499 he is noted as having rented two shoemakers’ stalls, but these were probably in the Saturday Market.<sup>138</sup> This suggests he may have been a corviser and therefore worked with leather goods, but it seems he dealt in a lot of products: in 1493 for example, he was described as a vintner and presented to the Sessions court for selling sub-standard tiles, another example of entrepreneurial activity.<sup>139</sup>

Two men living close to the Weekday Market – Richard Barrett and John Howett – have already been identified as working with leather and this relationship can be taken further. Through cross-referencing tax records which are organised by street name against men with known occupations it can be shown that while crafts and tradesmen lived all over town, there are some residential patterns. At least three butchers lived in Fletcher Gate in 1473. A similar exercise on later tax lists shows

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<sup>135</sup> NA CA 2169, 2171.

<sup>136</sup> NA CA 1602.

<sup>137</sup> NA CA 3350.

<sup>138</sup> NA CA 1660.

<sup>139</sup> NA CA 6.

that there were also three in 1571 and four in 1582.<sup>140</sup> Both Fletcher Gate and Middle Pavement were omitted from the extensive 1524-25 lay subsidy (discussed in Chapter Two), but there were three butchers living in Low Pavement which joins Middle Pavement and the two streets may have been listed together. The Weekday Market was also conveniently close to Broad Marsh and Narrow Marsh, both areas well known for their tanneries, particularly in the caves.<sup>141</sup> In 1473 three barkers or tanners lived in Narrow Marsh, in 1524-25 one tanner lived in Broad Marsh and a further seven in Narrow Marsh, and in 1582 eleven tanners who lived in The Marsh were listed as paying St Mary's parish rate.<sup>142</sup>

There were butchers and tanners living in other streets but not in the same concentrations: a barker lived in the Hen Cross/Timber Hill area in 1473 and just over a hundred years later another barker, William Knyveton lived on Timber Hill where he paid St Peter's parish rate.<sup>143</sup> In 1524-25 a tanner lived in Hen Cross, near The Poultry and Saturday Market, and another lived in Walsar Gate, two lived in Castle Gate in 1544-45 and one in Fisher Gate in 1582-83.<sup>144</sup> There were butchers in Stoney Street and Bridlesmith Gate in 1473-79 and one in Walsar Gate in 1524-25. A butcher joined the two tanners in Castle Gate in 1544-46 and in 1582-83 there was a butcher in Chapel Bar, one in St Mary's Gate and another in Stoney Street.<sup>145</sup> Walsar Gate, St Mary's Gate and Stoney Street are all close to Weekday Cross. The Weekday Market with its shambles and the proximity of the Marsh tanneries seems to have caused a concentration of butchers and tanners in

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<sup>140</sup> NA CA 4502, 4611; TNA E179/160/208.

<sup>141</sup> T Foulds, 'Trade and Manufacture', in J Beckett (ed), *Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), p.78.

<sup>142</sup> NA CA 4611, 8012; TNA E179/159/123.

<sup>143</sup> NA CA 8012, M 399.

<sup>144</sup> NA CA 4611; TNA E179/159/123, E179/159/155.

<sup>145</sup> NA CA 4611, 8019; TNA E179/159/123, E179/159/155.

this area of Nottingham, suggesting some informal zoning of the town which may reflect a continuity of practice. Noisome trades like butchery and tanning were often found on the edges of towns, to keep the unpleasant aspects of the work away from townspeople. Fletcher Gate, although reasonably central in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was near the border of the older English borough, and it is therefore possible that the connection between butchery and tanning and streets like Walsar Gate, Stoney Street, Fletcher Gate and the Marshes was a long standing one.

In comparison to the Weekday market, tax payers who have lived in Timber Hill on the southern border of the Saturday Market in 1473-79, 1524-25 and 1571 include cordwainers, drapers, tailors and mercers, together with their apprentices, but no butchers.<sup>146</sup> To the north of the market on Long Row there were bakers, barbers, cordwainers, drapers, fishmongers, mercers and tailors, together with vintners and inn keepers, and at the end of the sixteenth century, ropers and ironmongers, but again no butchers.<sup>147</sup> Likewise, only two tanners, William Cook senior, who in 1577 paid St Peter's parish rate when he lived in Timber Hill and William Cook junior, who lived in Long Row and paid St Mary's parish rate in 1582, are found near the Saturday Market.<sup>148</sup> This mix of trades must reflect the range of products sold in the Saturday Market.

There was, of course, a shambles on the corner of the market where it met with Cow Lane (now Clumber Street), but no butchers are identified as living in the streets surrounding this market. The exception to this may be John Rose who have

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<sup>146</sup> NA CA 8019, M 399; TNA E179/159/123.

<sup>147</sup> NA CA 4611, 8019, M 399; TNA E179/159/123, E179/159/155.

<sup>148</sup> NA CA 4611, M 399.



lived in either Low Pavement or Hen Cross.<sup>149</sup> Rose was one of the richest men in Nottingham and the only butcher to become mayor. It is likely, therefore, that he managed his butchery business but was not involved in its messier side, although he lived close by, as both streets are near to the markets.

This raises the question of who traded in the Saturday Market shambles? The records contain some clues. A list of stall holders dated 1558-59 named fifteen men who held butchers' stalls.<sup>150</sup> Six of these are noted elsewhere in the Borough records as butchers and four of them lived in Weekday Cross, Fletcher Gate and Castle Gate. Another, Robert Hunter, who rented two stalls, may be the same Robert Hunter who was appointed as the mayor's cook in 1557-58 so he was involved in both the production and consumption of meat.<sup>151</sup> The trade of Richard Fish is not known. The remaining seven, however, are not found in any other borough records. In 1577-78 the butchers presented a set of rules to the Council intended to control their trade and two of the clauses specifically mention 'cuntrye' butchers.<sup>152</sup> In the same year, the Mickletorn jury called for a cover at the end of the Shambles 'for the bucschers of the co[n]tre that they may stand drye vpon the Sayterdayes'.<sup>153</sup> It is possible that the Weekday Market, which as its name suggests, traded everyday except Saturday, was used by local, Nottingham butchers while the shambles in the Saturday Market was at least partly tenanted by men from the county who came to town to trade, some standing outside and some renting more permanent stalls. They must have been attracted to the town because of the demand created by its increasing population.

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<sup>149</sup> NA CA 4570; TNA E179/159/123.

<sup>150</sup> NA CA 7449.

<sup>151</sup> Stevenson, 'Appendix', IV, p.417.

<sup>152</sup> NA CA 4608.

<sup>153</sup> NA CA 3014.

The rental received from the lease of market stalls is a useful indicator of the size of the market and also of changes in the town economy. The Chamberlains' accounts for 1435 record a Flesh House (the shambles) of sixteen bays, giving room for thirty-two stalls which cost 4s 6d plus a penny for the king each year. To the north of the Flesh House were ten bays for ten 'fish boards' which included a board for the fishmonger's servant to stand on, at a cost of 2s per year. There were a further ten bays or twenty stalls in the Drapery at 4s plus a penny for the king, and the account also mentions booths for corvisers and glovers, but the quantity and rental value is not stated. In between these buildings were another seven booths with rents between 2s and 5s.<sup>154</sup> By 1461-62, the rent of the butchers' stalls had increased to 4s 11d, and in addition there were thirty mercery stalls, two smiths' stalls, two turners' stalls and six ropers' stalls. There were also ten shoemakers' stalls, but only eight fish stalls.<sup>155</sup> Some of these stalls were covered: 7s was paid in 1486 to tile the shoemaker's booths and by 1499-1500 there were eight covered and six uncovered fish stalls bringing rents of 2s and 1s respectively.<sup>156</sup>

These rent increases and improved stalls imply an expansion to the market at roughly the same time as money was being invested into new tenements in the 1470s and 1480s. By the end of the century, however, in the same way that houses lacked tenants so too did market stalls. In 1499-1500, twelve of the butchers' stalls were in decay 'for want of tenant', which resulted in rent reductions.<sup>157</sup> The chamberlains' accounts for 1531 show that the rent of the thirty mercers' stalls

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<sup>154</sup> NA CA 4448.

<sup>155</sup> NA CA 1660a.

<sup>156</sup> NA CA 1603, 1660c

<sup>157</sup> NA CA 1660c.

reduced from 4s 3d each in 1499-1500 to 3s 3d and the uncovered fish stalls fell from 12d to 6d. Nine corvisers' stalls were now rented for 3s 4d compared to six stalls at 4s 8d and one stall at 5s 4d in 1499-1500.<sup>158</sup> The cheaper rents must have been an attempt to attract more traders at a time when, as discussed above, the town was showing signs of economic depression and was experiencing a reduced population.

The same account reports the loss of rents on two shops and four stalls because they had been leased to burgesses in repayment for money loaned to the corporation for a period of years which had not yet expired.<sup>159</sup> This implies some shortfall in the town's income, which may have been caused by an expensive legal suit against Thomas Mapperley over the ownership of town land known as Cornerwong, finally resolved in 1485.<sup>160</sup>

Most of the later sets of chamberlains' rentals give little additional detail, but the stallage list or rental of 1558-59 mentioned earlier provides not just the number and cost of stalls, but also the names of the people who rented them.<sup>161</sup> In the Spice Chamber, which in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries had been called the Mercery, there were twenty-six stalls, four less than previously rented out, but three of these must have been larger than the others because they brought in 5s rather than 3s 4d. The Chamber seems to have been divided into two areas, one part being assigned to eleven glovers' stalls. Two of these were rented to Reginald Richardson but the remainder of the tenants took only one stall each.

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<sup>158</sup> NA CA 2166.

<sup>159</sup> NA CA 1660c.

<sup>160</sup> NA CA 1602 for costs; NA CA 4524, 4525, Stevenson, *II*, pp.398-400 for Award of Arbitrators.

<sup>161</sup> NA CA 7449.

Three are known to be glovers but one, Edward Samon, was the son of Anthony Samon of Annesley Woodhouse and his tenancy is more likely to have been an investment rather than his occupation. The occupations of the other tenants are unknown.

The stalls in the other part of the Spice Chamber are not assigned to specific goods, but some of the tenants can be identified as mercers. One of the larger stalls was rented by Master Atkinson, who was probably William Atkinson, a mercer who was mayor in 1546-47 and 1558-59. Another large stall was rented by Thomas Atkinson, possibly a relative, who was sheriff in 1564-65. The third large stall was tenanted by Thomas Clerk, who may have been sheriff in 1559-60. Another tenant, John Cost, must have been a descendant of either John Cost, mercer, or John Cost, draper, both of whom lived in Nottingham at the end of the fifteenth century. Richard Askew, a mercer, rented two stalls for a total of 6s 8d and Henry, Humphrey and William Walker all rented a stall each (they may or may not have been related).

Like the butcher, John Rose, mentioned earlier, it is unlikely that men who held civic office, such as William Atkinson, worked on these stalls themselves. They may have employed men to sell on their behalf, or even sub-let. This certainly must have been the case with one stall rented to Nicholas Glossop, a shoemaker who in 1556-57 also rented a shop adjoining the shambles.<sup>162</sup> Two women rented stalls in their own right, although again they probably employed others or sub-let. One of these was Elizabeth Fisher who rented one of the mercers' stalls; she may have been the widow of Richard Fisher, a litster, in which case she was elderly,

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<sup>162</sup> NA CA 2170.

having been presented to the Sessions court in 1500-1 for buying malt in Nottingham and selling it in Derby.<sup>163</sup> The other was the unnamed wife (not widow) of Athelstan Wood, who rented a glovers' stall and must have operated in her own right.

In addition to the Spice Chamber there was the Drapery where 'Master Coken', most likely Thomas Coughen, mayor in 1551-52 and 1559-60, rented a stall, and Robert Cocken or Coughen also had a stall here; both are recorded elsewhere as drapers. Other known drapers with stalls in this building were Randall Glossop and Thomas Barwell, but other tenants include Fabian Mellers, who also owned an inn and Master Gregory, who may be John Gregory, mayor in 1561, although he is listed by Stevenson as a tanner, not a draper.<sup>164</sup> Finally, in addition to the butchers' stalls discussed above, five covered and five uncovered fishmongers stalls were let, including two to Thomas Nix and one to William Nix, who were members of an established family of fishmongers.<sup>165</sup>

This analysis suggests that there were at least three types of stall holder. Some traded directly from their own stalls, some were wealthy enough to employ others to trade on their behalf and others, such as Anthony Samon or Nicholas Glossop, were landlords, living off the income from sub-letting. Even more than property ownership, these men are examples of commercial investors who lived off the income of trade.

The converse of this commercial activity is highlighted in this analysis of stall holders and market rents when the number of untenanted stalls is considered.

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<sup>163</sup> NA CA 10a.

<sup>164</sup> Stevenson, 'Appendix', *IV*, p.419.

<sup>165</sup> Other family members include Edward, John and Leonard, all fishmongers.

Following the lists of stall holders and rents they owed is a list of ‘decays’. This shows that £3 7s 1d was lost on four uncovered and two covered fish stalls and eleven butchers’ stalls, a further 20s for six stalls in the Spice Chamber and 52s for thirteen Drapery stalls, or a total of £6 19s 1d, which is 38 per cent of the total potential income and a significant sum.

In addition to the permanent stalls in the market buildings, there were thirty-two stalls or pitches in the market place; in 1556-57 the potential income is given as £8 for thirty-two stalls at 5s each.<sup>166</sup> Individual tenants are not listed so these stalls were probably let on a casual basis to anyone coming to trade in the Saturday Market and each year the chamberlains report rents ‘lost’ or paid to the sheriffs for Goose Fair.<sup>167</sup>

Some of the people who traded at these stalls could have been the men and some women that purchased a licence to trade in the town, who are listed in the Mayor’s rolls and books between 1414 and 1510. They followed a range of occupations typically found in Nottingham (see Chapter Three), including baker, cordwainer, tailor, tippler and weaver. Several women traded in this way, working as weavers, seamstresses and tipplers, although one, Agnes Woodwall is listed as a barber.<sup>168</sup> Until 1463 the amounts paid for licences ranged between 4d and 40d, women generally paying at the lower end. After 1467 the cost of a licence became cheaper, the most expensive being 2s in 1499 and only 1s in 1500, and the lowest amount paid was 2d in both 1500 and 1510.<sup>169</sup> The number of registered traders

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<sup>166</sup> NA CA 2170.

<sup>167</sup> for example NA CA 1607, 7449.

<sup>168</sup> NA CA 3350.

<sup>169</sup> NA CA 4547, 3351, 3354.

also reduced from sixty-six in 1478 to twenty-two in 1510, in line with the reductions in rent for market stalls and shops seen at this time.<sup>170</sup>

The 1558-59 stallage list, which breaks down the receipts for the market pitches into week-by-week and quarterly sums, shows the degree to which the market was under used in this mid-century period. Rather than the £2 per quarter that was expected, in 1558-59 the quarterly receipts were

Michaelmas	21s 10½d
Christmas	20s 1½d
Lady Day	19s 11 d
Midsummer	<u>21s 8½d</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£4 3s 7½d</b>

or just over half what might have been expected. The loss in income of just under 50 per cent is rather more than, but consistent with, the lost rent from the lease of stalls noted above. The income received though is an improvement on 1537-38 when a total of only £2 11s 11½d was recorded.<sup>171</sup> This not only testifies to the economic problems of the earlier sixteenth century but suggests that the economic upturn of the later sixteenth century had begun.

After 1558-59 there are further signs of improvement. In 1573-74, the rent of two fishers' stalls was revalued to 5s each increasing potential income to 22s but otherwise the rental values remained the same.<sup>172</sup> Decays, on the other hand, were apparently diminishing. In 1568-69, although six uncovered and eight covered fishers' stalls and thirty-two butchers' stalls were said to be in decay, the costs were only 6d, 8d and 2s 8d respectively, that is 1d per year per stall. These losses may actually be a nominal 'decay' paid to the sheriffs for Goose Fair; the same

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<sup>170</sup> NA CA 3350, 3354.

<sup>171</sup> NA CA 1609.

<sup>172</sup> NA CA 2171.

list includes claims for 2s 5d and 14d for twenty-nine and fourteen stalls respectively that 'Master Sheriff had'.<sup>173</sup> Further improvements in rental income are shown in 1571-72 when the chamberlains' account records only one fisher's stall in decay for 6d (half a year), a butcher's stall in decay for 6d, three stalls in the Spice Chamber in decay for 10s, and seven stalls in decay for 28s, an overall loss of 39s or approximately a quarter of the loss of thirteen years earlier.<sup>174</sup>

The same recovery can be seen in civic investment in the market. The Spice Chamber, Drapery and Shambles were permanent structures which, despite poor rents, were maintained and kept secure by the town chamberlains. In 1484-85, 1s 8½d was paid for tiles, lime and labour for the Mercery and 4d was paid for iron bands for the door between the Drapery and the Shambles, suggesting they were interconnecting buildings.<sup>175</sup> In 1494-95, new fish boards were purchased and the Drapery was thatched, a carpenter was employed to work on the Shambles, hooks and locks were fitted to the door and the 'pale' or fence around the Drapery and Shambles was repaired.<sup>176</sup> Further proof that the market was improving is given by the increased spend on the market buildings. In 1568-69, 10 pounds of iron was purchased for repairing the clapper of the bell in the Spice Chamber, and 24 stones 5 pounds of lead were bought for a cover for the louver over the bell.<sup>177</sup> In 1571-72 three-quarters of lime was bought to repair the Cheese Cross and 300 tiles were acquired at a cost of 5s 1d for the Spice Chamber, which was tiled and

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<sup>173</sup> NA CA 1611.

<sup>174</sup> NA CA 1612.

<sup>175</sup> NA CA 1602.

<sup>176</sup> NA CA 1604.

<sup>177</sup> NA CA 1611.



pointed for 5s 8d while its door, and the door to the shambles, were yet again repaired and new hasps and staples attached.<sup>178</sup>

The request by the Mickletorn jury in 1577 for a cover at end of the shambles has already been noted. Two years later the jurors asked that there should be some

bylding mayde of the Tymbar Hill wythe the townes money and in shorte tyme, by good p[ro]vesyon mayde, ye towne may reape a great rente for the same and otha[r] plases as wel<sup>179</sup>

Such building was desirable to enhance the attraction of the town's two annual fairs, events which otherwise are rarely mentioned in the surviving town records. This investment in the market spaces must have been in response to increased demand from consumers for goods sold in the market and by traders for space in which to sell. The demand was a consequence of the growing population and a more prosperous economy. The value of civic investment in property was clearly understood and exploited by the citizenry.

An interesting division within the Saturday Market was a wall which ran east to west across the market place (see Map 1 above). It is first mentioned in 1530 when 8s was paid for pointing it.<sup>180</sup> It has been suggested that this wall marked the division between the English and French boroughs, in which case it probably also marked the division between the three parishes where they met in the Saturday Market.<sup>181</sup> Speed's map of 1610, however, marks the northern side of the wall as being the corn market and Deering notes that in the mid-eighteenth century timber and animals were sold to the south and grain, food, hardware and other

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<sup>178</sup> NA CA 1612.

<sup>179</sup> NA CA 3015.

<sup>180</sup> NA CA 1608.

<sup>181</sup> S N Mastoris, 'The Boundary Between the English and French Boroughs of Medieval Nottingham: A Documentary Survey' *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, 85 (1981), p.68.

commodities to the north.<sup>182</sup> There are no firm definitions of this space in earlier records but a Mickletorn presentment for 1589 notes that the corn market was so ‘thronnge’ (crowded) that ‘Biers cannot passe threw’ and another notes that there was a ‘beestmarket’ there,<sup>183</sup> so it seems likely that Speed’s divisions applied at least twenty years before he drew his map. Adjacent to the large Saturday market was the Woman’s market where, as the street names – Hen Cross, Cheese Cross and The Poultry – suggest, dairy products and poultry were sold.<sup>184</sup>

The configuration of Nottingham’s market spaces is consistent with evidence found in other medieval and early modern towns. Graham Jones claims that the larger a town the more market places it was likely to have, and these were probably differentiated by both shape and the products sold there.<sup>185</sup> Weekday Cross and the adjacent streets of Middle Hill and High Pavement described a roughly triangular or a funnel shape, which Jones argues was associated with livestock sales as the shape helped with herding animals and must have facilitated moving bulls into the bull ring if not into the market. Rectangular market places, such as found in Norwich and Loughborough, dealt in a mix of products and, as Map 1 shows, Nottingham’s Saturday Market is almost rectangular and a great range of products passed over its pitches, stalls and booths. The west side of the Saturday Market where it joins with Chapel Bar is, however, also a funnel shape. If livestock were sold to the south of the market wall, again this funnel would help control the flow. The sale of dairy products, according to Jones, was focused on crosses surrounded by a circulation space, which seems to have been the case in

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<sup>182</sup> Deering, *Nottinghamia*, p.7.

<sup>183</sup> NA CA 51b.

<sup>184</sup> Stevenson, ‘Appendix’, *III*, pp.469, 472 & 479.

<sup>185</sup> G Jones, ‘The Market Place: Form, Location and Antecedents’, in S Pinches, M Whalley and D Postles, *The Market Place and the Place of the Market* (Leicester, 2004), p.3.

the Women's market though they were perhaps hemmed in by the more permanent market buildings close by.

### **Other trading places**

Goods were sold in more places than just the markets. Some trading took place in private houses. In 1525 Thomas Derbyshire, William Worsley, George Hall and Thomas Sherwood were presented to the Sessions court for 'keeping markets' (that is, selling goods) in their homes.<sup>186</sup> Derbyshire, Worsley and Hall all lived in Chapel Bar, one of the main routes into the Saturday Market. The occupations of Worsley and Hall are not known, but Derbyshire is described as a minstrel and Sherwood as an inn holder, so they must have indulged in a little side-trading as well.<sup>187</sup>

There were also several shops listed in the chamberlains' accounts and rentals although, as with the butchers' shops mentioned above, the term may indicate permanent market stalls rather than spaces set aside for selling within houses or other buildings. In 1446, a grant of property to John Dorham enrolled in the Borough Court mentioned five shops. Three were granted to him: two shops on Smithy Row and one in the 'Flesh Shambles' in Weekday Market between shops owned by Margaret Eastwood and Thomas Sutton of Mansfield.<sup>188</sup> The proximity to the markets calls into doubt whether these were shops or stalls. Robert Bercroft was granted the 'farm' of a shop near the Drapery in 1452, again this may refer to a stall.<sup>189</sup> John Flint leased a shop in the Shoemakers' Booths for ten years beginning in 1494 and in the same year a shop in the Saturday Market was let for

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<sup>186</sup> NA CA 26b.

<sup>187</sup> NA CA 1384, 1392.

<sup>188</sup> Foulds online CA 1336.

<sup>189</sup> NA CA 4448, 4458, Stevenson, *II*, pp.362 & 409.

twenty years to John Pierson for £6 13s 4d.<sup>190</sup> The same John, or possibly his son, still rented this shop in 1531 for 3s 4d annual rent. The 1499-1500 Chamberlains' accounts list a further three shops, all near the 'butchers' house'.<sup>191</sup>

On the other hand, there were some shops not associated with the market. In 1483, Henry Champagne, a shoemaker was presented to the Sessions court for encouraging townspeople to make fraudulent wagers over shooting arrows across the Leen from the front of his shop.<sup>192</sup> In 1531 Sir Richard Trowell paid the chamberlains for a counter and bay window in St Peter's Lane.<sup>193</sup> Sir Richard is most likely to have been the chaplain of St Mary's Guild at St Peter's Church, where he was also churchwarden, although Stevenson indexes him as 'knight'.<sup>194</sup> Either way, it is unlikely he traded directly, but probably sub-let. Four years later, John Sladen, inn holder, took a lease for sixty years on void ground near Bridlesmith Gate on which he undertook to build a shop with a chamber over it.<sup>195</sup> Fifteen years later he rented this shop for 8d and the same accounts list a shop against the Cheese Cross.<sup>196</sup> Margery Mellers' will of 1539 includes the bequest of 'my shop and shops' to John English, Nicholas English and Humphrey Bird.<sup>197</sup> These were, though, not the only shops in town. The Guild of St Mary at St Peter's Church, for example, owned a shop rented in 1515-16 by a Richard Smith, although which Richard is impossible to say.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> NA CA 1604.

<sup>191</sup> NA CA 1660c.

<sup>192</sup> NA CA 3.

<sup>193</sup> NA CA 2166.

<sup>194</sup> NA PR 21599; Stevenson, *III*, index.

<sup>195</sup> NA CA 4875b, Stevenson, *III*, p.443.

<sup>196</sup> NA CA 2167.

<sup>197</sup> NA CA 4771.

<sup>198</sup> NA PR 21599.

By 1576-77 thirteen shops are listed in the town rental, at least six of which do not appear in earlier rental lists. Christopher Basford, gentleman, rented a newly built shop at the south end of the Weekday shambles and Anthony Heywood rented a shop which had formerly been the tollbooth at the Drapery. Robert Stanley, an alderman, rented a shoemaker's shop with a chamber over to the west of the Drapery, Robert Sye was the tenant of two shops and a stables on the Saturday market and Widow Jepson held a shop in Narrow Marsh.<sup>199</sup> These new shops were appearing at the same time that new tenements were being built and the markets were showing signs of greater prosperity. Like market stall holders, some of the shop holders, like Christopher Basford, Robert Stanley and Robert Sye, probably lived off the profits of trade or by sub-letting to others, rather than trading in their own right. At the same time, landlords – whether the town or private individuals like John Sladen – were taking advantage of a rising demand for trading space and investing in new or improving old property, which are in themselves indications of a changing economic environment.

### **The Guild Hall**

Nottingham's Guild Hall was located on Weekday Cross, near the Weekday Market. It was here that the town's business was conducted. Nottingham's Charter of Incorporation granted in 1449 gave the burgesses the right to hold a Court in the Guild Hall to hear complaints of debt, breach of covenant, trespass and other offenses, but this was a simple confirmation of existing practice for the Borough Court.<sup>200</sup> It was in the Guild Hall that the chamberlains made their account of the town's finances to the burgesses, and where the assessment of goods for taxation

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<sup>199</sup> NA CA 2172.

<sup>200</sup> Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, *II*, p.194-95.

purposes was made.<sup>201</sup> The Guild Hall was moreover the town's prison. In 1463-64, a new padlock was purchased for the prison door at the same time as the gable end of the Hall was re-dawbed.<sup>202</sup> It was also the place where, in 1597-98, the burgesses met to protest against the terms of the lease of the Tithe Hay, a meeting which was foiled by the Council.<sup>203</sup> The Guild Hall, then, was a communal space, where burgesses participated in the government of the town and the seat of law and justice.

In 1478-79, the Guild Hall was rebuilt or at least significantly modified, work which required twelve carpenters who were supervised by twenty burgesses including all the aldermen and several common councillors.<sup>204</sup> Though an expression of civic pride, this rebuild was also a commercial investment which included the three tenements and tavern already mentioned together with a room variously referred to as a parlour, shop or house. Given its location so close to the Weekday Market, these were probably sound investments.

The parlour (*parlorae*) was rented to John Cragg in 1499-1500 for 10s.<sup>205</sup> He was a tippler, so probably sold beer from here, in which case the parlour may have been the tavern mentioned earlier.<sup>206</sup> In 1549, the shop and tavern under the Council House were let on a twenty-one year lease to John English, mercer,<sup>207</sup> who was probably the grandson of Robert English whose property had bordered the vacant land on which the tavern had been built eighty years earlier.<sup>208</sup> In 1556-

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<sup>201</sup> NA CA 3351, 4736.

<sup>202</sup> NA CA 1601.

<sup>203</sup> NA CA 3376.

<sup>204</sup> NA CA 3350.

<sup>205</sup> NA CA 1660c.

<sup>206</sup> NA CA 3350.

<sup>207</sup> NA CA 4878; Stretton MS XXX, Stevenson, *IV*, p.395.

<sup>208</sup> NA CA 2168, 4513, Stevenson, *II*, p.306.

57 the same shop and tavern were leased to Robert Peverell, a surgeon, and fifteen years later, William Stanshall, a butcher, rented the tavern.<sup>209</sup> Stanshall also rented a butchers stall in the Saturday Market, and like Robert Hunter, the cook mentioned above, is another example of entrepreneurial activity within Nottingham's tradesmen, investing in both food production and its retail sale, either as a raw product or finished dishes.<sup>210</sup>

In 1552-53, Ralph Bamforth, a tailor, rented a house and tavern 'under the armoury' which, it seems, was also part of the Guild Hall.<sup>211</sup> It is impossible to say how much armour the town possessed but in 1557-58, John Sheperd was paid 6s 8d for 'dressing' the town's harness and John Locksmith received twice that amount in 1571-92.<sup>212</sup> Nottingham certainly owned a quantity of gun powder, used in celebrations and for scaring the birds in the fields, if not for warlike activity.<sup>213</sup> Finally, in 1576-77, the Wardens of the Tanners rented the house over the tavern 'being now the lether hall'.<sup>214</sup> This lease reflects the increasing importance of tanning and leatherworking within Nottingham which is discussed in Chapter Three. Whether the house, shop and parlour were the same space or not is open to question but it seems likely to be the case, illustrating how flexible the Guild Hall could be.

The Guild Hall had many functions. As was fitting for a town where markets and other trading activities were so important, it contributed to the rental income of the town and it was also the place where the town's weapons were kept. More

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<sup>209</sup> NA CA 2169, 2170, 2171.

<sup>210</sup> NA CA 4779.

<sup>211</sup> NA CA 2169.

<sup>212</sup> NA CA 1610, 1612.

<sup>213</sup> NA CA 1613.

<sup>214</sup> NA CA 2172.

importantly, though, it was the place where law was dispensed, decisions reached and public announcements made. Its location on the border of the town's two boroughs was unlikely to be co-incidental and probably had great significance to the town's burgesses and Nottingham's civic identity.

### **Common Land**

Although the definition of a large town is that it has a range of occupations not dependant on agriculture, no medieval town was completely unconnected to farms and farming. Men such as William Hegyn, mentioned above, owned farm land as well as tenements in the town, which they leased in return for rental. The town also owned much farm land managed for the benefit of its burgesses. As Map 2 shows, beyond the town boundaries was a complex of communal lands comprising fields, meadows, wood and coppice lying to the north and south of the town.

Some of the land was farmed communally; the chamberlains' accounts record the cost of labour and materials devoted to constructing and maintaining the hedges of the Lammas fields which were partitioned for only part of the year, and to other hedges and fences including the 'long hedge' which marked the boundary between Nottingham and Sneinton.<sup>215</sup> In 1463-64, 13s 6d was spent on twenty man-days labour to hedge the wood, Eppersteynor<sup>216</sup> and East Croft and a further 14s 4d for willows and 'tinsel' to make the hedges, while 16s 2d paid for materials and carriage to make fences and 'barreours' [gates?].<sup>217</sup>

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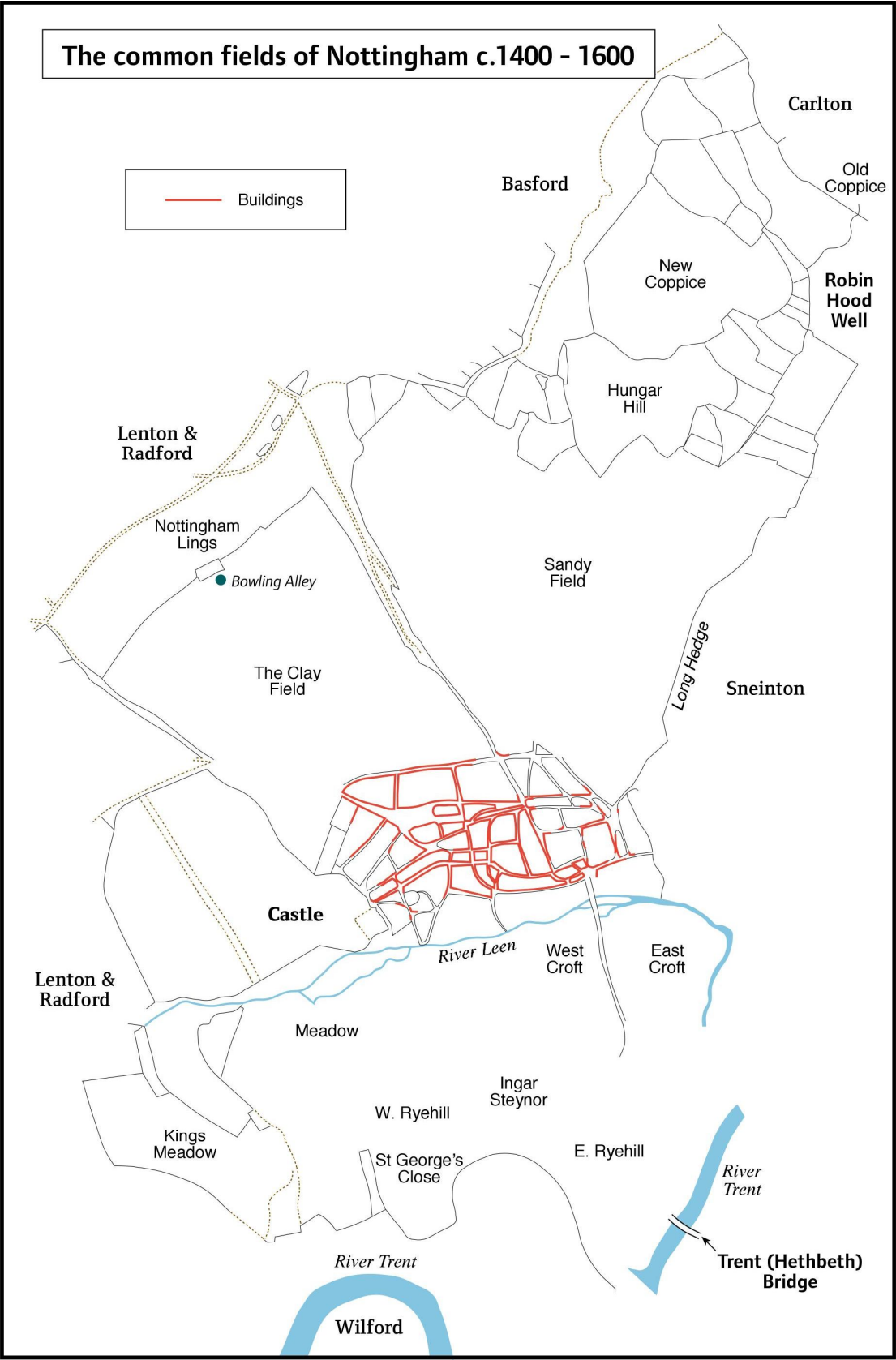
<sup>215</sup> NA CA 1607.

<sup>216</sup> probably near Trent Bridge, Stevenson, 'Appendix', II, p.438.

<sup>217</sup> NA CA 1601.



Map 2: the common fields of Nottingham c.1400-1600<sup>218</sup>



<sup>218</sup> This map is based on Richard Bank's map of Sherwood Forest dated 1609 and is not to scale.

Similar payments are found in all the chamberlains' account books; in 1494-95 for example, there was more hedging at Eppersteynor and the lane to the coppice was repaired and a new gate made.<sup>219</sup> In 1568, whips and thorns were gathered for hedging at East Croft and the dyke in West Croft was repaired.<sup>220</sup>

Some of the labour may have been provided voluntarily by burgesses as in 1494 the chamberlains' accounts show that bread, herring and ale was provided for 'boners' [booners] working on Eppersteynor.<sup>221</sup> This communal work continued in the sixteenth century as the chamberlains' accounts for 1571-72 record 4d paid for bread and ale for the 'common work' at Butter Cross, indicating a continuity of traditional practices of communal work.<sup>222</sup>

Much of the land was, nevertheless, 'farmed' or leased to individuals. The rental of 1435 shows that Herbred Stener<sup>223</sup> was leased to John Manchester senior for ten years for £3 a year, John to fence it at his own cost. The same rental lists Little Steynor, Rye Hill, Ingald Steynor and Nomans Part as all being leased for a year for amounts ranging from 5s to 13s 4d.<sup>224</sup> By 1499-1500 Hethbethsteynor was leased to Richard Pykerd, then a common councillor but later mayor, for the same annual sum of £3, and another steynor, possibly Little Steynor, was leased to William Mascury for nineteen years for £4.<sup>225</sup> Katherine Pykard, Richard's widow, was, in 1511, granted a lease of twenty-one years for 'common ground and pasture called 'The Water Wessh nere Samon's Pasture' paying 15s per year,

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<sup>219</sup> NA CA 1604.

<sup>220</sup> NA CA 1611.

<sup>221</sup> NA CA 1604.

<sup>222</sup> NA CA 1612.

<sup>223</sup> probably Hethbethsteynor, a gravelly area near Trent Bridge, Stevenson, 'Appendix', *II*, pp.439, 470-71.

<sup>224</sup> NA CA 4448, Stevenson, *II*, p.356.

<sup>225</sup> NA CA 1660.

provided she allowed free passage to burgesses' cattle.<sup>226</sup> The following year she was fined for 'dryvyng gret substance of catell of neette, kye and shepe thoro oure medo, eyting our gresse, to the gret hurtte of owre medo and newsan[ce] to vs all'.<sup>227</sup>

In the mid-1480s, St George's Guild benefited from the rent of a property called 'Ingersteynor' which had been granted to the Guild by the Council for an unknown period of years. This property first appeared in the Guild accounts in 1488-1489, but, as the previous two years' accounts are missing it may have come into the Guild's possession slightly earlier; it was no longer on the books in 1508. The Guild accounts note that its 'treasury' contained an indenture for £21 loaned to the Council. The inference is that Ingersteynor was leased in return for the loan, so the length of the agreement could well have been twenty-one years or year for each £1 of the loan.<sup>228</sup> The Guild sub-let the land for 36s 8d per year rising to 40s in 1497, so it got a good return on its money. The date of this loan coincides with the lease of shops and stalls in return for loans to the Council, discussed above, and it is likely that this grant was part of the same money-raising exercise to cover short-falls in other income and the cost of the legal suit against Thomas Mapperley.

The town's meadows known as East and West Croft together with a small area called the Hook were to the south of the Leen. In 1435 East Croft was 'farmed' to John Castle, John Lovot and John Fossebrook, for ten years for 14 marks while West Croft was divided into four parts, each bringing 20s. Later these areas were

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<sup>226</sup> NA CA 1383b, 4565, Stevenson, *III*, pp.438-39.

<sup>227</sup> NA CA 3012.

<sup>228</sup> NA PR 21599.

divided into burgess parts and the crops leased. In 1499-1500 the first crop of East Croft brought £7 16s 8d and the second crop 45s 3d, and the lease of the pasturage of West Croft was worth £4. The same account also notes that 44s 2d was lost from the farm or lease of the crop of two and half parts of Eastcroft (*ij partium et dimidia in le Hoke de Estcroft*) for lack of tenants and that a further 6s 6d had to be ‘allowed’ to the chamberlains’ because Robert Tull, a husbandman, and Ralph Pykard had been ‘visited with infirmities’ and were unable to work.<sup>229</sup>

Despite the lack of tenants at the beginning of the century, by 1531 East Croft was divided into ten parts, each paying 15s for the first crop and lesser amounts for the second and third crop.<sup>230</sup> This arrangement was reversed in 1552 when the Council ordered that East and West Croft should both be divided into four parts, with four burgesses sharing each part.<sup>231</sup> By 1573-74 East Croft was again divided into ten parts, each occupied by three burgesses, but West Croft remained divided into four, so a total of forty-four burgesses tenanted these meadows.<sup>232</sup> Of these forty-four, nine were widows of burgesses who had inherited their husband’s burgess privileges. They include Widow Coughyn, most likely the widow of Robert Coughen who had been sheriff in the 1560s. Widow Hasilrig was probably the widow of Robert Hasilrig, mayor and Calais Staple merchant. Widow Atkinson may have been Johanna or Joan Atkinson who lived on High Pavement and paid 8s tax on lands to the lay subsidy of 1571.<sup>233</sup> The other widows – Sybthorp, Goodwin, Wilson, Millington, Katherins and Cowper – could all be relicts of men whose names appear regularly in town records, at least as members

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<sup>229</sup> NA CA 1660.

<sup>230</sup> NA CA 2166.

<sup>231</sup> NA CA 3358.

<sup>232</sup> NA CA 2171.

<sup>233</sup> TNA E179/160/208.

of one of the town's many juries, but often as sheriff or chamberlain. Like the widows and wives who held market stalls, they most likely sub-let this land rather than farmed it themselves.

As well as land, the town possessed a common bull which was over-wintered, possibly at Newark, at a cost of 3s 8d in 1503-4.<sup>234</sup> Burgesses were allowed to keep eight beasts in the common fields, although this was abused from time to time; Alderman Burton, for example, had fourteen in 1577.<sup>235</sup> In 1432, Isabella Barrett, wife of John Barrett, a butcher, was engaged to drive the cattle 'of the town of Nottingham' to pasture but was not paid the 21d agreed.<sup>236</sup> Townspeople also kept pigs: in 1410 Gilbert de Lamley's herb garden was destroyed by John de Colston's pigs, there were pigsties in Malin Hill, Hollowstone and 'the rock' and in 1589 the vicars of Nottingham's three parish churches were exhorted to each keep a boar for the benefit of the town.<sup>237</sup> The sixteenth-century Hall books record the appointment of a neat (cow) herd, a swine herd, a pinder to manage strays, a woodward and a keeper of the meadows, though they might be known by other names.<sup>238</sup> Thomas Parker was engaged as Keeper of the Sown Fields and Woods for which he received 15s in 1499-1500 for three quarters of a year. He died part-way through the year and Milo Page was paid 5s for the remaining quarter. In the same year John Catterick, who was the Keeper of the Meadows and Fences received £2 and a gown worth 5s.<sup>239</sup> Clearly, whatever the economic position of the town, there was a considerable connection with the surrounding

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<sup>234</sup> for example NA CA 1601.

<sup>235</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>236</sup> Foulds online CA 1323.

<sup>237</sup> NA CA 3011, 3018; CA 4448, Stevenson, *II*, p.355; Foulds online CA 1306/I.

<sup>238</sup> for example NA CA 3360, 3361.

<sup>239</sup> NA CA 1660.

agricultural areas which continued throughout both centuries, and common land was still in demand at the end of the sixteenth century.

It was suggested above that the many migrants arriving in Nottingham in the last fifty years of the sixteenth century caused the town to expand northwards, but that there were no indications of significant overcrowding in the streets. This is not the case for common land and there were many complaints that there was insufficient common land to be shared around the increasingly large number of burgesses. The division of East and West Croft, discussed above, was probably a consequence of greater demand from burgesses for a share of the common meadow. One solution was for leased land to be recouped. In 1577 the Mickletorn Jury found that Master Newton's lease on West Steynor was void and recommended that the 'pore Bordgesses may have it for a cove pastur'; they also asked for no more 'foreign' burgesses, unless they paid £10 because there were already so many that the 'pore Burdgesses co[m]mons is eatten up' and that any burgess not using his 'part' in East or West Croft sub-let it to a burgess not a foreigner.<sup>240</sup> Ten years later the same jury requested that no foreigners should be allowed to have commons in the fields or meadows and six months after that presented Alderman Gregory for sub-letting his part of the last crop of East Croft to foreigners and for supporting a foreigner who wanted to enclose part of the open field to make a Lammas close.<sup>241</sup> These 'foreigners' were not the poverty-stricken vagabonds that motivated national legislation to control vagrants, but men who entered the town to trade as burgesses, or even wealthier men such as those listed in the 1599 subsidy return described in the next chapter, who owned land but did not take on

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<sup>240</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>241</sup> NA CA 3016, 3017.

burgess responsibilities.<sup>242</sup> The many presentments show a sympathy with the plight of poor burgesses, similar to that identified by Archer in his investigations of London substructures.<sup>243</sup> They were also the spur to burgesses to call for reforms to the composition of the Council, which are discussed in Chapter Seven.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter, which addresses the first and second of the research questions, has provided many examples of the effect of economic change in Nottingham. These indicate both a general pattern of economic decline followed by recovery and expansion, and some, perhaps more local, fluctuations. The most clear indicator is perhaps market rentals. These increased in the first half of the fifteenth century, when there was also some investment in the market as stalls were covered or tiled. The latter part of the century and the early part of the sixteenth century, though show a declining market when rents were reduced, particularly for mercers, corvisers and fishmongers, and there were few tenants for butchers' stalls. A regional factor at this time was the strategy employed by the Council to fund the expensive legal suit against Thomas Mapperley which led it to grant long leases in return for loans and so reduced its annual income. In the later sixteenth century, however, not only did rents begin to increase, but there were fewer, if any, decayed rents and improvements were made to the market area which, in 1589-90, was reported to be crowded.<sup>244</sup>

Demographic changes also had some consequences for the fabric of the town. Rents of tenements and other housing follow a similar pattern to that shown by

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<sup>242</sup> TNA E179/160/249.

<sup>243</sup> I W Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1991), p.51.

<sup>244</sup> NA CA 51b.

stall rentals, with some investment in new property in the 1480s, followed by reports of lost rents, insufficient tenants, and property in disrepair, which eventually led to the re-edification statute of 1535-36. These depletions meant that during the fifteenth century the town had many vacant spaces, especially on its boundaries. Investment in building until the end of the sixteenth century was concentrated into the central areas of the town, while the peripheries were vacant and in decay. Even the increase in population from the mid-sixteenth century seems to have only resulted in in-filling in the central areas and some of the back lanes, with a small expansion to the north towards the end of the century.

The effect of population growth on the demand for common land, though, was more serious and, moreover, did not come from paupers and unskilled workers, but from men with sufficient means to become burgesses. It resulted in subdivisions of meadowland, calls to recoup leased land, the condemnation of subletting to 'foreigners' and a growing tension between the Council and burgesses.

Most of these changes were gradual readjustments in response to market demands. After 1570, though, the problems of in-migration and its consequences for common land appear in the records with increased frequency which may reflect the speed of population growth that is the subject of the next chapter.

Some continuities have also been identified; residential patterns appear to be unaltered throughout both centuries, centring on the different uses of the market places. The importance of agricultural land to a significant part of the community is another consistent feature, as is the presence of men, and a few women, who invested in property, sometimes to the detriment of the burgess community. Protests from this community suggest a tension between the needs of the less



prosperous burgesses and the strategy employed by the Council to manage communal land. This subject will be discussed in more detail in Part II.

## Chapter Two: Population and wealth

Population change and personal wealth are two key measures used in the debate concerning the decay or decline of towns in the later medieval period. The ultimate cause of economic decline both for towns and individuals was, according to R B Dobson the result of demographic attrition.<sup>245</sup> The converse of Dobson's argument, made by A R Bridbury and others, is that increases in taxable wealth perceived in the 1524-25 lay subsidy are evidence of individual wealth and an expanding economy.<sup>246</sup> Some of the implications of fluctuations in population size (combined with economic change) such as the contraction and expansion of the built-up areas, rent reductions and increases, and demands for common land, were raised in the previous Chapter. This Chapter investigates the details of population change, not just in terms of absolute numbers but also in comparison to other towns.

Estimates of population size are often based on tax returns, so it is also possible assess personal affluence. Wealth was an important indicator of an individual's status within a town because, as Susan Reynolds points out, in a highly stratified society 'the rich had a duty to rule'.<sup>247</sup> As well as carrying obligations, wealth provided town governors with the opportunity to rule. Wealthy men, who were able to employ agents to work on their behalf, had the time and financial

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<sup>245</sup> R B Dobson, 'Urban Decline in Late Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 27 (1977).

<sup>246</sup> A R Bridbury, 'English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, second series, 34:1 (1981).

<sup>247</sup> S Reynolds, 'Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought', in S Reynolds, *Ideas and Solidarities of the Medieval Laity: England and Western Europe* (Aldershot, 1995), p.11.

resources to become community leaders.<sup>248</sup> In return for this almost unpaid work they were accorded some status as holding civic office brought with it something of the standing of county gentry.<sup>249</sup> Another of the historiographic arguments is that the later sixteenth century saw an increasingly wide social gap between the rich and poor which became one of the contributing factors in social unrest.<sup>250</sup> This chapter looks for evidence of affluence, or its opposite poverty, and assesses the depth and social implications of any gap.

### **Population trends**

Research on national trends of population change suggest that there was a slow growth between 1377 and 1546 of 0.15 per cent per year, although as E A Wrigley acknowledges, 'Most scholars ... believe that the population was stagnant until well into the fifteenth century' with some suggesting the 1480s as a turning point and some the 1510s, although Wrigley himself seems to favour the later date.<sup>251</sup> There must, however, have been fluctuations in this trend. As mentioned in Chapter One, there seems to have been some increased demand for urban land at the beginning of the fifteenth century, albeit a rather short-lived one.

There are no accurate measures of either population or communal and individual wealth for Nottingham, or most other towns, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it is possible to make estimates. Exact population figures are hard to calculate but some estimates have been made using the 1377 poll tax and 1524-25

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<sup>248</sup> T H Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977), p.306; R H Britnell, 'Sedentary Long-distance Trade and the English Merchant Class in Thirteenth-Century England', in P R Cross and S D Lloyd (eds) *Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1993* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp.131 & 133.

<sup>249</sup> A L Brown, *The Governance of late Medieval England, 1271-1461* (Stanford, 1989), p.126.

<sup>250</sup> for example, R Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture c.1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), p.13.

<sup>251</sup> E A Wrigley and R S Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981), p.566.

lay subsidy rolls. In 1377 Nottingham had 1,447 tax payers so that, using a multiplier of 1.9, Alan Dyer has estimated a population of 2,749.<sup>252</sup> Dyer has also calculated the population of Nottingham using the 1524-25 subsidy based on 295 tax payers.<sup>253</sup> Under assessment of this subsidy was common in the north Midlands, and there is evidence that about one-third of households in towns like nearby Leicester or, further afield, Norwich were omitted.<sup>254</sup> To allow for this under assessment, Dyer has suggested that ‘a multiplier of 6.0-7.0 would probably be about right in many cases’ which produces a population for Nottingham of 1,918, a figure he later adjusted to 2,220.<sup>255</sup>

The 1510s and 1520s have been identified as times of ‘crisis’. The years 1518-25 are described by Charles Phythian-Adams as having a particularly high mortality rate which resulted in the population of Coventry falling by at least 15 per cent between 1520 and 1523.<sup>256</sup> David Palliser notes a similar decline in the population of York hastened by epidemics in the early 1520s.<sup>257</sup> In Nottingham, in addition to evidence from vacant property due to lack of tenants, discussed in Chapter One, there is some circumstantial evidence to support the idea of a higher than normal mortality rate in the early part of the sixteenth century which may account for

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<sup>252</sup> A Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640* (Basingstoke, 1991), pp.64-5 & p.74.

<sup>253</sup> This figure is incorrect and should be either 296 or 298 depending which version of the tax roll is used; see below.

<sup>254</sup> A Dyer, ‘Appendix: Ranking Lists of English Medieval Towns’, in D M Palliser (ed), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, I, 600-1540* (Cambridge, 2000), p.763; W G Hoskins, ‘English Provincial Towns in the Early Sixteenth Century’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 6 (1956), p.17 republished in P Clark (ed), *The Early Modern Town: A Reader* (London, 1976), p.101; S Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977), p.161.

<sup>255</sup> Dyer, ‘Appendix’, p.764; Dyer, *Decline and Growth*, p.74; A Dyer, “‘Urban decline’ in England, 1377-1525”, in T R Slater, (ed), *Towns in Decline AD 1000-1600* (Aldershot, 2000), p.275.

<sup>256</sup> C Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), pp.52-57 & 190.

<sup>257</sup> D M Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), p.212.

population decrease. David Marcombe reports that between 1517-22 there are twenty-nine grants of probate surviving which is exceptionally high for the town.<sup>258</sup> The Borough court records provide supporting evidence for this; in 1518-19 the executors of eleven deceased burgesses appeared in the Borough court, over twice the usual average of five.<sup>259</sup> Rather more tangentially, Nottingham's Charter of Incorporation of 1449 appointed seven aldermen for life, one of whom was to be mayor, so that the post cycled around the same group of men at roughly six year intervals. In the first thirty or so years of the sixteenth century, however, with the exception of John Williamson, John Rose and Thomas Mellers, few men held the post of mayor more than once, and in one case a newly appointed alderman died before he had time to become mayor. This suggests a high level of mortality at all levels of society that coincided with the economic problems already raised. These two factors contributed to some instability in the mayoralty and therefore local government, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Such arguments, of course, do not negate Dobson's assertion of individual prosperity.

At the end of the sixteenth century, using parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, it has been calculated that the population of Nottingham was 2,920 in 1580, 3,440 in 1590 and 3,080 by 1600.<sup>260</sup> The apparent decline between 1590 and 1600 may have been a consequence of repeated outbreaks of plague. In April 1593 Edmund Garland and Michael Bell were both presented at the Sessions court for lodging their sisters knowing that they had come from towns where there was

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<sup>258</sup> D Marcombe, 'The Late Medieval Town, 1449-1560', in J Beckett (ed) *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), p.84.

<sup>259</sup> NA CA 1392; lesser figures appear in for example NA CA 1383 (1508) & 1384 (1512) which list five; NA CA 1397 (1525) lists four.

<sup>260</sup> A Henstock, S Dunster and S Wallwork, 'Decline and Regeneration: Social and Economic Life', in J Beckett (ed) *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), p.134.

plague,<sup>261</sup> while in July of that year sixteen men, including two alderman, a common councillor, a former chamberlain and a future sheriff were presented at the same court for leaving town 'against their oath'.<sup>262</sup> Again, the death rate appears to be high, with nineteen suits brought to the Borough court by executors in 1594-95 and a further nine in 1597-98.<sup>263</sup>

Even so, these figures may be an under-estimate as the Archiepiscopal Visitation records for Nottingham show that there were 2,360 men and women over the age of sixteen in 1603.<sup>264</sup> Wrigley estimates that between a quarter and a fifth of adults were omitted from this survey and a further 35 per cent must be added to allow for children under the age of sixteen.<sup>265</sup> Based on these figures the population of Nottingham in 1603 was between 3,823 and 3,903, or about 800 more than the estimates derived from parish records. This implies that the figures for 1580 and 1590 may also be higher, but there are no reliable sources on which to base revised estimates. If the lower estimates based on parish registers are taken, the population increase of about 50 per cent was similar to that found in other towns. York for example, increased from about 8,000 people in the mid-sixteenth century to 12,000 by the early seventeenth, and Warwick also increased by about 50 per cent. Leicester, on the other hand, saw only a 19 per cent rise between 1509 and 1600.<sup>266</sup> If the higher figures are taken, however, Nottingham expanded at a more rapid rate than other towns, nearly doubling its population in seventy-five years. As raised in Chapter One, this large increase in residents

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<sup>261</sup> NA CA 52a.

<sup>262</sup> NA CA 52b.

<sup>263</sup> NA CA 1428, 1430.

<sup>264</sup> A C Wood (transcriber) 'An Archiepiscopal Visitation of 1603' *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 46 (1942), p.4.

<sup>265</sup> Wrigley, *Population History*, p.569.

<sup>266</sup> P Clark and P Slack, 'Introduction', in P Clark and P Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History* (London, 1972), p.17.

coincided with the development of the Saturday market and new building as the economy expanded, but they also occur at a time when concerns about poor burgesses and the lease of common lands were being expressed and some of the town's resources stretched.

These population figures mark the start of the fifteenth and the end of the sixteenth centuries with one mid-point estimate, but still leave large gaps particularly for the fifteenth century. Documents held in the Nottinghamshire Archive (NA) provide some indication of population trends. The first is a lay subsidy roll for 1472-73 which comprises the names of 151 freeholders. The second, dated between 1473 and 1479, lists 347 men and women who contributed to a tax described in the NA catalogue as a 'levy'.<sup>267</sup> The purpose of the levy is unknown because the top of the document is missing and as a result the heading and (by comparison with the surviving sheets) perhaps thirty names are lost. The amounts collected are small, ranging from ½d to 3s 4d, so it may record a local collection and, given the date, it is tempting to suggest that it was to raise money for the new Guild Hall built in 1478-79. There are twenty-eight names which appear in both documents, consequently the two documents together record 470 tax payers which, with the thirty missing names, gives a total of about 500 individuals. The levy is organised by street so each named person probably represented a household, some of which were small: Alice Helmesley and Johanna Holand, for example, are shown as paying 4½d between them. For this reason, and because of the number of tax payers recorded, a multiplier of 5 rather than 6.5 (as used by Dyer for the 1524-25 lay subsidy) seems more reasonable,

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<sup>267</sup> NA CA 4502, Stevenson, *II*, pp.285-96; NA CA 8019. The dating of this document relies on the inclusion of Lady or Dame Johanna Thurland whose husband, Thomas, died in 1473. She died in 1479.

giving a population of 2,500; a lower multiplier of 4.5 would give a population of 2,250. Both estimates are slightly higher than Dyer's estimates for 1524-25 but less than the 1377 figure and so indicate at best a stagnation, and at worst a gradual decline in population from the end of the fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century, contrary to national trends (which include rural populations) but in line with other urban centres.

There are, unfortunately, no subsidy assessments for the earlier fifteenth century, and while tax records in the form of national subsidies do exist for the sixteenth century, they are damaged, incomplete, or targeted at the wealthier citizens.<sup>268</sup> Despite these documentary inadequacies the surviving data does give a range of figures across the 200 years of this study.

Table I: Estimates of population between 1377 and 1604

<b>Year</b>	<b>1377</b>	<b>1472-79</b>	<b>1524-25</b>	<b>1580</b>	<b>1590</b>	<b>1600-4</b>
Population estimate	2749	2250 -2500	1918-2220	2920+	3440+	3080-3903

#### *National and local rankings by population size*

One of the uses of population estimates is as simple measures to differentiate between small and large towns. As Christopher Dyer asserts, there is 'widespread acceptance that the population level of 2,000 divided small towns from large'.<sup>269</sup> Using this measure Nottingham has been classified as a large centre together with even larger towns such as London, York and Southampton;<sup>270</sup> although the more

<sup>268</sup> for example TNA E179/159/155 (1544); NA CA 4623 (1595).

<sup>269</sup> C Dyer, 'Small Places with Large Consequences: the Importance of Small Towns in England, 1000-1540', *Historical Research*, 75:187 (2002), p.2.

<sup>270</sup> Dyer, 'Small places', p.3.



detailed examination of its population above shows that at times it was close to the borderline.

Population size has also been used by Alan Dyer to produce national rankings of medieval towns at different dates, and, together with other indicators, by Jane Laughton, Evan Jones and Christopher Dyer to devise a regional urban hierarchy for three East Midlands counties: Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland.<sup>271</sup> Such rankings are useful indices against which Nottingham can be placed in national and regional contexts to gain a greater understanding of the town's importance, or otherwise, to the locality and the country. Although these are static measures, taken at a particular moment dependent on available sources, changes in ranking over time are an indication of alterations in town status.

Nationally, Alan Dyer ranked Nottingham at twenty-ninth by population size in 1377 but only fiftieth by 1524.<sup>272</sup> In a similar ranking of forty-three large towns by John Patten, Nottingham is ranked twenty-fifth in 1334, does not appear at all in 1524-25, but is rated twenty-first in 1660-70. These positions confirm a general pattern of population decline until the mid- to late-sixteenth century, followed by considerable growth which, as suggested above, may have exceeded that experienced in other towns.<sup>273</sup>

At a regional level, the viewpoint is slightly different. Although Nottingham is not included in the Laughton, Jones and Dyer survey, a comparison with the findings of that project show that with 1,447 taxpayers in 1377 Nottingham would have

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<sup>271</sup> Dyer, 'Appendix', pp.747-70; J Laughton, E Jones and C Dyer, 'The Urban Hierarchy in the later Middle Ages: a Study of the East Midlands', *Urban History*, 28, 3 (2001), pp.331-57.

<sup>272</sup> Dyer, 'Appendix', pp.758 & 762.

<sup>273</sup> J Patten, *English Towns 1500-1700* (Folkestone, 1978), p.42.

been third behind Leicester with 2,380 people and Northampton, which was only slightly larger, with 1,477 townsmen and women. By 1524-25 Northampton and Leicester had swapped places for first and second position but if Nottingham had been included, its 296+ taxpayers would again have ranked it third above Stamford's 240.<sup>274</sup> In other words, until the mid-sixteenth century at least, Nottingham's ranking within the East Midlands was essentially unchanged despite its falling population because all East Midlands towns suffered the same degradation. There are no rankings for the later sixteenth century, probably because of the idiosyncrasies of tax returns which will be discussed below, but it seems likely that Nottingham's population growth outstripped that of its nearest neighbour.

## **Wealth**

Wealth is closely associated with social status and, therefore, with social stratification. An analysis of tax returns, then, should give some indication not just of personal wealth but also of the social organisation of Nottingham. As with estimating populations, however, this assessment is not without problems because avoidance and under-valuation of assets was 'endemic'<sup>275</sup> and must be taken into account in any study of taxation records.

Until the late sixteenth century tax was paid communally, each town or village paying a sum set in the fourteenth century according to a system known as 'fifteenths and tenths'. This fossilized system was insufficient to meet the needs of Tudor governments which experimented with other forms of taxation, but at the same time regularly collected 'fifteenths and tenths'.

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<sup>274</sup> Laughton, 'Urban Hierarchy', pp.340-41.

<sup>275</sup> R W Hoyle, *Tudor Taxation Records: a Guide for Users* (London, 1994), p.30.

### *Late fifteenth century taxes*

The earliest complete tax record for Nottingham is the lay subsidy of 1472-73.<sup>276</sup>

It was levied at one-tenth of freehold value and therefore automatically excluded the majority of townspeople. As Table II illustrates, most of the total sum collected was paid by only a few; eight people paid over one-third of the total (£16 3d), while over half the subsidy (£22 8d) was contributed by 10 per cent of the population or only fifteen people, and 50 per cent of tax payers contributed almost 90 per cent of the total tax.

Table II: 1472-73 lay subsidy

% of tax payers	tax payers	money (d) £43 12s	% of total collected
1%	2	1683	16.1
2%	3	2197½	21.0
5%	8	3843	36.7
10%	15	5288	50.5
25%	38	7619¼	72.8
50%	76	9329¼	89.2
75%	113	10156½	97.1
100%	151	10464	100.0

Source: NA CA 4502

Three of the eight people who made up the top 5 per cent of subsidy payers were mayors of Nottingham. Thomas Thurland, who paid the largest amount of 74s 1½d, was a Calais Staple merchant; he was mayor of Nottingham on nine occasions from 1442 and MP six times. John Hunt with his wife Alice, and John Mapperley, also with his wife (another Alice) contributed 28s 9d and 26s 7½d respectively; both were mayors in the 1470s and 1480s. John Hunt was the son of John Hunt, senior, who had also been a mayor and both were merchants. Another significant tax payer was William Babington, son of Sir William Babington who was Chief Justice of the King's Bench, and a relative (perhaps father) of Thomas

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<sup>276</sup> NA CA 4502, Stevenson, *II*, pp.285-96.

Babington, the Recorder of Nottingham at the end of the fifteenth century. Two other members of this wealthy group were Cecily Wentworth and Margaret Alestre and it is likely that Margaret, who paid 65s 7½d for her freehold, was the widow of Thomas Alestre, who had been mayor in the 1450s and 1460s and, like Thurland, MP five times.

A further four mayors are found in the next seven tax payers making a total of seven mayors in the top 10 per cent of subsidy payers, but as this group included three women, the true proportion is seven out of the twelve highest male tax payers held the most senior civic office in Nottingham at some time between 1442-43 and 1477-78. Altogether, the subsidy list includes fifteen men who were or would become aldermen (and therefore mayor), two common councillors and seventeen men who had been bailiff (pre-1449), sheriff (post-1449) or chamberlain.

The lowest amount paid by a man holding civic office was 3¾d by Richard Burton who had been chamberlain in 1471-72 and was a petty collector of this subsidy.<sup>277</sup> The smallest subsidy payment was a farthing paid by Henry Wilson, a decennary. On the basis of freehold property only, not only does this subsidy show the range in wealth of Nottingham people at the end of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, but also demonstrates, if rather simplistically, the relationship between wealth, office holding and social status. The wealthiest held the most senior positions, the least wealthy the lower civic offices.

Because of the levy taken between 1473 and 1479 it is possible to make some observations about the less wealthy townsmen and women of Nottingham at the

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<sup>277</sup> NA CA 4502, Stevenson, *II*, pp.285-96.

beginning of the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The levy taxed households at low amounts. The largest payment was 3s 4d but the majority, 110 people, paid between 1d and 2d and ten paid only ½d. There were twenty-eight people who paid both the subsidy and the levy but there seems little correlation between payments made to both. John Dalby paid 17s 1¾d to the subsidy but only 4d to the levy while Richard Stevenson paid 18d for his freehold and 11d levy. The largest levy payment of 3s 4d was made by Thomas Lovatt who also paid 15s 1d for his freehold.<sup>278</sup>

As the levy comprised householders but very few freeholders the pattern of payments is rather different from that of the subsidy. Even at this low level however, there are disparities in wealth distribution. The top 5 per cent of tax payers contributed less than 20 per cent of the total received, a smaller amount than the top 5 per cent of freeholders, and the lowest quartile paid 6.5 per cent of the total which is over double that paid by the same group of subsidy payers. Nevertheless, as Table III shows, 50 per cent of taxpayers contributed 80 per cent of the total tax collected which is not dissimilar to the proportion of freeholders who paid the lay subsidy, indicating a degree of prosperity amongst the middle-rank of townspeople.

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<sup>278</sup> NA CA 8019.

Table III: 1473-79 levy

% of tax payers	tax payers	money (d) £6 14s 11½d	% of total collected
1%	3	84	5.2
2%	7	166	10.3
5%	17	304	18.8
10%	35	485	29.9
25%	87	881	54.4
50%	174	1290	79.7
75%	260	1515	93.5
100%	347	1619½	100.0

Source: NA CA 8019

The same differentials between rich and less rich clearly exist, even though they are slightly less pronounced, and there is again some relationship with office holding. At the date of the levy, no contributor had held a more senior office than chamberlain, but nine would later become common councillors, with a higher taxable income. Richard Fisher, for example, paid 7d to the levy; he became a common councillor in 1500 when he was assessed as having goods worth £10 on which he paid 2s 6d tax.<sup>279</sup>

Two of the levy payers, Edmund Hunt and Richard Mellers, who would both be mayor in the 1480s and 1490s, also paid the lay subsidy. Richard Alestre, mayor in 1485-86, did not pay the subsidy, but his mother was probably Margaret Alestre, the second highest subsidy payer and widow of Thomas, a former mayor and MP. These are interesting observations which illustrates part of the 'life-cycle' of some burgesses whose ability to hold civic office, and therefore their personal social status, increased with their wealth.

At the lower end of the scale, the levy lists twenty-five men who were or would become decennaries compared to only ten freeholders who held this minor office,

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<sup>279</sup> NA CA 7480i&ii.

confirming the point made above that the less wealthy burgesses only qualified for the less responsible civic offices.

### *The 1523-27 lay subsidy*

One of the experimental taxes tried by the Tudors was the 1523-27 lay subsidy granted by Parliament in April 1523. It was a complicated tax: in the first two years land was assessed at 12d in the pound, movable goods worth over £20 at 12d in the pound and goods valued between 40s and £20 at 6d in the pound. Wages over 20s were taxed at 4d in the pound. The latter two years targeted the better off; in 1525-26 the subsidy was paid only by those with lands worth £50 or more at 12d in the pound and in 1526-27 goods valued over £50 were taxed at 12d in the pound.<sup>280</sup> The subsidy was, then, extensive and because it included many wage earners as well as those with capital assets in the form of goods or land it is the tax most commonly used for assessing both collective and individual wealth.

For Nottingham there are three versions of the subsidy for the first two years of the collection. The first, dated 1523-24 is held at the Nottinghamshire Archive; it lists tax payers and the amount they paid for the first year of the subsidy.<sup>281</sup> The sum total of this collection is given as £50 8s 6d though there is an arithmetical error and the correct total should read £50 9s paid by 296 people. The second, kept at The National Archive (TNA), records the assessments as well as the amount of tax paid. It is either a revised version of the first instalment or a list of payments to the second instalment of 1524-25, but the top is much rubbed and the dates are illegible.<sup>282</sup> It is longer than the Nottingham version listing 298 tax

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<sup>280</sup> TNA Notes: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/notes.asp?slctgrantid=241&action=3>

<sup>281</sup> NA CA 4570.

<sup>282</sup> TNA E179/159/123.

payers, and helpfully it notes that many of the men shown as servant in the first list were apprenticed to the person listed above them. The third list is incomplete comprising tax payers in just three streets and part of a fourth un-named one.<sup>283</sup> All the lists are organised by street and when they are compared with Map 1 it is clear that a number, including Fletcher Gate and Middle Pavement have been omitted. Whether this was deliberate or because the streets were grouped in some way, or because the residents' worth had fallen below the minimum £1 valuation is impossible to say.

There are considerable discrepancies between the two complete lists, in particular many of the payments increased. Some of these increases were relatively small but still significant. William Goldring, for example, is shown as paying 3s in the Nottingham list and 5s in the TNA version, and William Pares 2s rather than 12d. Other increases were far greater: according to the TNA list John Howes and William Mabson both paid 20s compared to 8s entered in the Nottingham list; Costlin Pykard's tax increased from 9s to 30s and John Alanson's from 12s to 40s. These variations can probably be accounted for because the first assessment was based on the military survey of 1522 but some receipts were lower than this earlier assessment, and there were other mistakes. Consequently more specific instructions were sent to commissioners (now lost) which resulted in re-assessments.<sup>284</sup> There is one major discrepancy: the Nottingham roll lists John Rose as living in Low Pavement paying £3 tax but he appears in the incomplete list living in Hen Cross and does not feature at all on the complete TNA list. As he was mayor in 1526-27, Rose was not dead so he was either accidentally omitted

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<sup>283</sup> TNA E179/139/455 part 2.

<sup>284</sup> TNA *Notes*.



or deliberately avoided paying. The overall effect of the re-assessment was to increase the number of Nottingham tax payers to 298 and the total amount of tax paid to £56 6s 2d, that is £5 17s 2d more than the Nottingham list. If John Rose had been included, the total collected would have increased to £59 6s 2d.

Table IV shows that, as in 1472-73, there was a great difference between the highest and lowest tax payers, the pattern for 1524-25 being, if anything, steeper than the earlier payment. One per cent of tax payers contributed almost 20 per cent of the total collected, and 2 per cent or six people payed almost a third. This supports the argument that individuals prospered even when other evidence suggests the town was suffering considerable problems.

Table IV: 1524-25 lay subsidy

% of tax payers	tax payers	money (d) £55 6s 2d	% of total collected
1%	3	2640	19.5
2%	6	4440	32.9
5%	15	8100	69.9
10%	30	10112	74.8
25%	74	11830	87.5
50%	149	12828	95.0
75%	224	13218	97.8
100%	298	13514	100.0

Source: TNA E179/159/123

The relationship between wealth and civic office is yet again emphasised as all six men who make up the top 2 per cent of tax payers had been mayor. They were John Williamson, a draper who paid the highest tax amount of £5, Thomas Mellers, a merchant, and Thomas Willoughby, a tanner, who both paid £3 and Robert Hasilrig, a merchant, Robert Mellers, a bell founder, and William Parmatour, a tanner, who all paid 50s. To them should be added John Rose, who was a butcher. This range of occupations is in sharp comparison to the highest tax payers of 1472-73, the majority of whom were merchants or the widows of

merchants; a shift in the occupational profile of Nottingham's mayors which is discussed in Chapter Three. In total, ten of the top fifteen tax payers had been or were shortly to become mayors of Nottingham and a further two had been chamberlains. Of the next fifteen there was one more mayor and a further four men who would become mayor in the next decade, a common councillor and four men who had been either sheriff or chamberlain or both. In other words, twenty-two of the thirty people who made up the top 10 per cent of tax payers in 1524-25 held one of the town's senior offices. Furthermore, 95 per cent of the total tax collected was paid by 50 per cent of the population, a larger proportion than that seen in the 1470s, implying that disparities in the distribution of wealth were growing.

At the lower end of the scale were 133 people who paid at the lowest rate of 4d for either goods or wages. Many of these are noted to be apprentices, nine of whom are found in later Nottingham records as burgesses. Others paid tax on wages at a higher level and were journeymen or other employees. The highest wage earner was John Woolley who paid 20d, placing him within the top 25 per cent of tax payers. He is listed immediately below Emma Seliok, probably the widow of Richard Seliok, a bell founder. In 1530 Woolley appeared in the Borough court as a burgess when he was also described as a bell founder, so in 1524-25 he was almost certainly a journeyman working for Emma. His progress from apprentice to journeyman to full burgess status is another example of the 'life-cycle' or personal social mobility experienced by burgesses.

Because taxation levels were based on a sliding scale it is possible to break the collection down into bands of wealth as in Table V, below. Although this

breakdown gives similar results to the previous analysis it highlights the distribution of wealth more accurately, particularly at the lower end of the scale.

Table V: breakdown of 1524-25 subsidy payments

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Number of tax payers</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>% sub-total</b>
Goods £50+	5	1.7	
Goods £40-9	3	1.0	
Goods £30-9	4	1.3	
Goods £20-9	7	2.3	6.4
Goods £11-19	12	4.0	
Goods £10	7	2.3	
Goods £8	5	1.7	
Goods £6-7	6	2.0	
Goods £5	6	2.0	
Goods £4	13	4.4	
Goods £3-4	18	6.0	22.5
Goods £2-3	68	22.8	
Goods £1	96	32.2	55.0
Wages £2+	2	0.7	
Wages £1	43	14.4	15.1
Lands £6-16	3	1.0	1.0
Total	298		100

Only a small number, fewer than 6.5 per cent of the tax paying population, owned goods assessed at £20 or more and only 1.7 per cent had goods worth over £50. Twenty-two per cent of tax payers were assessed at between £3 and £19, but the largest group, or 55 per cent of the tax paying population, comprised those with goods valued at the lowest level of £1-3, with wage earners representing a further 15 per cent. It was mentioned above that it is generally thought that this tax omitted approximately one-third of the poorest residents, which means that below the 70 per cent who made up the lowest earning tax-payers was a further 30 per cent of the total population on or near the poverty level.

### *Local and national comparisons of urban wealth*

Using the breakdown of the 1524-25 lay subsidy it is possible to make some national comparisons. An analysis of the same subsidy collected in Worcester, for example, shows a very similar pattern for the higher valuations, but a considerable difference at the lower end of the scale.

Table VI: Comparison of Nottingham and Worcester tax payers

	<b>Nottingham</b>	<b>Worcester*</b>
<i>Number of tax payers</i>	298	499
	percentage of total taxpayers (rounded)	percentage of total taxpayers
Goods £50+	2	1
Goods £20-49	5	5
Goods £3-19	22	29
Goods £1-2	55	19
Wages	15	34
Other	1 (lands)	11 (profits)

\*Source: A Dyer, *The city of Worcester in the sixteenth century*, p.175.

The large number of wage earners in Worcester, 34 per cent compared to 15 per cent in Nottingham, was a result of the dominance of the cloth industry in that town.<sup>285</sup> Nottingham, though, had many more people with goods valued between £1-£3. As will be discussed in the next chapter there was no dominant industry in Nottingham at this time because the production of cloth, leather and metal working employed roughly equal proportions of the known workforce. Consequently, compared to Worcester, there were many more small, independent craftsmen who paid tax at this level. At the same time, with 2 per cent of tax payers owning goods valued over £50 Nottingham had a proportionately larger group of wealthy men.

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<sup>285</sup> A Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1973), p.105.

Although Exeter, as a port, was a much more prosperous town than either Worcester or Nottingham, Wallace MacCaffrey's breakdown of tax payers shows a similar pattern of wealth distribution, albeit with much higher payments. Three per cent of the population paid tax on goods worth £100 or more and a further 3.5 per cent paid for goods worth between £40 and £100. Twenty-one per cent had goods valued between £5 and £39 and the remaining 78 per cent comprised wage earners and those with goods worth between £1 and £4.<sup>286</sup> A similar set of findings occur in Southampton, where 3 per cent of the taxable population were assessed for goods worth £40 or more and 50 per cent had goods or wages of £1.<sup>287</sup> Taking into account the lower threshold of £40 (rather than £50 in Table VI), these figures are not dissimilar to Nottingham's analysis, despite Southampton having favourable trading concessions to support its economy.<sup>288</sup> All four towns, notwithstanding their differences in population, size and economic base, show the same distribution of wealth, with a few rich men at the top and a broad base of minimum tax payers at the bottom.

Communal wealth, measured by the total sum paid in taxation, like population, has been used to rank towns, both nationally and regionally. The number of comparisons which can be made is, however, limited as there are few sufficiently comprehensive taxes. The findings must also be treated with care because, as Alan

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<sup>286</sup> W T MacCaffrey, *Exeter 1540-1646: The Growth of an English County Town* (Cambridge, 1958), p.249.

<sup>287</sup> C Platt, *Medieval Southampton: The Port and Trading Community, AD1000-1600* (London, 1973), p.265.

<sup>288</sup> Platt, *Southampton*, pp.169 & 172.

Dyer has pointed out, such taxes reflect the size and wealth of the business community not the population as a whole.<sup>289</sup>

The 1524-25 lay subsidy has been used by Alan Dyer to rank the top one hundred towns by taxable wealth. Nottingham, however, is not included in this ranking, probably because it is classed with towns like Derby and Doncaster as being either under-assessed or lacking credible data.<sup>290</sup> Yet based on even the lower payment of £50 9s Nottingham should stand somewhere between Devizes (ranked seventy-fourth, paying £50) and Guildford (ranked seventy-third, paying £52). On the higher payment of £55 6s 2d Nottingham would be promoted to between Alton (ranked sixty-seventh, paying £55) and Cirencester (ranked sixty-sixth, paying £58), and even higher if John Rose's missing payment is included. If both payments are under-assessments, then Nottingham's ranking would be higher still. Even so, this represents a considerable decline in wealth compared to its ranking in 1334 when Nottingham stood at twenty-five, above Northampton (twenty-nine), Worcester (thirty-six) and Leicester (thirty-eight).<sup>291</sup> Like the population rankings, these comparisons suggest that Nottingham's status declined considerably between the fourteenth and the early sixteenth century.

Looking regionally, neighbouring towns that are included in Dyer's ranking are Leicester, ranked at twenty-ninth paying £107 in subsidy, and Northampton, ranked thirty-ninth paying £91. Both these town had far larger populations than Nottingham and a *per capita* estimate of wealth better represents their relative positions.

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<sup>289</sup> Dyer, 'Appendix', p.765.

<sup>290</sup> Dyer, 'Appendix', pp.765-67.

<sup>291</sup> Dyer, 'Appendix', pp.755-56

Table VII: Comparison of tax paid *per capita* in 1524-25

town	tax paying population	tax	<i>per capita</i>
Leicester*	427	£107	60.1d
Northampton*	477	£91	45.8d
Nottingham <sup>§</sup>	298	£55 6s 2d	44.5d

\*Source: A Dyer, 'Appendix', *Cambridge Urban History*, Vol. I, pp.761-2 & 765-6.

<sup>§</sup> Source: TNA E179/159/123

From this rather crude comparison, it seems that early sixteenth-century Nottingham was not only considerably smaller than its closest neighbour, Leicester, but its *per capita* average was also noticeably lower. Nottingham has a very similar *per capita* figure to Northampton, which had an even larger tax paying population than Leicester. In other words, while Nottingham was not as prosperous as Leicester it was economically on a par with much larger Northampton, probably because of the wealth of a few individuals.

From these various comparisons and rankings it becomes possible to describe Nottingham in national terms as a town which, despite its small size, had sufficient wealth to rank it somewhere in the third quartile of the top one hundred towns ranked according to wealth. Regionally, it was level with much larger towns such as Northampton and in both cases, its position must have been strongly weighted by the number of wealthy men who made up the top 1 or 2 per cent of the population. Below these wealthy men were a large group of craftsmen and a few women who comprising the majority of tax payers and below them wage earners, many of whom as apprentices would go on to become craftsmen. At the lowest level were those who were too poor to be taxed at all.

### *Tudor tax avoidance and under assessment*

It has been noted several times that John Rose was omitted from the TNA list of 1524-25 lay subsidy. Rose is associated in several Nottingham documents with two other mayors, John Williamson and Thomas Mellers. In particular the three men were accused of ‘imbeseling’ or falsifying the returns for the fourth instalment of the 1523-27 subsidy which taxed only those men with goods worth £50 or more. Having been assessed at ‘1 pown[es] a pese and su[m]m of the substans of lv pown[es] and aboue’ they returned ‘*nichil*’,<sup>292</sup> a claim supported by the certificate of assessment for this year which declares there were no chargeable persons in Nottingham.<sup>293</sup> This is despite both versions of the earlier instalments showing that John Williamson, for example, paid tax on goods worth £100. Interestingly, the original entry against his name in the TNA roll has been scratched out and a new figure written over, though this may simply have been correcting a clerical error. If this was an under-assessment it further adds to the argument that some individuals prospered in the adverse conditions, and to an increased disparity between rich and poor.

The problem of tax avoidance was not just limited to Nottingham. The end of Elizabeth’s reign is noted for its high levels of taxation and also for the under-assessment across the country. When calling for a new subsidy in 1593, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, claimed that there was one wealthy shire where no one was assessed as holding land worth more than £80, and no one in London was assessed at above £200 and only eight above £100.<sup>294</sup> Ironically, William Cecil himself was persistently assessed at only 200 marks, and it is thought that large

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<sup>292</sup> NA CA 4736.

<sup>293</sup> TNA E179/91/101.

<sup>294</sup> J E Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments 1584-1601*, Vol. 2 (Norwich, 1957), p.310.



numbers of people avoided paying tax altogether.<sup>295</sup> This must be borne in mind when evaluating later Tudor taxes.

In towns like Nottingham the majority of taxes were collected on the value of goods, but these valuations were not based on an inspection or inventory. Instead assessments were, as Hoyle puts it, 'bunched together' in amounts which represented 'creditworthiness' or the amount of money a man might realise from his business assets, which included debts and money on loan.<sup>296</sup> It is easy to see, then, that a butcher like John Rose or a draper such as John Williamson might own many assets but have problems raising the coin needed to pay his tax. Hoyle comments that a taxpayer in the 1520s faced the problem of

converting his debts into specie at a time when confidence had probably evaporated in the face of expected war and the disruption of international trade which preceded it<sup>297</sup>

Furthermore, Hoyle postulates that by reducing capital, taxation contributed to the economic downturn of the 1520s and again in the 1540s because it limited the capacity of merchants to trade and promoted economic conditions which made it difficult for a new set of merchants to emerge.<sup>298</sup> The discussion of occupations in the next chapter certainly shows a decline in the number of merchants in Nottingham across the sixteenth century, and it may be that tax burdens contributed to this.

The sliding scales used to assess some Tudor taxes may also have inadvertently added to the problem of under assessment, if not deliberate avoidance, by

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<sup>295</sup> Hoyle, *Tudor Taxation Records*, p.30.

<sup>296</sup> R W Hoyle, 'Taxation and the Mid-Tudor Crisis', *Economic History Review*, 51:4 (1998), pp.6-7.

<sup>297</sup> Hoyle, 'Taxation', p.10.

<sup>298</sup> Hoyle, 'Taxation', pp.23-24.

providing useful limits or boundaries for assessment. The subsidy granted in 1543 (to be paid in 1544, 1545 and 1546), for example, had four levels. Men with goods valued at 20s paid 4d in the pound and those with goods worth between £5 and £10 paid 8d in the pound. Assessments between £10 and £20 incurred tax at 16d in the pound and anything over £20 at 2s in the pound.<sup>299</sup> The 1544 subsidy roll for Nottingham lists 124 people but unfortunately is damaged particularly to the right hand side so that many of the amounts of tax paid and some of the valuations are missing.<sup>300</sup> From the eighty-five entries that are legible it is apparent that assessments were ‘bunched’; there are four assessments at 20s and twelve at 40s, but only one at 15s. There are assessments at £3, £4, £5, £6, £7, £8, £9 and £10 but not at fractions of pounds, and only two assessments between £10 and £20. One of these was Nicholas Bonner who was assessed at £16. He was a baker who had been chamberlain in 1541-42 and would be common councillor by 1550. There are four assessments at £20; Robert Lovatt, Thomas Hobbs, Thomas Coughen and John Collinson, all of whom were mayor in the 1540s. The relationship between wealth and civic office holding is still apparent in this tax, but the fact that no one was assessed at a higher rate suggests that £20 was seen as the top limit at which anyone was prepared to be assessed. The alternate, and unlikely, explanation being that individual wealth had fallen considerably since the 1520s.

The occupations of the four wealthiest men were woolman, ironmonger, draper and baker respectively, showing yet again the shift in the source of wealth noted above. It not only provides further evidence in support of Hoyles’ contention that

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<sup>299</sup> TNA Notes: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/notes.asp?slctgrantid=247&action=3>

<sup>300</sup> TNA E179/159/155.

heavy taxation undermined merchant activity, but also that the gap they left was filled by other traders, dealing in a wider range of goods.

It is not clear if tax assessments were public knowledge. The declarations of the value of goods owned by Rose, Williamson and Mellers were made in the 'Gildhall and Councellhowse', but the concern of the Mickletorn jury which accused them of embezzlement was not so much that fraud had been carried out but that it should not be known more widely as this would be to the detriment of the borough.<sup>301</sup> Thirty years later, William Atkinson, one of the aldermen, was accused of revealing the council's 'sekreyt cownsele' concerning the subsidy,<sup>302</sup> although who he revealed it to is not said. In 1579 the Mickletorn jury requested that the burgesses should hear the 'ende and reck[n]inge of aney subseyde when aney is', but this may be a reminder to the Council that they were ultimately answerable to the burgess community.<sup>303</sup> The fact that the bunching seen in 1544 (and later) subsidies seems to apply to all tax payers, suggests it was with the consent of the community, but it is possible that knowledge of the details were limited to a few officials.

#### *The Lay Subsidies of 1571, 1593 and 1597*

The subsidies of the later sixteenth century were less complicated than those of 1523-27 and 1543-46, although they comprised two sets of taxation. The first, granted by the Commons, was for payments of fifteenths and tenths. The second, ordered by Parliament, applied to goods valued over £3 and lands over 20s, paid in instalments according to a scale.

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<sup>301</sup> NA CA 4736.

<sup>302</sup> NA CA 47c.

<sup>303</sup> NA CA 2765.

In 1593, the Commons granted six fifteenths and tenths. The list of payments to the second instalment of the 1593 collection, held in the Nottinghamshire Archive, is, unfortunately, incomplete, comprising 245 tax payers in three of the town's seven wards.<sup>304</sup> Although this tax was based on 'fifteenths' there are signs of bunching as two men paid 8s, one 7s, nine 5s and so on, with ninety-one people paying 4d, and two paying 3d and 2d. This bunching, and the incompleteness of the roll, may account for the rather flatter pyramid shape evident in Table VIII, nevertheless, 50 per cent of tax payers still contributed 86.4 per cent of the revenue. The incompleteness of the 1595 roll also means that many of the town officers are missing, even so there were two mayors, two common councillors and three sheriffs in the top 10 per cent of tax payers.

Table VIII: 1595 lay subsidy (incomplete)

% of tax payers	tax payers	money (d) £16 13s 2d	% of total collected
1%	2	192	4.8
2%	5	416	10.4
5%	12	836	20.9
10%	25	1476	36.9
25%	61	2696	67.4
50%	123	3455	86.4
75%	184	3757	94.0
100%	245	3998	100.0

Source: NA CA 4623

The 1571 and 1597 subsidies were more selective as they taxed only the most wealthy at higher rates. The former was collected over two years at the rate of 20d in the pound for goods worth more than £3 for the first year and 12d in the pound for the second. Lands valued at 20s or more were taxed at 2s 8d.<sup>305</sup> The later

<sup>304</sup> NA CA 4623.

<sup>305</sup> TNA, *Notes*, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/notes.asp?slctgrantid=263&action=3>

collection was made at the higher rate of 2s 8d for goods and 4s for lands, to be collected in four instalments.<sup>306</sup>

The list for the 1571 collection is compiled by street and comprises fifty-seven men and six women who paid these higher rates of tax.<sup>307</sup> Five of the women paid on goods valued at either £3 or £4, but one, Johanna Atkinson, paid for lands valued at £3. Eighteen people paid 5s tax on goods worth £3, twenty-five on goods valued at £4 and eleven for goods worth £5. The highest tax payer was William Coke, a merchant whose goods were worth £10 for which he paid 14s. He lived on Wheeler Gate, but did not hold any office, there is no record of him appearing in the Borough court and it is possible that he was not a burgess. The second highest payment of 10s for goods worth £6, was made by Ralph Barton who lived on St Mary's Gate; he may have been the town's Recorder in which case also resided at Grey's Inn.<sup>308</sup> There were seven people who paid tax on land, three at the lowest level of 40s, two at £3 and one each at £4 and £5. Three of these are given the title 'gentleman', two of whom lived on Long Row and the third on Great Smith Street which is its continuation.

In total, fourteen tax payers lived on Long Row, including four mayors, two common councillors and five sheriffs. With occupations such as draper, roper, ironmonger and baker, they were living close to their business outlets. There were only three tax payers living in Narrow Marsh, but all three were tanners and all became mayor. In total, thirteen mayors, seven common councillors, two coroners and fourteen sheriffs paid this tax. If the landowners and women are taken into

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<sup>306</sup> TNA, *Notes*, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/notes.asp?slctgrantid=277&action=3>

<sup>307</sup> TNA E179/160/208.

<sup>308</sup> NA CA 1611.

account, this leaves fifteen men who, though paying tax at the same rate as the town leaders did not hold any civic office. John Woodson, for example, paid tax on goods worth £4, but the most active part he played in town administration was to sit on one of the Session court presentment juries,<sup>309</sup> and the same can be said about other members of this group such as Roger Brown, Robert Briggs and John Fribus. The implication of this is that there was a group of men, who though reasonably prosperous, chose not to put themselves forward for office, although it is likely they were burgesses.

The 1599 instalment of the 1597 subsidy was collected by parish and lists only fifty-seven tax payers, less than in 1571, but the assessment were of higher value.<sup>310</sup> The three highest assessments for goods were allocated to Humphrey Bonner (valued at £5), Anker Jackson and Peter Clerke (both valued at £4). Bonner, Jackson and Clerk were all mayors in the 1590s, and the other four aldermen in this decade all paid tax on goods valued at £3. Also paying at this rate was Elizabeth Gelstroppe, widow of a former mayor, and there were eight chamberlains and four common councillors in the group.

Bonner, Clerke, Jackson, and one other alderman, William Freeman were accorded the title 'gentleman' (*generosus*) and there were another five men described as gentleman who paid tax on goods valued at £3. These latter, however, are not listed in the 1604 terrier which named all burgesses living in that year, and none held any civic office.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> NA CA 48c, 49.

<sup>310</sup> TNA E179/160/249.

<sup>311</sup> NA CA 4635b.

There were a further eight men who were taxed on lands worth between £2 and £5. The only one to be listed as a burgess in the 1604 terrier was John Kyme, described as a yeoman.<sup>312</sup> He, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, was also the subject of complaints by the town millers.<sup>313</sup> Nothing is known about two of the tax payers; a third, John Atkinson, brought a suit in the foreign pleas court against John Holt, but otherwise he is absent from the Borough Records.<sup>314</sup> Marmaduke (*Marmaducus*) Gregory, ‘gentleman’, may have been related to John Gregory who had been mayor four times between 1561-62 and 1586-87, and John Brownlow may have been the son of John Brownlow, mayor five times between 1567-68 and 1589-90. If so, they represent a sideways step socially from the top of the urban ladder onto that of the gentry, where they joined two other tax payers: Edward Stanhope (later Sir Edward)<sup>315</sup> and Philip Strelley, both members of local county gentry.

The presence of ‘gentry’ in town was not new in the sixteenth century. In 1446, Margaret, Lady of Bingham, paid 5s rent for a messuage in Hen Crosse, and in 1472-73 Henry Pierpont, knight, and Robert Strelley, knight, paid 4¾d and 5¾d respectively for their freehold to the lay subsidy.<sup>316</sup> In 1504, as mentioned in Chapter One, Sir Henry Willoughby, Sir Gervase Clifton and Sir William Pierpont all held property in the town, although they were probably absentee landlords.<sup>317</sup> There were also townsmen who aspired to gentry status, the Samon and Thurland families, mentioned in Chapter One, being two examples. What is

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<sup>312</sup> NA CA 4635b.

<sup>313</sup> NA CA 59.

<sup>314</sup> NA CA 1428.

<sup>315</sup> A Henstock, ‘The Changing Fabric of the Town, 1550-1570’, in J Beckett (ed) *Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition, (Chichester, 2006), p.111.

<sup>316</sup> Foulds online CA 1336; NA CA 4502, Stevenson, *II*, pp.285-96.

<sup>317</sup> S N Mastoris, ‘A Tax Assessment of 1504 and the Topography of Early Tudor Nottingham’ *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 89 (1985), p.39.

perhaps different is that in the later sixteenth century, the honorific ‘gentleman’ was according to men whose qualification was their civic status, not their county land holdings. Furthermore, while the Samons and Thurlands moved out of town, the Stanhopes and Strelleys were moving in. Adrian Henstock reports that between 1590 and 1640 at least twenty-five ‘members of the county gentry chose to live in Nottingham’.<sup>318</sup> Nottingham in 1600 was not yet the ‘fashionable centre’ that attracted ‘urban gentry’ that it was to become in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, but it appears that the foundations were being laid.<sup>319</sup>

### **The social fabric of Nottingham**

The discussion so far has focused on those men and a few women who were wealthy enough to pay tax, highlighting the relationship between wealth, civic office and social status. This is a relatively straight-forward and hierarchical assessment of the social structure of Nottingham, but, as men like William Coke and John Woodson have indicated, there was a section of the community who, although economically on a par with the civic leaders, did not take a major part in community government.

There are other groups of people which are almost invisible in the town records. One of these, surprisingly, was professional men such as lawyers and clerics. William Harrison identified lawyers as ‘gentlemen’,<sup>320</sup> and some are named in the Borough court records, particularly after 1550, a trend also noted nationally.<sup>321</sup> Christopher Bamford, John Marriott, Thomas Clarke, Thomas Connors and Roger

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<sup>318</sup> Henstock, ‘Changing Fabric’, p.114.

<sup>319</sup> Henstock, ‘Changing Fabric’, p.114.

<sup>320</sup> G Edelen (ed), *William Harrison, 1534-1593: The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life* (Washington and New York, 1994), pp.113-119.

<sup>321</sup> R O’Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450-1800* (Harlow, 2000), pp.116 & 173.



Goddard are all named as attorneys in 1578.<sup>322</sup> Christopher Bamford may be the same Christopher that was the Sheriff's Sergeant in 1574-75 and who, as a younger man, was presented to the Sessions court for playing illegal games.<sup>323</sup> Roger Goddard lived in Broadmarsh and paid St Peter's parish rate of 4d.<sup>324</sup> Otherwise there is no record of any of these men.

Another important, if not necessarily numerous, section of society must have been the clergy of Nottingham's three parishes churches, and their associated guilds, fraternities and chantries. Occasionally they appear in the Borough court: John Plough, junior, Rector of St Peter's for example, was prosecuted for debt five times in 1542 for amounts between 12s and 52s 4d.<sup>325</sup> He had succeeded his uncle, John Plough senior, as Rector. John senior had, in 1525, had acquired the right to choose his successor, which he passed to his brother, Christopher Plough, father of John junior. This younger John was a Protestant who fled to Basle when Mary succeeded to the throne in 1553.<sup>326</sup> Whether the appointment was simply family favouritism or an indication that there were some families in Nottingham with Protestant leanings at this early date, is uncertain.

As well as the churches, there were two friaries within the town boundaries: the Carmelites or Whitefriars near what is now Friar Lane, to the west of Market Square and Friars Minor or Greyfriars, to the south in Broadmarsh. Again, members of these convents rarely appear in Nottingham records. After their dissolution, apart from the physical presence of friars in Nottingham, another

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<sup>322</sup> NA CA 1426.

<sup>323</sup> NA CA 47a.

<sup>324</sup> M 399

<sup>325</sup> NA CA 1419.

<sup>326</sup> P Hoare, *The Rectors of St Peter's Church, Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1992), p.14.

noticeable absence would have been the loss of the friary bells: those belonging to the Whitefriars were sold to Robert Skoles, a pewterer and the Greyfriars bell was purchased by Humphrey Querneby, bell founder, and one of Nottingham's mayors.<sup>327</sup>

Despite the paucity of evidence, it seems clear that these men were all at the top end of the hierarchy. The men and women at the other end of the scale are even more invisible. Some of them were 'aliens', that is not born in England or Wales, who were required to pay an alien tax. In the fifteenth century, nine women and sixteen men from Scotland and Brabant paid this tax. Some were householders and so must have been well established in the town.<sup>328</sup> Some of the women were seamstresses and others are described as 'servants of William Nottingham'.<sup>329</sup> There is one instance of an alien becoming a 'denizen' of England. In 1432, Nicholas Plumptre, alias Braban or Ducheman, petitioned the king for denizenship on the grounds that he had lived in England for over thirty years and married an English woman. The Plumptre family were wealthy merchants; it seems likely he married into that family and adopted his wife's name.<sup>330</sup> He became a bailiff in the same year, showing his new status both as a naturalised citizen and as a member of an influential family.

Aliens were also required to pay the sixteenth-century lay subsidies at double the standard rates, or a poll tax if they had no assets.<sup>331</sup> There are, though, no lists of

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<sup>327</sup> TNA E117/12/4.

<sup>328</sup> TNA E179/159/86, E179/159/91, E179/159/100.

<sup>329</sup> TNA E179/159/89.

<sup>330</sup> TNA SC8/96/4764.

<sup>331</sup> TNA, *Notes*, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/notes.asp?slctgrantid=277&action=3>

aliens in Nottingham for this century, which probably reflects the decline of the wool and textile industries which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nottingham was also home to many men and women whose existence is only noted by their presentment in the Sessions court for minor social misdemeanours, from scolding to harlotry and petty theft to gambling, some of which are discussed in Chapter Six.

Finally, mention must be made of the many migrants who entered Nottingham. The migration of much needed labourers, apprentices, servants and professional men had long been a feature of medieval life and, like the alien community, were a positive addition to the town. Without it, towns like Nottingham would not have been sustained.<sup>332</sup> The rapid expansion of Nottingham from the mid-sixteenth century must have been the consequence of in-migration, but increasingly the poorest were perceived as an unwelcome threat to civic stability. National legislation required that migrants were controlled and Nottingham's aldermen were frequently reminded by the burgesses of this responsibility.<sup>333</sup> None of Nottingham's records name poor migrants, but refer to them as vagrants and vagabonds who frequented ale houses and back lanes.<sup>334</sup> Those who were lucky enough to have a permit to travel from one town to another received small sums of money to help them on their way.<sup>335</sup> The financial burden of poor migrants was of concern. Suspicious strangers who stayed longer than three days and could not explain how they intended to maintain themselves were either driven from town

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<sup>332</sup> P Clark and D Souden, 'Introduction', in P Clark and D Souden (eds), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (London, 1987), p.24.

<sup>333</sup> NA CA 3014, 3015.

<sup>334</sup> NA CA 49.

<sup>335</sup> NA CA 1626, 1627.

or kept in prison.<sup>336</sup> In 1579, to reduce the town's financial responsibility for maintaining the poor, it was suggested that landlords who let space in the lanes to poor and potentially migrant workers, should be bound to the mayor 'in a good round somme of money to dyscharge the townye yf they leve aney chyltren be hinde them'.<sup>337</sup>

These few, sometimes non-specific, examples, demonstrate that although the social stratum of Nottingham appears to be a simple hierarchy based on civic responsibility and wealth, the social fabric of Nottingham was more complex and colourful than administrative documents might, at first glance, suggest.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has continued the investigation of indications of demographic change begun in Chapter One. The assessment of the scale of population change in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has shown a gradual decline throughout the fifteenth century, although evidence of demand for land in the 1410s, presented in Chapter One, may reflect a small, temporary increase at a time when there are no tax lists or other sources which indicate population change. There is evidence that the early years of the sixteenth century saw a sharp decrease in population, reducing it to the point at which Nottingham's status as a town is questionable. This coincided with, and was probably one of the causes of, the economic problems identified in the previous chapter. The rapid increase in population, which coincided with economic recovery in the last half of the sixteenth century, is clear even if the exact rate of growth is less easy to determine.

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<sup>336</sup> NA CA 3018.

<sup>337</sup> NA CA 3015.

This chapter has also looked at the range of wealth held by the townspeople, from the richest to the least wealthy tax payer. The strategies adopted after the mid-sixteenth century to ameliorate the burden of national taxation make it difficult to assess the true differentials between tax payers, but all the analyses indicate a pyramidal hierarchy with a few, wealthy men at the top and many craft and tradesmen, whose earnings just qualified them for taxation purposes, at the base. A more detailed analysis of the men (and a few women) who paid tax describes a social hierarchy, which was consistent over both centuries, whereby the wealthiest held the most senior civic office and therefore had the greatest social status. Those who paid the lowest tax were unlikely to hold any but the most minor civic office. This differential may have been emphasised in the later sixteenth century as town officials were increasingly classed as 'gentlemen' on the basis of their civic office alone. The number of county gentry who took up residence also contributed to the changing social fabric of Nottingham.

An assessment of the lot of the very poorest, though, is difficult because they are in general invisible in the records. One observable change is perhaps that in the fifteenth century aliens and others who could contribute to the town's economy were accommodated. In the sixteenth century the social and financial consequences of poor migrants resulted in regulation. It is, therefore, possible to infer an increasing gap between the richest and the poorest, although not to quantify it.

One less obvious aspect of social status is life-cycle or personal social mobility of individual men who, as they progressed from apprentice to burgess, increased their earning capacity. Some of these were able to advance to sheriff, common

councillor and a very few to alderman and mayor. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, however, the latter progression, though dependent on wealth, may have had other prerequisites as well.

While this chapter has looked mainly at wealth in terms of taxation and status, the source of that wealth has been mentioned two or three times, particularly the shift in the types of occupation followed by the town's elite, the number of small craftsmen and lack of dominant industry in the early sixteenth century. The modification in the occupational make-up of Nottingham, and the factors which caused these adjustments, is the subject of Chapter Three.

### Chapter Three: The craftsmen and tradesmen of Nottingham

This chapter investigates the affect that fifteenth and sixteenth century economic realignments, combined with demographic changes, had on the occupational structure of Nottingham. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, England's economy was based on the export of both wool and finished cloth, but this was not to continue, and there were implications for towns like Nottingham. The contributing factors were a collapse in the export of wool in the mid-fifteenth century combined with a bullion shortage which affected the availability of credit.<sup>338</sup> This collapse was balanced by an increase in the export of finished cloth which reached record levels in 1549-50, causing over production and glut.<sup>339</sup> At the same time, the Calais Staple lost much of its status and financial power owing to heavy taxation, loss of markets and competition from finished cloth or 'draperies'.<sup>340</sup> In 1527 members complained that the Company's 400 ships had been reduced to 140 and that 'the poore and middle sort be decayed and declyned and the best and richest dayly decay and declyne after all'.<sup>341</sup> The north east and east midlands were also affected by a shift of shipping from eastern ports to London and the south coast, and towns weathered the storm by adapting to the new circumstances.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> J Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in R Britnell and J Hatcher (eds), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1996), p.241; J I Kermode, 'Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century: Some Lessons from Yorkshire' *Business History Review*, 65:3 (1991), pp.500-1

<sup>339</sup> A F Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578* (Aldershot, 2005), p.420.

<sup>340</sup> E E Rich, 'Introduction', *The Ordinance Book of the Merchants of the Staple* (Cambridge, 1937), pp.13-14.

<sup>341</sup> Rich, 'Introduction', pp.9-10.

<sup>342</sup> R H Britnell, 'The economy of British towns: 1300-1540', in David Palliser (ed), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol.1: 600-1540* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.318-19; N R Goose, 'In Search of the Urban Variable: Towns and the English Economy, 1500-1650', *Economic History Review*, new series, 39:2 (1986), p.170.

All of Nottingham's records contain some information about individual occupations but the amount is partly dependent on document survival and partly on scribal idiosyncrasies; some clerks were more consistent at noting occupations than others and are most dependable only when occupation is used to differentiate between two men with the same name, for example, John Cost, mercer, and John Cost, draper. It is possible to make assumptions about an individual's occupation, but this can be misleading as the lists of stall holders discussed in Chapter One highlights. The following analysis is, therefore, based on specific statements, that is when a person is said to be a mercer, butcher, tanner and so on. Consequently, the number of people with identified occupations, as Table IX shows, is between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the number of people found in any given decade.

### **The range of trades and crafts**

One definition of a town is that it has an array of trades and crafts not dependant on agriculture.<sup>343</sup> Christopher Dyer argues that small towns, that is those with a population of 2,000 or less, supported twenty to thirty occupations, compared to fifty or more in large towns.<sup>344</sup> Northampton, for example, had 477 tax payers in 1524 and seventy trades.<sup>345</sup> Yet, as John Patten points out towns and people were not static but 'subject to cyclical movements in the economy, various secular economic trends, and inflationary pressures from time to time', so this statistic can only be a guideline.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> C Dyer, 'Small Towns 1270-1540', in D M Palliser (ed), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol.1: 600-1540* (Cambridge, 2000), p.505.

<sup>344</sup> C Dyer, 'Small Places with Large Consequences: the Importance of Small Towns in England, 1000-1540' *Historical Research*, 75:187 (February 2002), p.8.

<sup>345</sup> J Laughton, E Jones and C Dyer, 'The Urban Hierarchy in the Later Middle Ages: a Study of the East Midlands', *Urban History*, 28:3 (2001), p.344.

<sup>346</sup> J Patten, *English Towns 1500-1700* (Folkestone, 1978), p.148.



Table IX, below, records the number of occupations found in Nottingham records and the number of people to whom an occupation was assigned. As individuals can appear in the records for many years, sometimes spanning two decades, occupational totals were calculated by decade but at thirty year intervals to allow for generational change, with the addition of the last decade of the sixteenth century to both ‘balance’ the range and take into account information derived from the 1604 terrier which listed all burgesses alive in that year, by the year of their enrolment.<sup>347</sup>

Table IX: Number of occupations and people

<b>Decade</b>	<b>Number of occupations</b>	<b>Number of people with occupations</b>	<b>Number of people in database for decade</b>
1400-09	42	197	745
1430-39	45	166	350
1460-69	51	202	420
1490-99	69	557	912
1520-29	45	251	552
1550-59	34	137	328
1580-89	48	221	560
1590-99	56	403	1118

From this evidence, Nottingham must be ranked as a large centre despite some low figures which can be attributed to record survival. The lowest figures occur in the early part of the fifteenth century, when the only available records are those of the Borough court where occupations were not regularly given. In contrast, the few records that survive from the 1460s include Mayor’s books, which list traders and burgesses and hence produce comprehensive lists of trades and crafts. The high figures of 1490-99 and 1590-99 reflect the richness of the sources in those decades.

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<sup>347</sup> NA CA 4635b.

Although this simple count of occupations allows Nottingham to be classified as a large town it says little about the types of trade or craft carried out or how these changed in response to social and economic pressures. By breaking occupations down, as in Table X, it is evident that at the beginning of the fifteenth century there were three dominant occupational groups: food and drink, cloth production and the making of leather goods which together comprised over 50 per cent of the known occupations. Associated with the latter two groups are the manufacture of clothing and accessories and the tanning and processing of hides into leather which made up almost another 20 per cent of the workforce. A fourth group, distribution, is perhaps less significant in terms of absolute numbers as it employed few people compared to manufacturing crafts, but is economically important because it comprised the mercantile trades whose members were often the wealthier sections of the population.

Many of these occupational groups were still significant at the end of the sixteenth century, but their relative positions had altered. By 1600, the manufacture of leather and leather goods and the sale of foodstuffs were the more important commercial activities employing 63.8 per cent of the identifiable work force, while cloth production had reduced to 4.2 per cent, and distribution (including merchants and mercers) was only 5.2 per cent.

Table X: Occupation Groups, 1400-1600: Number of workers in each group and Group as percentage of known occupations

Occupational Group	1400-09	%	1410-19	%	1420-29	%	1430-39	%	1440-49	%	1450-59	%	1460-69	%	1470-79	%	1480-89	%	1490-99	%
alabaster industry	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.6	1	0.7	1	0.9	1	0.5	4	1.4	4	2.6	11	2.0
building	11	5.6	5	2.7	5	3.6	17	10.2	15	10.5	7	6.4	18	8.9	35	12.5	17	10.9	35	6.3
cloth production	33	16.8	35	18.7	22	15.9	18	10.8	10	7.0	16	14.5	36	17.8	45	16.1	26	16.7	83	14.9
clothing and accessories	18	9.1	20	10.7	11	8.0	14	8.4	11	7.7	9	8.2	34	16.8	20	7.1	8	5.1	52	9.3
distribution	21	10.7	29	15.5	26	18.8	24	14.5	18	12.6	14	12.7	16	7.9	14	5.0	15	9.6	24	4.3
food and drink	40	20.3	38	20.3	19	13.8	25	15.1	34	23.8	20	18.2	36	17.8	63	22.5	33	21.2	122	21.9
leather production	19	9.6	15	8.0	17	12.3	16	9.6	12	8.4	8	7.3	10	5.0	12	4.3	12	7.7	26	4.7
leather work	28	14.2	26	13.9	16	11.6	22	13.3	23	16.1	13	11.8	24	11.9	32	11.4	12	7.7	80	14.4
metal working	14	7.1	10	5.3	10	7.2	11	6.6	8	5.6	7	6.4	16	7.9	30	10.7	14	9.0	54	9.7
other	4	2.0	2	1.1	4	2.9	7	4.2	1	0.7	6	5.5	2	1.0	8	2.9	6	3.8	31	5.6
provisions	1	0.5	0	0.0	4	2.9	2	1.2	4	2.8	2	1.8	1	0.5	3	1.1	3	1.9	13	2.3
services	4	2.0	4	2.1	1	0.7	7	4.2	3	2.1	4	3.6	8	4.0	7	2.5	2	1.3	13	2.3
wood horn and bone	4	2.0	3	1.6	2	1.4	2	1.2	3	2.1	3	2.7	0	0.0	7	2.5	4	2.6	13	2.3
total	197	100	187	100	138	100	166	100	143	100	110	100	202	100	280	100	156	100	557	100

Occupational Group	1500-09	%	1510-19	%	1520-29	%	1530-39	%	1540-49	%	1550-59	%	1560-69	%	1570-79	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
alabaster industry	7	1.7	4	1.0	1	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
building	9	2.2	15	3.6	3	1.2	2	0.8	3	1.3	1	0.7	3	6.4	11	7.6	12	5.4	21	5.2
cloth production	51	12.3	56	13.5	22	8.8	22	9.3	17	7.1	12	8.8	4	8.5	9	6.2	8	3.6	17	4.2
clothing and accessories	45	10.9	50	12.0	28	11.2	23	9.7	17	7.1	7	5.1	1	2.1	2	1.4	9	4.1	21	5.2
distribution	26	6.3	28	6.7	20	8.0	19	8.0	22	9.2	12	8.8	6	12.8	16	11.0	17	7.7	21	5.2
food and drink	85	20.6	74	17.8	63	25.1	55	23.2	68	28.6	43	31.4	14	29.8	42	29.0	60	27.1	114	28.3
leather production	26	6.3	22	5.3	19	7.6	15	6.3	22	9.2	19	13.9	6	12.8	17	11.7	34	15.4	41	10.2
leather work	79	19.1	78	18.8	53	21.1	48	20.3	41	17.2	22	16.1	7	14.9	29	20.0	48	21.7	102	25.3
metal working	46	11.1	42	10.1	23	9.2	22	9.3	22	9.2	6	4.4	2	4.3	8	5.5	14	6.3	28	6.9
other	15	3.6	13	3.1	11	4.4	21	8.9	13	5.5	3	2.2	2	4.3	4	2.8	5	2.3	8	2.0
provisions	4	1.0	6	1.4	1	0.4	2	0.8	6	2.5	4	2.9	1	2.1	2	1.4	7	3.2	11	2.7
services	7	1.7	13	3.1	3	1.2	3	1.3	2	0.8	4	2.9	1	2.1	2	1.4	3	1.4	6	1.5
wood horn and bone	13	3.1	14	3.4	4	1.6	5	2.1	5	2.1	4	2.9	0	0.0	3	2.1	4	1.8	13	3.2
total	413	100	415	100	251	100	237	100	238	100	137	100	47	100	145	100	221	100	403	100

## Occupations and office holding

One gauge of how the occupational groups were re-aligned over time is to examine the occupations of the mayors.

Table XI: Occupations of mayors

<b>1400-1449</b>	<b>No.</b>
merchant	9
draper	1
fisher	1
ironmonger	1
mercier	1
vintner	1
unknown	12
total	26

<b>1450-1499</b>	<b>No.</b>
merchant	7
bell founder/brasier	2
baker	1
draper	1
fishmonger	1
imagemaker	1
vintner	1
unknown	6
total	20

<b>1500-1549</b>	<b>No.</b>
tanner	5
baker	3
draper	3
merchant	3
bell founder	2
butcher	1
fishmonger	1
glover	1
ironmonger	1
litster	1
vintner	1
woolman	1
unknown	4
total	27

<b>1550-1600</b>	<b>No.</b>
tanner	4
baker	3
barber	2
cordwainer	2
inn keeper	2
mercier	2
roper	2
glover	1
ironmonger	1
merchant	1
unknown	1
total	21

Table XI makes clear that in the first half of the fifteenth century the mayoralty was dominated by merchants with the allied trades of draper and mercer. This dominance continued into the second half of the century, but with the introduction of manufacturing in the form of bell founding. By the first half of the sixteenth century the shift towards manufacturing was becoming more pronounced as

tanners had now joined bell founders as major office holders, and the victualling trades were collectively well represented. By the end of the sixteenth century, the range of occupations followed by mayors was much wider than 200 years previously. Although not an accurate measure, this grouping indicates a more mixed economy for the town led by the leather trade and the production and sale of food and drink, which is investigated further below.

An analysis of the occupations of the town's bailiffs, sheriffs and chamberlains (Table XII below) shows a similar pattern, although the number of different occupations is far greater. This mirrors the general redistribution of occupations listed in Table X and again shows that leather production and leather processing outweigh the other occupational groups. A comparison between Table XI and XII also reveals that men who followed trades such as weaver, wright, smith, cutler or chandler, might become a chamberlain, but did not become mayor. This may be because these occupations were not sufficiently profitable, but as will be discussed below, they were also the smaller, manual and less prestigious trades.

As the economy improved, despite the growing population and greater number of occupations (fifty-six by 1590), the range of trades followed by sheriffs and chamberlains was less than it had been in 1400-1450, suggesting a narrowing of the occupational hierarchy. It is interesting to note that although many butchers became sheriff or chamberlain, only one, John Rose became mayor. His appointment coincided with a time of economic difficulties and low population, as discussed in Chapter Two, and administrative instability which will be discussed in Chapter Five. He may have been the best or wealthiest man available at the time.

Table XII: Occupations of bailiffs, sheriffs and chamberlain<sup>348</sup>

1400-1449	No.
merchant	6
cordwainer	5
fisher/fishmonger	5
draper	4
mercier	3
tailor	3
tanner/barker	3
glover	2
skinner	2
spicer	2
butcher	1
chapman	1
cutler	1
hosier	1
litster	1
mercier/merchant	1
roper	1
shearman	1
walker	1
wright	1
unknown	44
total	89

1450-1499	No.
baker	10
draper	7
butcher	5
cordwainer	5
mercier	5
tanner/barker	4
inn keeper	3
tailor	3
fisher/fishmonger	2
grocer/taverner	2
image maker	2
smith	2
vintner	2
barber	1
builder	1
chandler	1
chapman	1
cutler	1
furbisher	1
girdler	1
glover	1
litster	1
potter	1
saddler	1
weaver	1
wright	1
yeoman	1
unknown	35
total	101

1500-1549	No.
cordwainer	8
baker	7
mercier	5
tanner/barker	5
butcher	4
tailor	4
draper	3
ironmonger	3
weaver	3
bell founder	2
fisher/fishmonger	2
glover	2
inn keeper	2
litster	2
smith	2
baker/yeoman	1
corrier	1
fletcher	1
goldsmith	1
millar	1
wheelwright	1
unknown	30
total	90

1550-1600	No.
cordwainer	12
butcher	10
tanner/barker	10
ironmonger	8
baker	7
mercier	6
fisher/fishmonger	5
glover	4
draper	3
joiner	2
vintner	2
barber	1
husbandman	1
inn keeper	1
saddler	1
spurrier	1
yeoman	1
unknown	15
total	90

<sup>348</sup> The occupations of men who went on to be mayor have been omitted to avoid double counting.

## The major crafts and trades

### *Distribution*

This term, which draws together merchants, mercers, ironmongers and spicers as well as pedlars and chapmen, describes one of the most important occupational groups. There were, of course, great economic and social differences between a merchant and a pedlar with many gradations in between. An agreement of c.1300 between the burgesses of Nottingham and the Prior of Lenton allocated stalls to merchants attending Lenton Fair according to status

the better class amongst the better, the middle class amongst the middle, the smaller amongst the smaller, each one according to his condition, as is contained as above in the case of cloth merchants, apothecaries, pilchers, and mercers.<sup>349</sup>

*(meliores inter meliores, medii inter medios, minores inter minores, quilibet secundum condicionem suam, sicut continetur ut supra de mercatoribus pannorum, apothecariorum, pellariorum, et mercenariorum)*

In the early 1400s, this group comprised a minimum of 10 per cent of the known occupations of Nottingham people but by 1600 this had declined to just over 5 per cent. As well as experiencing a gradual decline there were changes to the composition of the group.

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<sup>349</sup> NA CA 4672, Stevenson, *I*, pp.60-61.

Table XIII: 'Breakdown of occupational group 'Distribution' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
chapman/pedlar	1	4.8	3	12.5	1	6.3		0.0		0.0		0.0	2	11.8	1	4.8
coal driver		0		0.0		0.0	1	4.2		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
hardwareman		0		0.0		0.0	1	4.2		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
ironmonger	1	4.8	2	8.3	1	6.3	3	12.5	3	15.0	5	41.7	7	41.2	5	23.8
mercier	8	38.1	7	29.2	1	6.3	14	58.3	12	60.0	5	41.7	7	41.2	14	66.7
merchant	8	38.1	9	37.5	11	68.8	5	20.8	3	15.0	1	8.3	1	5.9	1	4.8
spicer	3	14.3	3	12.5	1	6.3		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
stallholder		0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	5.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
woolman		0		0.0	1	6.3		0.0	1	5.0	1	8.3		0.0		0.0
total	21	100	24	100	16	100	24	100	20	100	12	100	17	100	21	100



Table XIII, above, indicates how the balance between the different types of distributor altered over time. The dominant group in the early 1400s was merchants, many identified as Calais Staple merchants who therefore dealt internationally. They were closely followed by mercers, that is men who dealt in fine finished cloth especially velvet and silk, although they handled other items as well including linen.<sup>350</sup> By 1600 there was only one man who called himself a merchant but there were fourteen mercers and, as will be discussed below, the distinction may not have been clear by this time.

In the middle of the century there were at least three Calais Staple merchants in Nottingham, Thomas Thurland, Thomas Alestre and John Plumptre.<sup>351</sup> They were all mayors of Nottingham and Thomas Thurland, as noted in Chapter Two, was the highest tax payer in 1472-72, closely followed by Thomas Alestre's widow; John Plumptre was probably dead by the time the tax was collected. The mid-fifteenth century slump in the export of wool may explain why there was only one man, William Hegyn, specifically named as a Staple merchant at the end of the century. He was, nevertheless, still wealthy. As well as owning a considerably amount of town property, noted in Chapter One, he was assessed in c.1500, as having goods worth 300 marks (£200).<sup>352</sup> Other merchants, who may or may not have been connected to the Staple, were Edward (or Edmund) Hunt, John Hunt senior and John Hunt junior. Again, all three were mayors and significant tax payers.

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<sup>350</sup> C Corêdon with AWilliams, *A Dictionary of Medieval Terms and Phrases* (Cambridge, 2004), p.190.

<sup>351</sup> PRO, *Calendar of Close Rolls*, Vol. VI, p.15.

<sup>352</sup> NA CA 7480ii. The document is undated, but it must have been compiled after 1494 as John Hunt junior, omitted from the list, was dead by that date but before 1510 as William Hegyn died sometime before then.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century there were only two Calais Staple merchants in Nottingham, Robert Hasilrig and William English. Both were mayors and both appear in the top 10 per cent of tax payers in the 1524-25 subsidy, but Hasilrig paid only 50s in tax, half of that paid by John Williamson, a draper and therefore part of the trade which undermined the Staple. The other, William English, paid the even lower amount of 6s 8d.

These men, whose business meant that they made contracts and agreements away from Nottingham, rarely appear as plaintiffs or defendants in the Borough court as its remit was limited to 'trespasses, covenants, contracts, ... arising or done within the liberty aforesaid and the precinct of the same town'.<sup>353</sup> The converse of this limitation is that the more frequently a merchant used that court to settle his business disputes the more likely it was that he traded locally. Despite being described as a Staple merchant, Robert Hasilrig's many appearances in court suggest that much of his business was local. Thomas Mellers, described simply as merchant, made ninety-one appearances in the Borough court as plaintiff, implying that his market was domestic and general. Few complete complaints are recorded but even the briefest details show the range of his activities. In the burgess court of 1510 he sued Henry Hobbs, furbisher, on three occasions, twice for 5s and once for 10s, John Rose, butcher, for 3s 9d, Thomas Wilkinson, corviser, for 19s 2d and Miles Craggs, a mercer for 50s.<sup>354</sup> In 1512 he twice sued William Hydes, a mercer, once for 20s and once for 40s, in 1531 he asked that Walter Traves 'render' three pieces of gold price 10s,<sup>355</sup> in 1533 Richard Yates owed him 10s 6d and a pound of wool value 4s, and he prosecuted John Shepherd,

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<sup>353</sup> Charter of Henry IV, Stevenson, *II*, pp.4-5.

<sup>354</sup> NA CA 1383b.

<sup>355</sup> NA CA 1405.

armourer, for 15s 6d.<sup>356</sup> In the foreign pleas court he had dealings with Henry Orston of Brinsely, Robert Oxenfield of Wakefield, William Taylor of Wollaton and John Fisher of Dunington in Lincolnshire.<sup>357</sup> Fisher was an ‘oilman’, but there are also several suits for corn, malt or wheat.<sup>358</sup> In 1535, he bequeathed the majority of his estate to his widow, Margery.<sup>359</sup> Her will, dated 1539, includes a bequest of ‘my shop and shops with all parcell and parcells of wares gold and silver sterling belonging thereto’.<sup>360</sup> He was, therefore, trading in a wide range of goods from precious metals to foods but not specifically or extensively with wool or cloth. He has already been identified in Chapter Two as one of the men who prospered despite the apparent impoverishment of the town, and it was probably this diversification which led to his success. It does, however, suggest that the definition of ‘merchant’ had changed in response to economic circumstances. It also suggests that, despite the recession, there were a sufficient number of wealthy men and women to buy his wares.

The only man to be described as a merchant by the end of the sixteenth century was Humphrey Bonner, who is also given the appellation ‘gentleman’.<sup>361</sup> He was mayor in 1593-93, 1600-1 and 1607-8 and in 1599 he paid the largest amount of tax, 13s 6d on goods valued at £5. He was almost certainly also descended from Nicholas Bonner, mayor in the 1560s.

As the number of merchants diminished, the number of mercers rose from eight to fourteen, although like merchants, the goods they traded in altered over time, so

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<sup>356</sup> NA CA 1409.

<sup>357</sup> NA CA 1382, 1384, 1404a, 1406.

<sup>358</sup> for example NA CA 1400, 1406.

<sup>359</sup> NA CA 4771.

<sup>360</sup> NA CA 4771.

<sup>361</sup> TNA E179/160/249.

that the terms may have become almost synonymous. In 1431, Simon Ilkeston a mercer, was sued by John Lovell for £5 3s for dying a light silk known as cendal or sendal,<sup>362</sup> and in 1512, another mercer, Thomas Byrkes prosecuted the executor of Thomas Turner, a tailor, for 10s, probably for cloth purchased by him.<sup>363</sup> By the 1530s and 1540s, though, the range of goods dealt with by mercers had broadened. Brothers John and Nicholas English, both mercers, always appear together in the Borough court, and in 1544-45 they sued Humphrey Quarneby for £24 14s 7d for hops, dried and fresh fruit (including a pomegranate worth 12d), sugar and sugar candy, spices and a variety of cloths including say (a mixture of wool and silk), fustian (a mix of flax and cotton), linen and russet (a homespun cloth).<sup>364</sup> They were nephews of Thomas and Margery Mellers, and the main beneficiaries of her will. Humphrey Quarneby, who was a bell founder, was also related to Thomas and Margery and jointly inherited an interest in their shops, so this suit probably concerns some inter-family or business partnership dispute.<sup>365</sup> Some of the items listed in this suit were expensive, which again suggests that there was a market for luxury items.

The other sub-group which grew over the 200 year period was ironmongers, which dealt in domestically produced iron and iron products.<sup>366</sup> In the fifteenth century no more than three are found in the town records but over the sixteenth this number rose to as many as seven in one decade. As a group, it also grew in importance; although there was one mayor who was an ironmonger in 1412-13,

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<sup>362</sup> Foulds online CA 1322/1.

<sup>363</sup> NA CA 1385.

<sup>364</sup> NA CA 1421.

<sup>365</sup> Quarneby married Elizabeth Mellers, who, according to a grant dated 1548 was the daughter of Robert Mellers (NA CA 4591, Stevenson, *IV*, p.395). Stevenson, probably incorrectly, claims she was daughter of Thomas Mellers (Stevenson, *IV*, p.126, footnote 2).

<sup>366</sup> H Swanson, *Medieval Artisans* (Oxford, 1989), p.67.

no sheriff or chamberlain is known to have been an ironmonger in the fifteenth century, but there were eight sheriffs and one mayor in the last half of the sixteenth.

In December 1578-79, Thomas Cadman, James Hartley and Robert York brought two prosecutions in the Queen's Court at Westminster, the first against Thomas Nix and the second against Roger Owldmey or Owldmell, for practising as ironmongers without having been apprenticed against a Statute made in January 1563.<sup>367</sup> Although prosecuted in a central court, the full account of these two suits is written in retrospect at the beginning of the Borough court book for that year, so clearly the cases held some significance. Nothing is known about Owldmey but Thomas Nix was one of a family of fishmongers (see Chapter One). He had been trading as an ironmonger for eleven months before this intervention, for which he was fined the not insignificant sum of £22 (that is 40s per month of illegal trading), particularly as in 1571-72 his goods had been assessed for tax at £4.<sup>368</sup> This may indicate the degree of under-assessment already discussed. Why a fishmonger would begin to trade in iron products is open to question, but it must have seemed a profitable venture.

The three men who brought the case were ironmongers of some importance: James Hartley had been sheriff in 1567-68, Robert York was sheriff in 1580-81 and Thomas Cadman had been both sheriff and chamberlain and was to become a common councillor; he was elected as aldermen but refused the position.<sup>369</sup> The prominence given to these cases may simply be because the mayor, William Scott,

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<sup>367</sup> NA CA 1426; *Statutes*, Vol. 4, part 1, pp.414-22.

<sup>368</sup> TNA E179/160/208.

<sup>369</sup> NA CA 3368.

who was also an ironmonger, decided to clamp down on unlicensed activity in his own trade, supported by three other influential ironmongers. Probably as a consequence of this court action, and to enforce the statute, an order was made in the following March that apprentices in all crafts should enrol their indentures, and that new apprentices should only be admitted 'bye consente of the Wardens of the occupacyon'.<sup>370</sup> As a result, the Hall Book for 1578-79 records ninety-six apprentices indentured to burgesses of the town, many of which are retrospective, dating back three or four years.<sup>371</sup> Whatever the reasons, the effect of both these actions was a greater regulation of trading conditions.

Chapmen or travelling salesmen comprise only a small proportion of this group, but the enrolment of Adam Jackson as a burgess in 1580 is an interesting development as he paid £1 for his burgess fee instead of the usual 6s 8d.<sup>372</sup> Presumably market demand for his wares which were probably less expensive than those traded by Mellers or the English brothers, stimulated by a growing population, was sufficient to warrant him paying this comparatively high amount.

The composition of the Distribution group, then, although economically strong, with many wealthy members, modified over time in response to the changing economic conditions which saw the decline in importance of the wool trade and the expansion of local markets to meet the demand of an increased population, causing merchants and mercers to adapt their trade and deal with local markets rather than international ones.

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<sup>370</sup> NA CA 3363.

<sup>371</sup> NA CA 3363.

<sup>372</sup> NA CA 1619.

*Cloth production, clothing and accessories*

One of the reasons given for the decline in the wool trade was an increased demand for finished cloth. For the fifteenth century, the production of cloth comprised about 16 per cent of the total known workforce in Nottingham (see Table X), while the associated group of clothing and accessories employed approximately 10 per cent. The sixteenth century, however, saw a gradual decline in these occupations both relative to other occupations and in terms of absolute figures, probably the consequence of a number of circumstances including a decline in textile exports and the migration of cloth production into more rural areas that was experienced nationally.<sup>373</sup>

Although, as Table XIV shows, weavers comprise about a third of the known workforce involved in cloth production at the beginning of the fifteenth century, this may be a low estimate as few became burgesses, and therefore had little cause to use the Borough court, and many were women. Another reason to suggest that the numbers should be higher is that the Weavers' Guild is one of the few known craft guilds of the town. It was also one of the few acknowledged by Henry II and consequently the craft paid 40s a year in return for the right to produce all dyed cloths for a radius of ten miles of Nottingham.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> A Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English towns 1400-1640* (Basingstoke, 1991), p.27; Swanson, *Artisans*, pp.30 & 39.

<sup>374</sup> Stevenson, *III*, p.58 footnote 1.

Table XIV: Breakdown of occupational group 'Cloth Production' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
bondlace weaver		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	5.9
bulker		0.0	1	5.6	1	2.8		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
coverlet maker		0.0		0.0		0.0	2	2.4		0.0		0.0	2	25.0		0.0
draper	6	18.2	3	16.7	10	27.8	16	19.3	6	27.3	7	58.3	2	25.0	5	29.3
dyer/litster	8	24.2	3	16.7	1	2.8	12	14.5	5	22.7		0.0	1	12.5	1	5.9
shearman		0.0	2	11.1	9	25.0	9	10.8	2	9.1	1	8.3		0.0		0.0
spinster		0.0		0.0	1	2.8	1	1.2		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
tapiter	1	3.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
walker/fuller	7	21.3	4	22.2	2	5.5	14	16.9	4	18.2	2	16.7	2	25.0	2	11.8
weaver/webster	11	33.3	5	27.7	12	33.3	29	34.9	5	22.7	2	16.7	1	12.5	8	47.1
total	33	100	18	100	36	100	83	100	22	100	12	100	8	100	17	100

Table XV: Breakdown of occupational group 'Clothing and accessories' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
cap knitter/maker		0.0		0.0		0.0	3	5.8		0	1	14.3		0.0	1	4.8
hatmaker		0.0		0.0		0.0	11	21.2		0		0.0	1	11.1	1	4.8
hosier	3	16.7	5	35.7	2	5.9	1	1.9		0		0.0		0.0		0.0
jerkin maker		0.0		0.0		0.0		0		0		0.0		0.0	1	4.8
seamstress		0.0		0.0	3	8.8	1	1.9		0		0.0		0.0		0.0
tailor	15	83.3	9	64.3	27	79.4	36	69.2	28	100	6	85.7	8	88.9	18	85.6
upholder		0.0		0.0	1	2.9		0		0		0.0		0.0		0.0
vestment maker		0.0		0.0	1	2.9		0		0		0.0		0.0		0.0
total	18	100	14	100	34	100	52	100	28	100	7	100	9	100	22	100



The comparatively low status of weaving and weavers is demonstrated by the few weavers who pay tax, normally at a low rate. John Wood is the only weaver identified as paying the 1472-73 subsidy at 2½d for a tenth of his freehold; he is also the only weaver to be listed as sheriff. More significantly, despite its inclusiveness only four weavers paid the 1524-25 lay subsidy, two paying 12d each and two the minimum of 4d each for movables.<sup>375</sup>

Economically, then, weavers were at the lowest end of the scale and they probably saw little improvement over the period; moreover the lot of some workers may have worsened. In 1599-1600, the Wardens of the Weavers presented three men to the Sessions court (or possibly the Great Court, see Chapter Six for discussion) for ‘for occupienge the occupation of a wevver, contrary to an order set dow[n]’; the three men were fined 10s each.<sup>376</sup> Four years later a petition was sent to the Sessions court (or Great Court) by a group of poor weavers who were not burgesses, complaining that those weavers who were burgesses ‘put us downe from woorking, theirby to worke the utter undoing of us and of our poore famelies’.<sup>377</sup> As they were not members of the burgess community they could not look to the Guild for support and had to appeal to the town’s good will. Both these examples illustrate both the degree to which weaving was under stress in Nottingham at this time and the protectionist attitude by burgesses towards their craft, similar to that of ironmongers twenty years earlier.

Walkers or fullers (who washed and treated cloth) and shearmen (who finished the cloth), both of whom make up a comparatively small proportion of the known

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<sup>375</sup> NA CA 4570.

<sup>376</sup> NA CA 55.

<sup>377</sup> NA CA 60, Stevenson, *IV*, p.275.

workforce, seem to have a similar economic position as weavers, paying little tax and rarely holding civic office: William Sherman (shearman) was bailiff in 1428-29 and John Horspole (walker) in 1430-31. None are known to have held civic office after him. In contrast dyers or litsters, who may have controlled at least part of the production process, were more successful: John Howes paid 8s towards the 1524-25 subsidy and was mayor in 1528-29, Robert Fisher was a common councillor and Robert Mody became sheriff and chamberlain twice in the 1520s.

The borderline between the manufacture of cloth and the production of clothing is blurred. In 1546 Rauff Bamforth, Thomas Pinchware, and Robert Sherwood, all tailors, were also described as ‘guardians’ or ‘wardens’ of the Craft of Kersey Weavers.<sup>378</sup> Like cloth production the trade in clothing and accessories declined between 1400 and 1600, but this may be due to the disappearance of crafts such as hat and cap makers and hosiers from the later records. Tailors, on the other hand, consistently comprise approximately 80 per cent of the workforce. Also involved in clothing and accessories are some of the few women whose occupations are known: Agnes Whitehead who was from Scotland, Gudrun Ireland and Grekyn [Gretchen?] Duchman, all seamstresses, paid taxes as aliens during the 1450s and 1460s.<sup>379</sup>

Another trade associated with cloth production was the drapers who not only dealt in finished linen cloth in the domestic market but are often associated with both tailors and with the whole process of cloth production.<sup>380</sup> Drapers were socially important until the mid-sixteenth century with five becoming mayor between

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<sup>378</sup> NA CA 1413.

<sup>379</sup> TNA E179/159/86, E179/159/91, E179/159/100.

<sup>380</sup> Swanson, *Artisans*, p.48.

1400 and 1550. This mid-century date, however, marks a cut-off point as no draper became sheriff or chamberlain after Thomas Barwell in 1568-69. The decline of drapers was matched by the rise in importance of mercers which was discussed above, and there may have been overlaps between the two trades, as the range of goods handled by Thomas Mellers and the English brothers implies.

At the end of the sixteenth century, there are two interesting additions to the workforce. The first is Thomas Rogers, a jerkin maker, and the second Roger Clerke, a bondlace or bobbin lace weaver.<sup>381</sup> These makers of luxury items were probably attracted to Nottingham because of its importance as an regional market place and the number of wealthy gentlemen who, the tax records suggest, were taking up residence.

### *Food and Drink*

This dominant group consistently made up at least 20 per cent and usually far more of the known workforce across the two centuries of this study (see Table X), but it comprised many different occupations. By 1600 it was the largest of all the occupational groups.

As Table XVI shows, the largest two occupations were butchers and bakers. From the mid-fifteenth century the number of bakers may be disproportionately high as most Mayor's or Hall books include a list of licensed bakers meaning they are more visible than other occupations. Those listed were, of course, the master bakers who owned the business but employed jobbing bakers to carry out the work.

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<sup>381</sup> NA CA 3371, 4624, Stevenson, *IV*, p.244.

Table XVI: Breakdown of occupational group 'Food and drink', at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
baker / baxter	7	17.5	3	12.0	10	27.8	49	40.1	27	42.9	20	46.5	21	35.0	43	37.7
butcher	17	42.5	12	48.0	8	22.2	22	18.0	15	23.8	12	28.0	20	33.3	41	36.8
cook	3	7.5		0.0	1	2.8		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	1.7	2	1.8
fisher/fishmonger	7	17.5	8	32.0	8	22.2	15	12.3	8	12.7	5	11.6	8	13.3	14	12.3
grocer		0.0		0.0	1	2.8	3	2.5		0.0		0.0	1	1.7		0.0
inn keeper hosteller/osteller ale house keeper taverner	5	12.5		0.0	2	5.6	14	11.5	8	12.7	5	11.6	3	5.0	5	4.4
millar		0.0	1	4.0		0.0	9	7.4	2	3.2	1	2.3	3	5.0	3	2.6
mustard maker		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
poulterer		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
salter		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
tippler / brewer		0.0		0.0	4	11.1	3	2.5	2	3.2		0.0	1	1.7	1	0.9
victualler		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	0.8		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
vintner	1	2.5	1	4.0	2	5.6	6	4.9	1	1.5		0.0	2	3.3	4	3.5
total	40	100	25	100	36	100	122	100	63	100	43	100	60	100	114	100

The number of bakers grew through the fifteenth century in proportion to other known trades, and there is an increase in actual numbers in the 1590s, although the proportion seems reduced as other trades become more visible. Always significant, bakers make up over one-third of this group of the 1590s. From 1500, bakers held senior civic office, including six mayors and many sheriffs and chamberlains.

Baking is one of the few trades in which women can be seen to play a major role. In 1499-1500, Isabella Hollingworth was admitted as a baker and John Slothwick, another baker, stood surety for her, and she for him.<sup>382</sup> Later, in 1527-28, Agnes Kirby was prosecuted with other town bakers for using 'foghtted' [fetid] wheat.<sup>383</sup> Three more widows were added to the lists of enrolled bakers after 1581-82.<sup>384</sup>

Butchers appear to be less numerous than bakers but because there are no annual enrolments they are less visible and so may have equalled or, towards the end of the sixteenth century, even exceeded the number of bakers. They held civic office less often than bakers, but again this changed over time. Five butchers became sheriff or chamberlain in the fifteenth century, but thirteen took these offices in the sixteenth. Only one butcher, John Rose, became mayor in the 200 years of this study, holding the office in 1513-14, 1520-21 and 1526-27, and it has already been posited that his appointment was a consequence of the economic problems and political instability of the early sixteenth century, identified in earlier chapters.

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<sup>382</sup> NA CA 4547.

<sup>383</sup> NA CA 28.

<sup>384</sup> NA CA 3365, 3371, 3373.

In 1577-78, the Mickletorn jury requested a number of improvements to the market place, including a cover on the shambles so that country butchers could shelter from the rain.<sup>385</sup> In the same year, a set of rules was presented to the Council detailing the terms under which a butcher could trade. These stipulated, how many animals could be kept in the meadow and prohibited the branding of other men's sheep and the slaughtering of neat (cows) in the market place. An interesting offshoot of the Reformation is the inclusion of clauses which banned the selling of 'wayre' on the Sabbath and prevented any butcher from going out of town, or sending his servant out of town, to 'fetche anne wayre' on the Sabbath.<sup>386</sup>

There are two clauses specifically against 'cuntrye' butchers. One ordered that they had to supply tallow for every three beasts killed, and the final and longest clause stipulated that country butchers should not open their stalls before ten o'clock to allow the wardens time to examine the meat to ensure it was fit to eat. These rules are an example of increased control over both the quality and terms of trade for this important foodstuff, at a time when the expansion in the size of the town and an increasing demand for meat must have been apparent. They precede the prosecution against Thomas Nix by one year and are another example of greater regulation of trading conditions in the town.

The term fisher and fishmonger may be synonymous although sometimes a distinction is made, for example the Borough court roll of 1417-18 describes Thomas Thomworth as fishmonger but a few entries later William Webster is said to be a fisher.<sup>387</sup> Table XVI show that fishers and fishmongers had always been

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<sup>385</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>386</sup> NA CA 4608, Stevenson, *IV*, pp.180-82.

<sup>387</sup> Foulds online CA 1312.

less numerous than butchers, a fact supported by the number of market stalls devoted to them, but fishing seems to have been of some commercial significance. In 1467, John Castle, a fisher, Richard Burton, a grocer and Henry Hegyn, butcher, subscribed to a bond of 100 marks for the lease of the fishing at the Weir on the Trent for the continuation of a lease taken by Castle's father.<sup>388</sup> John Castle senior had rented not only the weir but also a 'fish garden' in which he made 'stews', and with John Lovat, who may have been a tanner, and John Fosbrook, a butcher, held the lease of meadowland in East Croft for which they paid 14 marks, thus combining fishing with the raising and sale of beef.<sup>389</sup> Almost a hundred years later, Thomas Smith took the 'common fishing' on a lease of twenty-one years for 26s 8d; he also paid 3s for the Friar Pool and 2s for a shop on the Saturday Market, and so 'owned' both the production and distribution of his goods.<sup>390</sup>

There are comparatively few inn keepers, taverners or hostellers recorded but this may be because inn keeping was often a secondary or supplementary occupation. Fabian Mellers, a draper, inherited an inn called 'The White Hart' from his step-father, John Heskey, both were mayors in the last half of the sixteenth century.<sup>391</sup> In 1573-74, William Wilson, a baker, rented a tavern and garden on Chapel Bar combining the supply of food and drink, John Woodson rented a second tavern on Chapel Bar and there was a tavern under the Council House tenanted by William

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<sup>388</sup> NA CA 4492, Stevenson, *II*, pp.258-61.

<sup>389</sup> NA CA 4448, Stevenson, *II*, pp.355-56.

<sup>390</sup> NA CA 2168.

<sup>391</sup> NA CA 4770.

Stanshall, a butcher.<sup>392</sup> A previous tenant of this tavern was John English, mercer and heir of Margery Mellers.<sup>393</sup>

Closely related to brewing, and to baking, is milling. There were several mills around Nottingham. Some belonged to the Crown; in 1435 for example, Thomas Wolf was sued by Geoffrey Kneveton, Steward of the Castle for unpaid rent, and by William Hostler for money loaned to help him obtain the lease in the first place.<sup>394</sup>

Nottingham had at least one horse mill of its own; in 1463-64, 12s was spent on new mill stones for it.<sup>395</sup> By 1500 there were two horse mills, one in Fair Maiden Lane and one on Chapel Bar which brought in £3 6s 8d and 53s 4d respectively. Tenants of the Chapel Bar mill include Nicholas Haa or Hay<sup>396</sup> and his son, Matthew, who is recorded as the tenant in 1549-50 when he also rented the tavern on Chapel Bar.<sup>397</sup> The exact location of the mill on Fair Maiden Lane is unclear because in 1531 it is said to be on Barker Gate and let to Margaret Stytheholm but in 1549-50 it was in Goose Gate and let to Nicholas Arman.<sup>398</sup> These three streets run parallel to each other and greater accuracy was probably unnecessary in the rental list. By 1573, however, this mill was replaced in the rental by a malt mill on Castle Gate, leased to John Woodson who, as mentioned above, was also the tenant of both a tavern and the mill on Chapel Bar.<sup>399</sup> Like Thomas Smith, the

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<sup>392</sup> NA CA 2171.

<sup>393</sup> NA CA 2168.

<sup>394</sup> Foulds online CA 1327.

<sup>395</sup> NA CA 1601.

<sup>396</sup> NA CA 2166.

<sup>397</sup> NA CA 2167, 2168.

<sup>398</sup> NA CA 2166, 2168.

<sup>399</sup> NA CA 2171.



fisher, these millers had business interests which combined both production and consumption.

There was a third mill, on Narrow Marsh, and by 1576-77 a new water mill had been built on the Leen, let to William Gelstroppe for 40s.<sup>400</sup> Gelstroppe was a tanner, so this mill may have been used in the treatment of leather rather than grain, or it may be another example of diversification and entrepreneurial activity.

Milling, however, was not always profitable. In 1603, Thomas Greene, Robert Bennett, Randle Freeman and William Fletcher, petitioned the Council complaining that their tenancies were expensive because of the number of new mills recently set up.<sup>401</sup> One of these mills was owned by Master Kyme, almost certainly John Kyme, noted in Chapter Two as both yeoman and gentleman;<sup>402</sup> another had been set up by Master Collinson, possibly Ralph Collinson, son of John Collinson, baker and alderman, and a third mill was owned by James Scott, a glover. The largest complaint, however, was laid against 'one Dawson, who is a 'mere straunger and noe Burgesse'.<sup>403</sup> The petition, like that of the poor weavers the following year, was presented through the Sessions court and is yet another example of the stresses on the community of Nottingham at a time when a growing population made commercial investment in processes such as milling attractive, to the detriment of the less prosperous townspeople. This investment, though, is further evidence of entrepreneurial diversification in response to an expanding market for food and goods.

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<sup>400</sup> NA CA 2172.

<sup>401</sup> NA CA 59, Stevenson, *IV*, pp.265-67.

<sup>402</sup> NA CA 4635b; TNA E179/160/249.

<sup>403</sup> NA CA 59, Stevenson, *IV*, p.265-66.

### *Leather production and leather products*

As outlined in Table XVII, overall the proportion of men working in the production of leather in 1600 was roughly the same as in 1400, although there was a dip from the end of the fifteenth century to the second quarter of the sixteenth century to between 5 and 7 per cent of the total known workforce (Table X). In absolute numbers, this stability actually represented a growth in numbers from nineteen to forty-one. But this increase also reflects a change in the balance of crafts within the group, or at least the way they were recorded. Until the mid-fifteenth century the number of men described as skinner equalled or even slightly exceed the number of barkers or tanners and there was a scattering of ‘corriers/curriers’ who turned hard red leather into softer black leather.<sup>404</sup> By 1600 there are no entries in Nottingham records for skimmers and curriers, although their crafts may have been absorbed into the now dominant one of tanner.

In the 1510s and 1520s, when the number of leather producers was at its lowest, a number of men were presented to the Sessions court for buying and barking sheep skins. Some, like Harry Hopkin and Thomas Kirby, were tanners. Others, such as Richard Dalberbury and William Mabson were corvisers or glovers. Many were prominent townsmen, like William Bendbow, a common councillor, Thomas Willoughby, mayor in 1518-19, William Parmatour, mayor 1527-28 and 1534-35, and John Yates, mayor 1536-37.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Swanson, *Artisans*, p.58.

<sup>405</sup> NA CA 14c, 15b, 19a, 20c, 21a.

Table XVII: Breakdown of occupational group 'Leather Production' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
corrier	1	5.3	4	25.0	1	10.0	2	7.7	1	5.3	1	5.3		0		0
skinner	11	7.9	7	43.8		0	1	3.8	1	5.3		0		0		0
tanner/barker	7	36.8	5	31.3	9	90.0	23	88.5	17	89.4	18	94.7	34	100	41	100
total	19	100	16	100	10	100	26	100	19	100	19	100	34	100	41	100

Table XVIII: Breakdown of occupational group 'Leather Products' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
cobbler / shoe mender		0		0		0	4	5.0	2	3.8		0		0		0
collar maker		0		0		0	1	1.3		0	1	4.5	1	2.1		0
cordener / cordwainer / corviser / shoe maker / suter	14	50.0	13	59.1	19	79.2	50	62.5	37	69.8	11	50.0	26	54.2	58	56.9
glover	8	28.6	6	27.3	4	16.7	15	18.8	8	15.1	8	36.4	17	35.3	37	36.3
pouchmaker / purser							3	3.8	1	1.9		0		0		0
parchment maker		0		0		0		0		0		0	1	2.1	1	0.9
saddler	6	21.4	3	13.6	1	4.1	7	8.8	5	9.4	2	9.1	3	6.3	6	5.9
total	28	100	22	100	24	100	80	100	53	100	22	100	48	100	102	100

Why this should be is uncertain as the number of people involved in the associated leather working trades began to grow at this time. This expansion may reflect a growing demand for leather goods which the tanners were unable to meet, but the increase in leather workers includes men who are described as cobbler or shoe mender.<sup>406</sup> It was also a period when the rents of shoemaker's stalls had been reduced (see Chapter One), probably to attract more craftsmen. All this indicates that, at a time when the economy seems to have been at an all-time low, the demand was for goods at the lower end of the scale.

Tanning demanded a high level of capital investment in stockpiles of hides and materials and from the end of the fifteenth century tanners were the dominant and wealthier group.<sup>407</sup> Nine tanners, compared to six bakers and four merchants, became mayor in the sixteenth century and a further fifteen became sheriff or chamberlain.

The Tanners had a guild or fraternity, although very little is known about it. It may have had a quasi-religious function as a memorandum in the Hall book of 1502-3 says any man selling insufficiently tanned leather should give 4d to the common box and 4d 'to their seid light'.<sup>408</sup> In 1546 property belonging to the Tanners, which had an annual rental value of 98s 10d, was granted to the town in return for an annual payment of 40s.<sup>409</sup> Given the date of this grant, shortly before the dissolution of chantries, guilds and other religious groups, it is likely

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<sup>406</sup> for example NA CA 14c, 20b, 1378, 3354 and elsewhere.

<sup>407</sup> L A Clarkson, 'The Organization of the English Leather Industry in the late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, second series, 13, p.248.

<sup>408</sup> NA CA 3352.

<sup>409</sup> NA CA 2168; C Deering, *Nottinghamia vetus et nova or an Historical Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Nottingham* (Nottingham 1751, reprinted 1970), p.346.

that the Tanners were disposing of their property for the benefit of the town rather than having it seized by the Crown.

Like leather production, leather working shows growth in numbers so that by 1600, as Table X shows, it was the second largest occupational group employing 25 per cent of the known working population, an increase of almost 11 per cent over 1400, with most growth occurring after 1550. The greatest number of men in this group were employed as corviser or cordwainer – synonymous terms for shoemaker. Parallel to the shoemakers were the shoe repairers or cobblers who first appeared in the 1470s but disappeared from the records by 1540, approximately the same period that cheaper leather was being tanned.

The second largest section of the trade was the glovers which, although always significant, increased from 28.6 per cent of all known leather workers to 36.3 per cent in the last quarter of the sixteenth century (see Table XVIII), an increase in both relative and absolute terms compared to shoemakers, presumably in response to a growing demand for their goods from the enlarged market.

The remainder of the crafts within this group – saddlers, purse or pouch makers and collar makers – remained relatively constant. A new development for Nottingham, though, was the enrolment as burgess in 1600 of a parchment maker, especially as the town records had been written on paper for at least 150 years, which suggests an interest or demand for more expensive materials by some of the townspeople.

### **The minor crafts and trades**

The remaining crafts and trades, as Table X shows, collectively comprise no more than 25 per cent of the known workforce, and as individual occupations, each employs less than 10 per cent of the total, some considerably so. Nevertheless, several included a few wealthy men and are indicators of change in the town's economy.

*Alabaster Carving*: the carving and decorating of alabaster, usually for religious artefacts, was an important industry in Nottinghamshire and carved alabaster was also exported across Europe.<sup>410</sup> In the town, though, it comprised at most only 2 per cent of the known workmen (see Tables X and XIX). Some carvings were richly decorated, and carvers like Nicholas Hill must have worked on a large scale: in 1491 he employed William Bott as his agent, supplying him with 'fifty eight heads of Saint John the Baptist, part of them in tabernacles and in niches, to sell' and in the same year William owed Nicholas 10d for painting and gilding three alabaster salt-cellars.<sup>411</sup> In 1530, John Nicholson sued John Cottingham for 10s for not painting a head of John the Baptist with the 'half of a quarter' of gold both of which he had supplied.<sup>412</sup> Only one alabaster worker, called an imagemaker, Walter Hilton, became mayor; his son, Edward or Edmund, became a common councillor and another, John Spencer, was chamberlain in 1487-88. The early influence of the Reformation on this rather specialist industry can be inferred from the disappearance of alabaster men from the Nottingham records after 1530.

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<sup>410</sup> T Foulds, 'Trade and Manufacture', in J Beckett (ed), *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition, (Chichester, 2006), pp.79-80.

<sup>411</sup> NA CA 1374.

<sup>412</sup> NA CA 1401.

Table XIX: Breakdown of occupational group 'Alabaster working' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1440-49	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%
alabasterman				0		0	1	100	2	18.2		0.0
imagemaker			1	100	1	100		0	9	81.8	1	100
total	0	0.0	1	100	1	100	1	100	11	100	1	100

Table XX: Breakdown of occupational group 'Building' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
builder		0	1	5.9	3	16.7	1	2.9		0		0		0		0
carpenter / carver	1	9.1		0		0	4	11.4	2	66.7		0		0	1	4.8
glasier		0		0		0		0		0		0	1	8.3	2	9.5
joiner		0		0		0		0		0		0	3	25.0	11	52.4
mason	2	18.2	3	17.6		0	6	17.1		0		0	2	16.7	2	19.5
nailer		0	1	5.9		0		0		0		0		0		0
painter / stainer		0		0	4	22.2	6	17.1	1	33.3		0	2	16.7	1	4.8
plasterer		0	1	5.9	1	5.6		0		0		0		0		0
pointer		0		0	1	5.6	2	5.7		0		0		0		0
sawyer		0		0	1	5.6	1	2.9		0		0		0		0
thatcher		0	1	5.9	1	5.6		0		0		0	1	8.3	1	4.8
tiler/slater	1	9.1		0	1	5.6	5	14.3		0	1	100	2	16.7	3	14.3
turner	1	9.1		0	1	5.6		0		0		0		0		0
wright	6	54.5	10	58.8	5	28.6	10	28.6		0		0	1	8.3		0
total	11	100	17	100	18	100	35	100	3	100	1	100	12	100	21	100

*Building*: the building trade was perhaps the largest of these lesser crafts but also the most volatile; at its lowest in the 1550s it represented less than 1 per cent of the town's known work force but at its height in the 1470s, as Table X shows, it reached 12.5 per cent, though this is a consequence of a list of twelve carpenters who worked on the new Guild Hall in the Hall book for 1478-79.<sup>413</sup> In this decade there are also seven painters or stainers and three tilers, who may also have worked on the Guild Hall and the other buildings which being erected at this time. Some of the low figures can be attributed to the lack of detail in the surviving records as building workers are often un-named. In 1485-86, for example, the chamberlains' accounts list a variety payments for work on the 'new tenantries' near the Guild Hall made to anonymous sawyers, carpenters, plasterers and wrights.<sup>414</sup>

*Metal working*: as Table X shows, at the beginning and end of the period of this study metal working comprised about 7 per cent of the known workforce, but grew mid-period to 11.2 per cent. This mid-period increase is to a great extent due to the greater visibility of bell founders, particularly the Mellers family. Richard Mellers became sheriff in 1472-73 and was mayor in 1499-1500 and 1507-8. His wife, Agnes, founded Nottingham's Free School in c.1512.<sup>415</sup> He was father of Robert Mellers, another bell founder who was mayor in 1521-22, and of the litigious merchant Thomas Mellers. He was also grandfather-in-law to Humphrey Querneby and great-grandfather of Johnn Gregory, both mayors later in the century, and so was the root of the extensive family network discussed earlier.

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<sup>413</sup> NA CA 3350.

<sup>414</sup> NA CA 1603.

<sup>415</sup> NA CA 4771, Stevenson, *III*, pp.453-56.



Table XXI: Breakdown of occupational group ‘Metal working’ at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
armourer / gestron maker		0		0	1	6.3		0	2	8.8	1	16.7	3	21.4	1	3.6
bell founder / brasier / potter	1	7.1	5	45.5	3	18.8	9	16.7	6	26.2	1	16.7		0		0
blacksmith		0		0		0		0		0		0	2	14.3	11	39.3
cutler	1	7.1	1	9.1		0	4	7.4	1	4.3		0	3	21.4	8	28.6
furbisher		0		0		0	1	1.9		0		0		0		0
girdler		0		0		0	2	3.7	1	4.3		0		0		0
goldsmith		0		0	1	6	1	1.9		0	2	33.3		0	1	3.6
lead beater / plumber	1	7.1		0		0	1	1.9		0		0		0		0
locksmith		0	1	9.1	1	6.3	2	3.7	3	13.0		0	1	7.1	1	3.6
lorimer		0		0	1	6.3		0		0		0		0		0
pewterer		0	1	9.1		0	4	7.4		0		0		0	1	3.6
pinner	1	7.1		0		0	4	7.4	1	4.3		0		0		0
smith	10	71.4	1	9.1	7	43.8	19	35.2	7	30.5		0	1	7.1	1	3.6
spurrier		0	2	18.2	2	12.5	6	11.1	1	4.3	2	33.3	4	28.6	4	14.3
tinker		0		0		0	1	1.9	1	4.3		0		0		0
total	14	100	11	100	16	100	54	100	23	100	6	100	14	100	28	100

Although bell founding was clearly an important trade, no bell founders are specifically named after the death of Humphrey Quarneby in the 1560s. The town, however, benefitted from other metal work, including the prestigious crafts of armourer, goldsmith, pewterer and spurrier.<sup>416</sup> Numerically the major trade at the end of the fifteen century was smith, and in the later sixteenth century, blacksmith, when there were seven new burgess enrolments in this trade after 1590.<sup>417</sup>

*Miscellaneous:* this ‘catch-all’ category, listed in Table XXII comprises occupations which do not easily fit in the other groups. The largest is that of labourer or workman, with nineteen being recorded in the 1490s. Labourer like servant may mean many things, and although never highly paid, there were some who were reasonably prosperous. Six labourers enrolled as burgess in the first half of the sixteenth century, paying 6s 8d for their freedom and four labourers paid the 1473-79 levy and three paid the 1524-25 subsidy at the rate of 12d for their movables.<sup>418</sup> Nor were labourers restricted to handling small amounts of money. In 1498 James Wilson prosecuted Nicholas Wildgoose, a smith, for 10s 11d and a year later, William Shevington, a mercer, for 15s 8d.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Laughton, ‘Urban Hierarchy’, p.344.

<sup>417</sup> NA CA 4635b.

<sup>418</sup> NA CA 3355, 3356b, 4589, 8019; TNA E179/159/123.

<sup>419</sup> NA CA 1378, 1379.

Table XXII: Breakdown of occupational group 'Miscellaneous' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
bookbinder		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0	1	12.5
carter / carrier	1	25.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0
clock maker		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0	1	12.5
harper		0.0	1	16.7		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0
labourer / workman	2	50.0	5	83.3	2	100	27	90.0	9	81.8	3	100	2	40.0	3	37.5
lantern maker		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0	1	12.5
minstrel		0.0		0.0		0	1	3.3	2	18.2		0		0.0	1	12.5
piper	1	25.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0
shether		0.0		0.0		0	1	3.3		0.0		0		0.0		0.0
virginal maker		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0	1	12.5
wait		0.0		0.0		0	1	3.3		0.0		0	3	60.0		0.0
total	4	100	6	100	2	100	30	100	11	100	3	100	5	100	8	100

This group also comprises several musicians who resided in Nottingham including a piper in the 1400s, a harper in the 1430s, a minstrel in the 1470s and 1480s and two more in the 1520s and 1530s. The town also employed three waits, some of whom are named in the town accounts; they received a fee of 20s and wore a livery including a collar which cost 15s.<sup>420</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting development in this group in the last decade of the sixteenth century is the enrolment as burgess of a book binder, a clock maker, a lantern maker and a virginal maker. These specialist crafts, like the lace maker and parchment maker already mentioned, must have been attracted to the town in response to a demand for luxury goods created by people wealthy enough to afford these expensive items.

*Provisions and Services:* these two groups, shown in Tables XXIII and XXIV, include apothecaries, barbers, surgeons, chandlers, rope makers and, in the 1580s, a saltpetre man. Although they never account for more than 5.5 per cent of the workforce, at the end of the sixteenth century these groups supplied four mayors. This contrasts with the fifteenth century when only three men from these groups achieved the rank of baliff/sheriff or chamberlain, and suggests an improved status for both individuals and trade.

*Wood, Horn and Bone:* this last group which comprises coopers, cartwrights, wheelwrights, bowyers and fletchers at its largest comprised just over 3 per cent of the known working population. No one practicing any of these trades held a senior civic office and none paid tax even in the inclusive 1524-25 subsidy.

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<sup>420</sup> NA CA 1601a, 3352.

Table XXIII: Breakdown of occupational group 'Provisions' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
apothecary		0		0		0.0	1	7.7		0	1	25.0	1	14.3	2	18.2
chandler / candleman / tallow chandler / wax chandler		0		0		0.0	7	53.8	1	100		0.0	1	14.3	1	9.1
rope maker	1	100	2	100	1	100	5	38.5		0	3	75.0	4	57.1	8	72.7
saltpeter man		0		0		0.0		0.0		0		0.0	1	14.3		0.0
total	1	100	2	100	1	100	13	100	1	100	4	100	7	100	11	100

Table XXIV: Breakdown of occupational group 'Services' at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
barber	4	100	5	71.4	7	87.5	12	92.3	3	100	3	75.0	3	100	6	100
doctor / physician / surgeon		0		0.0	1	12.5	1	7.7		0	1	25.0		0		0
leech		0	2	28.6		0.0		0.0		0		0.0		0		0
total	4	100	7	100	8	100	13	100	3	100	4	100	3	100	6	100

Table XXV: Breakdown of occupational group ‘Wood, horn and bone’ at 30 year intervals.

Occupation	1400-09	%	1430-39	%	1460-69	%	1490-99	%	1520-29	%	1550-59	%	1580-89	%	1590-99	%
bowyer		0.0		0.0				0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	7.7
bowstring maker		0.0		0.0				0.0		0.0	1	25.0		0.0		0.0
cartwright	1	25.0		0.0			2	15.4		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
cooper	2	50.0	1	50.0			9	69.2	1	25.0		0.0	2	50.0	6	46.2
fletcher	1	25.0	1	50.0			2	15.4	3	75.0	2	50.0	1	25.0	1	7.7
shuttle maker		0.0		0.0				0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	7.7
wheelwright		0.0		0.0				0.0		0.0	1	25.0	1	25.0	4	30.8
total	4	100	2	100	0	0	13	100	4	100	4	100	4	100	13	100

## Agriculture

One of the definitions of a town is that its economy was dependent on trade and commerce rather than agriculture, but it was established in Chapter One that many, if not all, burgesses were associated in some way with farming the common land surrounding the town. This association, however, was a secondary activity and so the number of people recorded with agricultural occupations is small – usually the neat herd, swineherd and pinder already mentioned – and for some decades there are no records of agricultural workers in the town at all.

When agricultural occupations are stated it is usually because there is a business connections with the town. There are, for example, three husbandmen identified in Nottingham records. Thomas Staniland was enrolled as a burgess in 1502 with John Cragg and Robert Stables as sureties.<sup>421</sup> Cragg was described as a tippler in 1478 when he paid for a licence to traffic, but by 1500 he was sufficiently important to be included in the list of men who elected the mayor.<sup>422</sup> He may have bought grain from Staniland. There are at least five Robert Stables in the records at this time; one was a yeoman, one a tailor presented in 1517 for keeping thirty beasts in the meadow, and another an inn keeper who was presented for regrating corn in 1527, so again a possible trading connection.<sup>423</sup> One of the sureties for another husbandman, Charles Milner, enrolled as burgess in 1534, was Nicholas Dorman, who leased one of the town mills in 1552-52, again a possible business affiliation.<sup>424</sup> The last husbandman, Simon Pykard, was presented to the Sessions court in 1593 for leaving the town when there was plague in Nottingham, ‘against

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<sup>421</sup> NA CA 3352.

<sup>422</sup> NA CA 3350, 3351.

<sup>423</sup> NA CA 22, 20a, 22b, 28.

<sup>424</sup> NA CA 2169.

his oath'.<sup>425</sup> He had been sheriff in 1580-81 and, despite his seemingly rural occupation, lived in St Peter's parish where he paid the parish rate.<sup>426</sup>

There were also several men described as yeoman who became burgess and again their sureties reveal their trading connections. In 1467, John Newland became a burgess and one of his sponsors, John Spencer, is known to have been a baker. Thomas Wass who is described as both yeoman and baker became a burgess in 1499 with William Bytheway and John Down, also bakers, as sureties.<sup>427</sup> When Barton Ferrer became a burgess in 1513 his sureties were John Doubleday and John Durrant or Doret again both bakers.<sup>428</sup> This association of yeoman and baker is broken, however, in 1547 as Thomas Chetwin's surety as burgess was James Mason, a tanner.<sup>429</sup> The following year William Chetwin was enrolled and one of his sureties was Hugh Smith, a saddler, which suggests they supplied livestock or raw hide, rather than grain.<sup>430</sup>

The enrolment of yeoman as burgess became more common in the sixteenth century; the list of burgesses living in 1604 shows that at least seven yeomen were enrolled in Elizabeth I's reign, five in the last ten years.<sup>431</sup> One of these was John Kyne already noted as setting up a mill to the detriment of poor millers and who, in 1599, paid 8s tax on his land.<sup>432</sup> He can probably be described as a proto-capitalist, investing in all aspects of the production process and taking advantage of an expanding domestic market.

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<sup>425</sup> NA CA 52b.

<sup>426</sup> NA PR 21599.

<sup>427</sup> NA CA 4547.

<sup>428</sup> NA CA 3355.

<sup>429</sup> NA CA 4589, Stevenson, *IV*, p.3-4.

<sup>430</sup> NA CA 4590 Stevenson, *IV*, p.5-6.

<sup>431</sup> NA CA 4635b.

<sup>432</sup> TNA E179/160/249.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter has identified a number of changes in Nottingham's occupational structure which all stem from the economic and demographic changes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The most obvious are the decrease in the number of international merchants and the dwindling textile trade, both outcomes stimulated by decline in the international trade in wool and finished cloth. To compensate for these losses, manufacturing, in the form of bell founding and later leather processing, came to the fore, while merchants, mercers and drapers adapted to supply the domestic market.

These adaptations were measured and evolutionary. In the early sixteenth century, when every indicator suggests Nottingham's economy was at its lowest, the town possessed a range of small craftsmen, with no dominant industry. By 1600, the production of leather and leather goods were important industrial sectors which was only outnumbered by the production and sale of food and drink which supplied a larger population. The market expansion though was not just in basic commodities as Nottingham's potential for success as a market centre is indicated by the enrolment as burgesses of manufacturers of luxury products such as lace, musical instruments, books and clocks.

The converse of this prosperity is the presence of impoverished workers, such as the weavers and tenant millers who suffered because of commercial investment and self-regulation, that seems to have been a feature of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Such regulation may mirror a growing culture of control following the example of central government, but it also implies an increased need in the face of a growing population to organise and regiment.

Attention has been drawn to entrepreneurial, if not capitalist, activity on several occasions, but as many date to the 1400s, these were not 'modern' phenomena. In the fifteenth century, however, such activities were 'vertical' developments: fishers leased stews and sold fish; millers also tenanted inns, and so on. In the sixteenth century there is evidence for greater diversification exhibited by men such as Thomas Mellers, the English brothers, William Gelstroppe and John Kyme. The motives behind each example of diversification were a response to differing economic conditions. Mellers traded during a time of recession in a wide range of goods, including some luxury products to meet the demands of the few wealthy men who could afford them. Kyme, on the other hand, invested in a developing market for food products stimulated by the growing population.

It was established in Chapter Two that there was a relationship between wealth and civic responsibility, and this chapter has shown that this led to a hierarchy of occupations that limited the potential to hold civic office to just a few of the more prestigious trades. During the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when the economy was weaker, in order to find sufficient candidates for civic office the range of acceptable occupations became larger, and then contracted again as the economy improved, but with a different composition. As sources of wealth shifted from merchant trade to manufacture so the civic leaders were more likely to be industrialists than merchants but, overall, the relationship between wealth and civic office remained unchanged.

## **Chapter Four: Conclusion to Part I**

Part I has examined the economic development, demographic change, social hierarchy and occupational structure of Nottingham between 1400 and 1600. There are many overlaps between these topics and this chapter aims to draw them together in a consideration of the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis.

The first of these questions asked what economic changes could be detected in Nottingham's commercial ventures? In Chapter One the changes in market and property rentals and evidence for new building described, in general terms, an economy which contracted throughout the fifteenth century. This was followed by an expansion from the middle of the sixteenth century, as fewer rents are seen to be 'in decay', the market areas refurbished and town leaders encouraged to invest additional facilities. The occupational analysis in Chapter Three mirrored these trends. One of the most observable movements is the altered trading interests of merchants, which was a consequence of national and international factors that saw not just a diminution in the export of wool and textiles but also a shift of this trade towards London and the south. A long-term outcome of the loss of mercantile trade was the increased importance of tanning and leather crafts, both in terms of wealth and civic status, and in the numbers employed in the business. Shrinkage of the textile industry saw a proportional increase in the number of small craftsmen, particularly at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, a development reflected in the 1524-25 lay subsidy which shows that the majority of tax payers fell into the bracket occupied by small, independent craftsmen. The most successful occupations, though, involved the production and

sale of foodstuffs. The entry into the burgess rolls of the late sixteenth century of men employed in book binding, and lace, clock, musical instrument making as well as other luxury products is a clear indication of the growing importance of Nottingham as a market centre.

This same analysis named several men who could be called entrepreneurs, if not capitalists in the strictest definition of the term. They, however, were not a new phenomenon. Fifteenth century examples range from men like John Howes who appears to have dabbled in leather, wine and building materials, to the *rentier* activities of men like Thomas Samon and William Hegyn. Some men, like John Castle, the fisher, and John Woodson, the miller, participated in both the production and sale of foodstuffs. The sub-letting of property, whether market stalls or common fields, was also a common activity, throughout the period. What is observable, though, is that by the end of the sixteenth century the investment was on a bigger scale. Whereas John Castle leased fish stews and a market stall from the town for an annual rent, John Kyme and others set up new mills in competition not only to one another but to the town's tenant millers.

The financial benefits of such investment are difficult to calculate because the 'bunching' seen in later tax lists prevents any sensible assessment. What it is possible to say is that Nottingham was always the home of many wealthy men. In the fifteenth century these comprised the Staple merchants such as Thomas Thurland and William Hegyn, and members of families like the Samons, Alestres and Plumptres whose names appear as the highest tax payers and regularly in the lists of mayors. Even at the lowest point in both economic and demographic terms, men like John Rose and John Williamson and the extended Mellers family

prospered. Where comparisons are possible, Nottingham's wealthiest people are on a par with men from other towns, both regionally and nationally. A side-effect of this individual wealth is that the town compares well with other local communities, even though its population was smaller. Nottingham continued to produce wealthy businessmen at the end of the century, but as with commercial investment, some of the features were transformed as it became no longer simply a place where money was made, but also a centre which attracted men who already had money and status.

Another commercial development at the end of the sixteenth century was the greater regulation of trade such as the stricter enforcement of statutes and the self-regulation of the butchers. Although the former actions were imposed by central government, their local implementation shows that there was an intention to maintain standards in the face of growing demand and potential for profit, which was probably also the aim of the latter provisions.

Although some of these economic changes were as a result of evolving trends in international, national and regional trade, others were fuelled by population fluctuations. The detailed analysis in Chapter Two showed that, like the economy, there was a gradual decline in population through the fifteenth century, followed by an upswing in the later sixteenth century which saw the population rise by at least 50 per cent, and possibly 100 per cent, in seventy-five years, due to immigration. This rapid growth was one of the stimuli to the expansion of the market, improved rental income and investment in new building, both of shops and of lower quality housing for the poorer migrants. At the end of the sixteenth century such building resulted in the filling up of back lanes with paltry houses

and converted barns, and some northward expansion. Evidence of population shrinkage in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries means that the town's 'footprint' was little altered. The same cannot be said for common agricultural land. Either commercial investment or an early fifteenth-century population fluctuation saw some incursions into common land, but these were relatively minor compared to the problems caused by the size and rate of the sixteenth century population increase. Meadowland in East and West Croft was divided and subdivided, while the Sessions court and Mickletorn juries requested that restrictions were placed on sub-letting and that leases should not be renewed so that land could be recouped. Although 'poor burgesses' are the motivation for these petitions, they were not the poor migrants subject to so much Tudor legislation as these had no entitlement to common land. Instead they were men with a trade or craft sufficient to permit them to buy their civic freedom. Such men had always entered the town, but the analysis of both population and occupations indicates that the numbers were considerably greater by the end of the sixteenth century, thus stretching a limited resource. This dependence on common land and the produce of agriculture is a prime example of continuity within the town's economy, even in a period of commercial development.

The analysis of wealth in Chapter Two brought to light the relationship between wealth and civic office. This relationship remained unbroken despite shifts in the sources of wealth suggesting that there was no stigma attached to manufacturing, providing a man was able to generate sufficient wealth to divorce him from the day-to-day necessities of his trade. But only a few men achieved this level of affluence and a further analysis of the range of occupations followed by civic

officials indicates that there was a hierarchy of trades that prevented some men ever achieving office. The rigidity of this hierarchy was relaxed when social and economic problems made it difficult to find suitable candidates for office, but was tightened again when circumstances were more favourable. On economic measures alone, then, town administration was concentrated into the hands of just a few of the most prosperous burgesses.

Wealth and civic office brought with them social status and are, consequently, useful in establishing a social hierarchy. Only a few wealthy men held the most senior offices, while the poorest did not achieve office at all. Yet there was a degree of personal social mobility. The 1473-79 levy and the 1524-25 lay subsidy both comprise many townspeople whose income or assets must have been minimal, yet some would later achieve a respectability as burgesses, and a few achieved higher status. There were also gradations within the occupational groups, although they probably also reflected personal wealth. The agreement with the Prior of Lenton spelt out the ranks of merchants, but similar inequalities are implicit in tax returns and lists of 'master' bakers.

This definition of social status, however, is not universally applicable as there were people who fell outside the defined boundaries. Not all wealthy men aspired to or attained civic office, at least at the end of the sixteenth century, and a few already possessed gentry status before they entered the town. The presence of such affluent men compared to the influx of migrants, whether these were poor burgesses or even poorer general labourers and vagrants who frequented the ale houses, suggests a widening social gap between the top and bottom of Nottingham society.

The question of social and political tensions in Nottingham has not been dealt with directly so far, but greater social distinctions give some indication that these existed. As a result of economic and demographic changes there was discontent between tenant millers and poor weavers and the men who threatened their livelihood, while concern for the plight of poor burgesses saw the burgesses in opposition to the Council over the management of common assets.

There is little evidence for rapid alterations in the fifteenth century in any aspect of the town discussed so far. Both population and economy, and the consequences they have for the town, show a gradual decline over time, despite some fluctuations at in the 1410s and 1480s, which may have been hardly perceivable to the men and women living in Nottingham during these years. There are, though, many indications that the beginning of the sixteenth century saw a more rapid depletion of population, particularly through high mortality, which had a knock-on effect for the local economy, exacerbated by excessive taxation. The speed of growth at the end of the sixteenth century must have been much more pronounced, although because of the missing records in the middle years of the century it is not clear when the recovery began.

All the features discussed above, whether they concern the changing occupations of civic leaders, better rental incomes, the widening gap between rich and poor, or the social and political tensions that resulted from it, all come to the fore in the last thirty years of the century. They must have been sufficiently visible to all townspeople that some were able to commercially exploit the developments, while others were motivated to raise concerns over social issues. These concerns



were voiced through the Sessions and Mickletorn juries, two of the bodies that were part of Nottingham's administrative structure, which is discussed in Part II.

## **Part II**

### **Administration**

## Chapter Five: Local government

Frequent mention was made in Part I to Nottingham's civic officers – the mayor, aldermen, common councillors, sheriffs and chamberlains – who together were responsible for the administration of Nottingham. The relationship between these groups was defined partly by royal charter and partly through local custom. It is generally argued that as the sixteenth century progressed, local administration became increasingly oligarchic and structured, while at the same time its responsibilities and authority grew.<sup>433</sup> This chapter investigates the stages of development of Nottingham's local government and its responsibilities, and where possible identifies the factors which stimulated change, whether these were local or national, economic, social or political. It also looks at the degree to which Nottingham's administration was oligarchic, and at some of the men who comprised that oligarchy.

### Local administration before 1449

By 1400, the administration of Nottingham was firmly established as lying with a mayor supported by two bailiffs. It is most likely that this administration grew from the guild merchant, granted to Nottingham in 1189, but how closely the guild was related to the mayoral office is ambiguous. Even though the Borough court met in the Guild Hall, a guild merchant is mentioned only once in the Borough court records, when in 1365 it was noted that John Burre had been accepted into the guild in the chamber of Robert de Hopwell. Hopwell was mayor

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<sup>433</sup> R Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture c.1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), p.19.

in 1365-66 and, it must be assumed was master or alderman of the guild.<sup>434</sup> Stevenson interprets this to mean that entrance into the guild was synonymous with enrolment as a burgess.<sup>435</sup> It is, however, not surprising that Hopwell would hold both posts given that the most distinguished men would always hold the most responsible and prestigious positions.

In 1399, a Charter of Richard II not only ratified the right of the mayor and bailiffs to hear all disputes about rents, property, trespass, covenants, contracts and so on within the town, but the town was granted the right to appoint four 'upright and lawful men' (*quatuor probiores et legaliores homines*) to hear suits brought under the Statute of Labourers, effectively making the mayor and four of his peers Justices of the Peace.<sup>436</sup>

In 1411-13 Nottingham experienced disturbances and insurrection resulting from the election of the mayor. The details surrounding these disturbances will be discussed in full in Chapter Seven, but in the context of this chapter they expose a modification in local administration. Edward I's Charter of 1283-84 had granted the right to elect a mayor and bailiffs to all the assembled burgesses.<sup>437</sup> By 1411 an electoral college of forty-eight comprised of former mayors and bailiffs and the current mayor had taken on this responsibility.<sup>438</sup> This amendment to electoral procedure is an unmistakable indication that by the beginning of the fifteenth century Nottingham's council was a closed institution. From this time on the

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<sup>434</sup> NA CA 1275, Stevenson, *I*, pp.188-89. Stevenson translates the phrase *se receptur' fuisse ad gildam mercatorum* as 'should have been', a later translation by Trevor Foulds is that Burre 'had been' accepted into the guild, which makes more sense.

<sup>435</sup> Stevenson, *II*, pp.x.

<sup>436</sup> NA CA 4166, Stevenson, *II*, pp.1-12.

<sup>437</sup> *congregatis burgensibus utriusque burgi eiusdem villae*; Stevenson, *I*, pp.58-59.

<sup>438</sup> TNA C145/292/24-26, translated in PRO, *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, Vol. 8, 1399-1422 (1968), p.469.

mayor and bailiffs were chosen by men who had previously held civic office, not the whole burgess community. Furthermore, as Table XXVI below shows, with nine exceptions, all the mayors elected in the first half of the fifteenth century (and probably the latter half of the fourteenth, although this study has not looked at these in detail) had previously held the post of bailiff, thus restricting eligibility and political authority even further.

As indicated by this Table, in general there was an interval of about ten years between a burgess's appointment as bailiff and his first year as mayor. Hugh de Lyndeby for example, was bailiff in 1390-91 and mayor in 1400-1 and Robert Glade was bailiff in 1396-97 and mayor eight years later in 1404-5. Two mayors appear to have held the post of chamberlain rather than bailiff. One, Robert Squire, may have been bailiff in the 1370s when there are missing records, the other is Henry Wilford whose election as mayor for a second time in 1412-13 resulted in the insurrection already mentioned.

The ten year gap between appointments as bailiff and mayor allowed a burgess to accumulate some wealth which, as discussed in Chapter Two, was a prerequisite for mayoral office. It also allowed time for a man to accrue some seniority amongst his peers, business experience, familiarity with town administration and personal maturity, but there were exceptions to this pattern.

Table XXVI: Mayors 1400-1450  
(years in office before 1400 and after 1450 in brackets)

Mayor	Years in office	Bailiff	Chamberlain	MP <sup>439</sup>	Occupation	Relationships
Hugh de Lyndeby	1400-1	1390-91				
Robert Squire	1401-2 (1384-85, 1390-91)					executors: John Heth and Simon Ilkeston (both mayors) supervisor of will: William Stokes (mayor)
Thomas de Maperley	1402-3	1381-82		1412	mercier	
Thomas de Stanley	1403-4	1385-86				
Robert Glade	1404-5, 1413-14, 1419-20, 1423-24	1396-97				
Thomas Kay	1405-6, 1415-16	1394-95			draper/merchant	
John Samon	1407-8 (1383-4, 1396-7)	1381-82				father of Richard Samon (mayor) grandson of John Tannesley (mayor)
John de Plumptre (sen)	1408-9 (1385-86, 1394-95, 1395-96)	1373-74			merchant	father of John (junior) (mayor)
John de Alestre	1409-10, 1414-15, 1420-21, 1426-27, 1430-31	1402-3		1422, 1424	merchant	son of Nicholas Alestre father of Thomas Alestre (mayor)
John de Tannesley	1410-11 (1399-1400)	1395-96		1412	merchant	grandfather of John Samon (mayor) executor: Richard Taverner (mayor)
John del Heth	1411-22	1397-98	1396-97, 1401-2		draper	
Henry de Wilford	1412-13 (1398-99)		1377-78		ironmonger	father of John Wilford (chamberlain) poss. related to John Wilford, merchant
William Stokes	1416-17, 1425-6				merchant	supervisor, Robert Squire's will
Richard Taverner	1417-18	1408-9			vintner	executor: John Tannesley will

<sup>439</sup> compiled from T Bailey, *Annals of Nottinghamshire, a History of the County of Nottingham, including the Borough*, Vol. 1 (London, 1859), pp.291-324 & *History of Parliament: Register of the Ministers and the Members of both Houses, 1439-1509* (London, 1938), pp.668-69.

Mayor	Years in office	Bailiff	Chamberlain	MP <sup>439</sup>	Occupation	Relationships
Richard Samon	1418-19, 1422-23, 1428-29, 1432-33, 1439-40 (1451-52)	1414-15		1420		son of John Samon (mayor) great-grandson of John Tannesley (mayor)
Thomas Poge (Page)	1421-22			1419, 1420, 1422, 1423, 1427		
John Plumptre (jun)	1427-28, 1437-38, 1445-46 (1454-55)	1415-16		1430, 1436	Calais Staple merchant	son of John (senior) (mayor)
William Brodholm	1429-30, 1434-35	1417-18	1421-22			
William Halifax	1431-32, 1440-41	1423-24		1436		
John Etwell	1433-34	1419-20		1428, 1429	merchant	
John Orgrave	1435-36, 1441-42 1449-50 (1456-57)		1432-22			
Thomas Alestre	1436-37, 1444-45 (1452-3, 1461-62 1469-70)			1441, 1448, 1449 (x2), 1467	Calais Staple merchant	son of John Alestre (mayor)
William Webster	1438-39	1424-25			fisher	
Thomas Thurland (Thirland)	1442-43, 1447-48, 1448-49 (1450-51, 1453-54 1458-59, 1459-60 1462-63, 1463-64)			1441, 1448, 1449 (x2), 1450, 1461	Calais Staple merchant	
Robert Rasyn	1443-44			1434, 1446	‘gent’	
Geoffrey Knyveton	1446-47		1421-22		‘Constable’ of Nottingham Castle	executor of Queen Joan of Navarre

Richard Samon, for example, was bailiff in 1414-15 and mayor only four years later in 1418-19, but he was the son of John Samon and grandson of John Tannesley, both of whom had been mayor at the end of the fourteenth and in the early years of the fifteenth centuries.<sup>440</sup> He was probably also descended from John Samon who had been mayor in the 1360s and an earlier Richard Samon, mayor in 1355-56. Another example is father and son, John and Thomas Alestre. John Alestre was enrolled as a burgess in 1395,<sup>441</sup> became bailiff in 1402-3 and was appointed mayor seven years later in 1409-10. His son, Thomas, became mayor in 1436-37 and was Member of Parliament for Nottingham in 1441, but there is no record of him being bailiff.

Another man who had not acted as bailiff was Geoffrey Kneveton or Kneton.<sup>442</sup> In 1432 he appeared in the Borough court as Seneschall or Steward of Lord Fitzhugh.<sup>443</sup> Deering describes him as being Constable or deputy to Ralph Cromwell, Governor of the Castle, and in 1435 he was named as co-plaintiff with Joan, Queen of England in six suits for debt.<sup>444</sup> After the death of Joan, he and Thomas Bugge, esquire, were named co-executors of her Will, again pursuing small debts through the Borough court.<sup>445</sup> Kneveton had been chamberlain in 1421-22 and was elected mayor in 1446-47, after the death of Joan, possibly on the basis of his Court connections. John Etwell, who was mayor in 1433-34, is

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<sup>440</sup> NA CA 1302; Foulds online CA 1320.

<sup>441</sup> NA CA 3942.

<sup>442</sup> Stevenson uses Kneveton but the more frequent spelling, as noted by Trevor Foulds is Kneton.

<sup>443</sup> Foulds online CA 1323.

<sup>444</sup> C Deering, *Nottinghamia vetus et nova or an Historical Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Nottingham* (Nottingham 1751, reprinted 1970), p.184; Foulds online CA 1325.

<sup>445</sup> Foulds online CA 1329/II.



also given as a co-plaintiff with Queen Joan, for small debts for hay.<sup>446</sup> He had, though, also been bailiff and MP for Nottingham.

It seems then, that in addition to the wealth established in Chapter Two as the overriding qualification for mayoral office, family and political connections also played a key role in selection for mayor, sometimes allowing a short-cut through the normal route to office.

A second conclusion which can be drawn from Table XXVI is that repeated office holding was common if not the norm. In the first fifty years of the fifteenth century there were twenty-six mayors in total, only ten of whom held the office for a single year. Of these Thomas Mapperley, Thomas Poge or Page,<sup>447</sup> John Etwell and Robert Rasyn had all represented Nottingham in Parliament, before a decree of 1436-37 ordered that all MPs should have previously held mayoral office.<sup>448</sup> This technicality though only reinforces the concept that political connections, or political utility, also governed mayoral elections.

Another common feature of this group of office holders is that they were chosen to witness documents, usually property transactions, which form part of the Borough Records collection. A few of these transactions were witnessed by men who were family friends or neighbours of one of the parties, but the majority were sealed or attested either wholly or partially by men who had at least held the post of bailiff and more usually mayor. In 1404-5, for example, John Alwyn was granted a messuage in Belward Gate by William and Agnes Shypwryght.<sup>449</sup> The

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<sup>446</sup> Foulds online CA 1322/II.

<sup>447</sup> Poge in NA CA 1317; Page in TNA C/241/299/6.

<sup>448</sup> NA CA 4771, Stevenson, *II*, p.424.

<sup>449</sup> NA CA 1303.

conveyance or 'charter' was brought to the Borough court to be enrolled where it was witnessed by the mayor, bailiffs and seven others. Two of these, William Misterton and Henry Smith of Gamston, held the messuages either side of the property in question but the remaining five witnesses were John Samon, John Tannesley, John Plumptre, Henry Wilford and John Albeyn. John Albeyn is perhaps the odd one out as he does not appear to have a connection with John Alwyn, the Shpywryghts or to have held civic office, the other four, however, had all been mayor.

A survey of conveyances shows that John Samon witnessed a total of thirty-three property transactions, John Tannesley forty-two, John Plumptre twenty-three and Henry Wilford fifteen, in addition to those documents they signed in their capacity as mayor or bailiff. Other former mayors who were frequent signatories were William Stokes who witnessed twenty-three documents, and Thomas Kay or Cay and John Alestre whose names appear at the end of twenty-five transactions. Most of these are documents enrolled in the Borough court, yet, as established in Chapter Three, these fifteenth-century merchants rarely brought cases to that court, so it cannot simply be that they were present because they had suits in process. Rather, by witnessing such documents, these men were acting on behalf of the community in an unspecified but recognised capacity. By 1446 this same group when not acting as mayor probably comprised the committee of twelve who, with the current mayor, was authorised to

end and dispose of as they thincke meete of all things belonginge to  
the Commynaltie of the towne without interrupcion or contradiccion  
of any person within the towne<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> NA CA 4771, Stevenson, *II*, p.424.

Furthermore, the institution of this committee probably reflected a long-standing arrangement whereby former mayors acted as councillors to the current mayor. Its importance to the town at this date is, however, difficult to assess because all reference to its existence have been lost except for brief notes taken at the beginning of the seventeenth century by William Gregory.<sup>451</sup> Its existence, however, is evidence for yet further narrowing of burgess participation in local government as the responsibility for decision making moved from the burgess community to a committee.

The administration of Nottingham, by 1449, was then already closed. Candidates for mayor were limited to wealthy men often with family and political connections. Burgesses participation had been reduced by the appointment of a committee which made decisions on behalf of the community and the election of new officers was restricted to a group of forty-eight men who had already held a civic office of some significance. This structure had been reached through small accretions of authority which had become custom, but these were about to become more formal.

### **The 1449 Charter of Incorporation**

One reason for looking so closely at this first fifty years of the fifteenth century is that in 1449 Nottingham received its Charter of Incorporation and was given county status.<sup>452</sup> The most important provision made in the Charter in relation to the mayoralty and local administration was the creation of seven aldermen who were to hold this office for life and who would take turns as mayor. After this date it is possible to see the role cycling around the group of aldermen approximately

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<sup>451</sup> Stevenson, *I*, p.xi.

<sup>452</sup> Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, *II*, pp.186-209.

every six years. These aldermen were also created Justices of the Peace authorised to hear cases of felony, and, as recognition of their status, granted the right to wear a livery equivalent to that of the mayor and aldermen of London.<sup>453</sup> As Caroline Barron points out, it was the wearing of livery that marked London aldermen from their fellow men, providing an ‘outward and visible sign of the special status of the wearer’.<sup>454</sup> If that was the purpose of livery in London, it must have had a similar, if not greater, effect in Nottingham, marking out a few men as members of a social and political elite.

This Charter is normally regarded as the pinnacle of success for late medieval Nottingham, but a more detailed examination of the circumstances that surround this important award reveals a rather different picture. The effect of the fifteenth century slump and restricted credit facilities on the textile industry was discussed in Chapter Three. There is evidence that Nottingham suffered from the same economic pressures experienced by Yorkshire wool merchants identified by Jennifer Kermode.<sup>455</sup> Richard Goddard, through an analysis of the suits for debt brought to the Borough court, has noted a ‘cooling of the local economy and a reduction in the volume of trade’ in Nottingham from the 1420s.<sup>456</sup> Barrie Dobson has described the period after 1450 as a time of ‘massive evasion of civic office’,<sup>457</sup> which saw the richest men avoiding their civic duties, though this may

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<sup>453</sup> *uti valeant togis, capiciis, et collobiis de una secta et una liberata simul cum furruris et linaturis collobiis illis convenientibus eisdem modo et forma prout Major et Aldermanni Civitatis nostrae London ununtur*, Stevenson, II, p.205.

<sup>454</sup> C Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People* (Oxford, 2004), p.145.

<sup>455</sup> J I Kermode, ‘Money and Credit in the Fifteenth Century: Some Lessons from Yorkshire’, *Business History Review*, 65:3 (1991) pp.475-501.

<sup>456</sup> R Goddard, ‘Surviving recession: English Borough Courts and Commercial Contraction, 1350-1500’, in R Goddard, J Langdon and M Müller (eds), *Survival and Discord in Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of Christopher Dyer* (Turnhout, 2010), p.81.

<sup>457</sup> R B Dobson, ‘Urban Decline in Late Medieval England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 27 (1997), p.13.

not be a straightforward correlation. Jennifer Kermode, for example, has argued that in York the wealthiest continued to hold office while evasion occurred amongst the lesser tradesmen and craftsmen, which seems also to have been the case in Nottingham.<sup>458</sup>

The lack of records between 1455 and 1481 means that it is not possible to say how widespread the problem was, but in 1461-62 John Dalby, who may have been a mason, paid £6 13s 3d to be excused office, while John Pool and Robert Howett of whom nothing else is known paid £5 6s 8d and £5 respectively to be exonerated from the office of sheriff.<sup>459</sup> In the same period there are examples of men holding these mid-level offices for two consecutive years: Thomas Bradmer held the post of chamberlain in both 1450-51 and 1451-52, Thomas Brampton was chamberlain for two consecutive years in 1459-60 and 1460-61 and John Coke succeeded him in 1461-62 and 1462-63. Prior to this, it was not unknown for a burgess to hold the post of sheriff or chamberlain on two occasions, but it was rare and there was usually a gap of ten years or so between each appointment. That some men were appointed in consecutive years suggests that there were no other suitable candidates. The inference, therefore, is that middle-ranking burgesses felt less financially able to hold office, which in turn supports the impression that the town's economy in the mid-fifteenth century was unhealthy, for some people at least.

In contrast, at the mayoral level, the richest man in Nottingham, Thomas Thurland, seems to have actively sought office, or been sought out. Although

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<sup>458</sup> J I Kermode, 'Urban Decline? The Flight from Office in Late Medieval York', *Economic History Review*, new series, 35:2 (1982), pp.181-82.

<sup>459</sup> NA CA 1660.

repeated office holding, as already discussed, was the rule there was generally a gap of six to ten years between each occasion. This interval was a constant until those years immediately before and after the 1449 Charter was granted. Although Thurland was never bailiff he became mayor nine times in twenty years, sometimes holding the post for two years consecutively. He was also Member of Parliament for Nottingham on five occasions often in the same year that he was mayor, the first of these being 1442-43. He was again mayor 1447-48 and 1448-49 and MP in both Parliaments of 1449 and again in 1450-51.<sup>460</sup> He was joined on all these occasions by Thomas Alestre and their attendance at both Parliaments of 1449 means that they must have been instrumental in negotiating the Charter of Incorporation granted by Henry VI. Thurland's influence was again called upon when the Charter was ratified by Edward IV in 1462.<sup>461</sup> He was appointed mayor in both 1458-59 and 1459-60, MP in 1461-62 and mayor again in 1462-63. This ratification cost the town two marks to the Hanaper and £17 in expenses to Thurland.<sup>462</sup>

Thomas Thurland and Thomas Alestre together with John Plumptre, another mayor who had represented Nottingham in Parliament, were all Calais Staple merchants.<sup>463</sup> Their business interests and that of other mayors of the 1440s and 1450s such as Richard Samon who are also referred to as merchants, must have been affected in some way by the mid-century downturn. For them, the Charter brought great benefits since before 1449 they would have been financially liable for the town's affairs whereas incorporation gave them protection from this

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<sup>460</sup> *History of Parliament: Register of the Ministers and of the Members of Both Houses 1439-1505* (London, 1938), pp.668-69.

<sup>461</sup> Charter of Edward IV, Stevenson, *II*, pp.246-47.

<sup>462</sup> NA CA 1660.

<sup>463</sup> PRO, *Calendar of Close Rolls*, Vol. VI (1939), p.15.

threat.<sup>464</sup> Robert Tittler has argued that charters of incorporation, rather than being luxuries afforded by prosperous towns, could be a means of shoring up a failing economy, and this may have been the situation in Nottingham.<sup>465</sup> The wording of the Charter acknowledges that Nottingham had been incorporated ‘under a certain form’ for a long time, so its grant simply formalised the protection it already offered.<sup>466</sup> It is impossible to say whether the Charter was sought by Thurland and his colleagues in order to support the economy or protect a system of local government that was under threat from a lack of willing candidates, but it was probably not acquired to celebrate the town’s success.

Nottingham’s Charter of Incorporation is simultaneously a symbol of continuity and a marker of significant change within Nottingham. What should be clear from the account above is that the Charter only specifically mentioned civic offices that were new to the town – the aldermen and the sheriffs – and even these roles were rooted in existing structures. David Marcombe in his discussion of late medieval Nottingham claims that the

main weakness of the [1449] charter was that it did not define the role of the burgesses and commons in the corporation or make the ruling cabal accountable to the broad mass of citizens<sup>467</sup>

The definition which Marcombe rightly identifies as missing from the Charter probably seemed unnecessary to Thurland and his colleagues as the relationships were already defined by custom and tradition, and therefore part of a continuity of government. At the same time, by reducing the number that comprised the ruling

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<sup>464</sup> M Weinbaum, *The Incorporation of Boroughs* (Manchester, 1937), p.xxiv.

<sup>465</sup> R Tittler, ‘Late Medieval Urban Prosperity’, *Economic History Review*, new series, 37:4 (1984), pp.551-54.

<sup>466</sup> *quae est et a diu extitit villa sub certa forma corporata*, Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, II, pp.188-89.

<sup>467</sup> D Marcombe, ‘The Late Medieval Town, 1449-1560’, in J Beckett (ed) *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), p.92.

group from the mayor and twelve, as in 1446, to the mayor and six, the Charter created a formal divide between the aldermen and the remaining six. The remnants of the original committee became known as common councillors and so by omission rather than design the Charter created a lower house or company in a new and undefined two-tier system of local government.

Even though the Charter concentrated authority into the hands of a small group of men, and was thus another step towards a closed administration, it also provided stability and continuity of rule, two highly desirable features of government. Politically, it ensured that the town was managed by a small group of wealthy and experienced men, who in return for shouldering this burden, were granted a degree of financial protection and the additional incentives of the near-gentry status accorded to Justices of the Peace and a livery of the highest order. Following Incorporation there may have had some economic improvement because, as discussed in Chapter One, market rents increased in the 1460s and there was investment in new building in the following decade. This improvement, though, was short-lived as the economic and demographic problems of the early sixteenth century took hold.

### **Local administration after 1449**

The administration of Nottingham after 1449 comprised three groups. The first, instituted by the Charter, was the group of seven aldermen who took turns to stand as mayor. The second was the common council which formed a lower tier of administration and the third was the group of former chamberlains and sheriffs which acted as an electoral college. This structure remained in place until the



early years of the seventeenth century, although there were some amendments over time.

### *The mayor and aldermen*

Unsurprisingly, as the institution formed by the Charter the least changed group was the aldermen. Even so, they were not unaffected by the economic and demographic changes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One change, already been noted in Chapter Three, is that in line with the changing economic base of Nottingham, civic officers increasingly derived their wealth from manufacturing trades, although their role was as owners not operatives. Other changes were more personal.

The first alteration is that the three families which had dominated the mayoralty at the end of the fourteenth and throughout the early fifteenth centuries – the Alestres, Plumptres and Samons – all but disappeared after 1450. For example, John and Thomas Alestre were mayors on a total of ten occasions after 1409-10, but Richard Alestre was mayor only once in 1485-86. Another Thomas Alestre was mayor in 1512-13; dying in office he was the last Alestre mayor in this century. Likewise John Plumptre, mayor for the final time in 1454-55 was the last member of his family to be mayor, although Nicholas Plumptre was Mayor's Clerk in the 1570s.<sup>468</sup> Richard Samon was also the last member of his family to be mayor, first holding the post in 1418-19 and on five other occasions. Of his descendants, Thomas Samon, who was the largest property owner in Nottingham in 1504 was said to be 'of Annesley Woodhouse' and therefore not a town

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<sup>468</sup> NA CA 3360.

resident.<sup>469</sup> He was also described as *armiger* while Richard Samon, who only appears in the ‘foreign pleas’ of the Borough court is described as knight.<sup>470</sup> They were not the only family to assume some of the aspects of gentrification. Despite being mayor and MP with great frequency, Thomas Thurland was simultaneously Lord of the Manor of Gamston.<sup>471</sup> His son, Richard, married Alice, daughter of Thomas Neville; she was a granddaughter of Sir William Babbington, Chief Justice of the King’s Bench and, after Richard’s death she married Sir Gervase Clifton.<sup>472</sup> Richard and Alice’s son, Thomas, was mayor in 1484-84 and 1490-91 but the family is absent from the administrative records from then on. They are, perhaps, examples of wealthy men who chose the ‘patrician splendours’ of the county rather than the recessionary problems of urban living, testifying to both the financial opportunities offered by Nottingham, and the social ambitions of its wealthiest residents in this later medieval period.<sup>473</sup>

They were replaced by new men, some of whom also established dynasties albeit short-lived ones. The Hunt family was prominent for a while between 1460 and 1500: John Hunt senior was mayor in the 1460s and John junior and Edmund or Edward Hunt both mayors in 1470s and 80s. Thomas Hunt, who may or may not be related, was a legal adviser to the town particularly during a dispute between Nottingham and Retford, going so far as to consult Domesday Book in the matter.<sup>474</sup> He also acted for Nottingham in an expensive legal dispute against John

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<sup>469</sup> S N Mastoris, ‘A Tax Assessment of 1504 and the Topography of Early Tudor Nottingham’ *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 89 (1985), p.39; NA CA 1383b.

<sup>470</sup> NA CA 1400.

<sup>471</sup> University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections, Ne M 56.

<sup>472</sup> S Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991) p.237.

<sup>473</sup> A R Bridbury, ‘English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages’, *Economic History Review*, second series, 34:1 (1981), p.19.

<sup>474</sup> NA CA 4441, Stevenson, *III*, p.266.

Mapperley over a piece of ground called Cornerwong.<sup>475</sup> Another Thomas, however, son of Edmund and like his father a merchant, did not take on any civic responsibilities.<sup>476</sup>

Perhaps the richest mayor of this post-1485 period was William Hegyn, a Calais Staple merchant whose goods were valued in c.1500 at 300 marks for which he paid 50s tax.<sup>477</sup> He was a Nottingham man and his father and brother, both Henry, were butchers. William died before 1508 and his executor was his son, another William.<sup>478</sup> William junior was sheriff in 1509-10 but did not achieve any higher office as he too died sometime before 1515.<sup>479</sup>

William junior's death epitomises the problems that hit the mayoralty in the early sixteenth century. Seven of the men appointed as mayor in the late 1510s and early 1520s held the post only once and one newly appointed alderman died before he had the chance to become mayor. A consequence of this was that the stability which the 1449 Charter should have provided was undermined. Only three men, John Williamson, John Rose and Thomas Mellers, had any longevity as mayor. It seems, then, that the economic and demographic problems of this early part of the sixteenth century, already identified in Chapters Two and Three, were joined by political instability which must mark a low-point in the history of Nottingham.

One family which seems to have escaped and even prospered from the problems of the 1510s and 1520s was the Mellers. Richard Mellers became mayor for the

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<sup>475</sup> NA CA 4533, Stevenson, *II*, pp.397-98.

<sup>476</sup> NA CA 4544b, Stevenson, *III*, p.431.

<sup>477</sup> NA CA 7481i & ii.

<sup>478</sup> NA CA 1382.

<sup>479</sup> NA CA 1387.

first time in 1499-1500; he was succeeded by his sons Robert and Thomas and in turn by his grandson-in-law, Humphrey Quernby who was also MP for Nottingham in 1554 and 1562<sup>480</sup> and then by his great-grandson John Gregory. Another grandson, Fabian, became a common councillor, served as coroner and was appointed alderman but resigned in 1586-87 before he became mayor due to his wife's ill health; he was dead by 1589-90.<sup>481</sup> Fabian's mother had taken John Heskey as a second husband. Although he had not held any other office, he was a common councillor by 1551 and became mayor in 1557-58, but died in office.<sup>482</sup> It seems his pathway to the mayoralty was eased by his new family connections. Later sixteenth-century networks include the Bonner and Alvey families, when father was succeeded by son.

There are several observations to be made about these examples of dynastic success or failure. The first is the social mobility demonstrated by the dominant families of the early fifteenth century who acquired gentry status through the acquisition of land and their civic roles as Justices of the Peace. The second is that in addition to wealth as a pre-requisite for civic office (as established in Chapters Two and Three) family networks were useful, if not essential, levers. Both these factors contribute to the social distinctions that separated the community leaders from the rest of the burgess community, and even further from the non-burgess groups. The third observation is that the political instability of the early years of the sixteenth century which was a consequence of the high mortality rate of aldermen and the resultant ascendancy of three men, must have reinforced the

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<sup>480</sup> Bailey, *Annals*, Vol. II, pp.443 & 470.

<sup>481</sup> NA CA 3368, 4614.

<sup>482</sup> NA CA 4477.

economic difficulties. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, their time in office was marked by friction if not factionalism.

### *The common council*

The common council developed from the 1446 committee of ‘mayor and twelve’ omitted from the provisions of the 1449 Charter. Following the creation of seven aldermen the remaining six men became common councillors and Gregory notes that, after 1463, orders were made in the name of the mayor and the common council.<sup>483</sup> It is probably on this basis that Stevenson headed extracts from the Mayor’s books as ‘Minutes of the common council’ which is misleading as this title is not given in the original manuscripts. In 1552, the orders were made by the mayor and aldermen, with the consent of the common council while in 1594 only the order is noted and not who made it.<sup>484</sup> Nevertheless, these examples show that the role of the common council was to ratify the work of the aldermen on behalf of the wider community, thus excluding common burgesses from day-to-day decision making. Councillors were also involved in matters that affected the security of Nottingham. For example, in 1499-1500 four common councillors were part of the committee which heard a deposition for treasonable language and, one hundred years later, townsmen were interrogated by common councillors about their role in an attempt to overturn the decisions of the mayor.<sup>485</sup>

As an undefined group, the common council probably was unsatisfactory. Certainly, in 1600 the Mickletorn complained that councillors had been chosen to confer with the aldermen ‘for the good of the Commons and in steade of the

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<sup>483</sup> NA CA 4471, Stevenson, *II*, p.425.

<sup>484</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, pp.100 & 239. See NA CA 3358 & 3374 for original MSS.

<sup>485</sup> NA CA 4547, 3376.

commeneres' but neglected this duty; the mayor was asked to issue an order that any councillor absenting himself without good reason should be expelled.<sup>486</sup> This complaint, though, was made during a period of negotiation which led, a few years later, to a merger of councillors with chamberlains and sheriffs to form an enlarged council, and so cannot necessarily be taken at face value.

### *The chamberlains and sheriffs*

Under the terms of the 1449 Charter the office of bailiff was replaced by that of sheriff; two were elected every year. The post of chamberlain, however, was not part of the Charter's provisions. For most of the fifteenth century it was usual for a man to be appointed as bailiff or sheriff and then as chamberlain about ten years later. This pattern changed over time so that by the end of the sixteenth century it was the norm for men to be chamberlain first and sheriff a year, or at most two years, later. It may be that this change in the order of progression was an enticement to take on the onerous role of chamberlain in order that they could progress to the more formally constituted and possibly prestigious one of sheriff. The Mayor's book for 1499-1500 includes a list of twenty-two sheriffs followed by the word 'crymsyn', referring to their red livery.<sup>487</sup> The term 'Clothing' used to describe the group of former chamberlains and sheriffs who elected the mayor derives from this livery, although it is only used after 1578.<sup>488</sup>

While the 1449 Charter stated that the aldermen and sheriffs should be chosen by the burgesses it is clear that, as before, elections were limited to a relatively small group of men. The first surviving list of electors which dates from 1495-96 shows

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<sup>486</sup> NA CA 3020.

<sup>487</sup> NA CA 4547.

<sup>488</sup> NA CA 3363.

that the group comprised forty-eight former chamberlains, seven aldermen, six common councillors, the Recorder and two coroners, as well as the newly elected sheriffs and chamberlain, or a total of sixty-six men.<sup>489</sup> The number of this group was, however, flexible as a similar document for 1500-1 lists sixty men, while the Hall book for 1512-13 records the aldermen, common councillors and just thirty-six others.<sup>490</sup> This smaller group reinforces the argument made above that the economic and demographic problems of the 1510s and 1520s had political implications, among them this much reduced group of electors. Another indication that this was a politically difficult time for Nottingham is that it was a period when, yet again, men held the office of sheriff and chamberlain in consecutive years, or even both offices in the same year. Thomas Morton, for example, was chamberlain in 1510-11 and both chamberlain and sheriff in 1511-12, and Robert Mody held both posts in 1522-23, as did James Mason in 1529-30. There may not have been enough men with the right experience to make up a bigger electoral group. Although chamberlains and sheriffs had specific duties, their role as electors gave them civic responsibility long after they had finished their year in office which made them part of extended ruling group. The end of the sixteenth century saw calls to formally recognise this role, something that was finally achieved at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

### **The later sixteenth century**

In contrast to the earlier part of the century, the last thirty years of the sixteenth century saw a more stable mayoralty. All the mayors from 1570, with the exception of Robert Stanley and Robert Marsh held the office at least twice. John

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<sup>489</sup> NA CA 4544c.

<sup>490</sup> NA CA 3351, 3355a.

Gregory was mayor on five occasions between 1561 and 1586 and Robert Alvey may have held the post four times between 1573 and 1594, although Alvey senior might have been mayor before 1588 (the year he died)<sup>491</sup> and Alvey junior after that date. Similarly, John Brownlow was mayor five times.<sup>492</sup> Richard Hurt, Richard Morehagh, Humphrey Bonner and William Freeman who were all appointed aldermen during the 1590s show a similar longevity through the first fifteen to twenty years of the seventeenth century.

As in earlier years, there are some dynastic elements to these names. The Alvy family is noted above, and John Gregory has already been mentioned as a descendant of Humphry Querneby and Richard Mellers, while Humphrey Bonner was almost certainly the son of Nicholas Bonner, mayor in the 1560s. In Chapter Two it was pointed out that several of them are given the honorific ‘gentleman’, and therefore the attributes of gentrification, yet another example of social separation.

Another factor in this separation, it is argued, was the growing responsibilities and authority of local administration, ensuing from an increasingly centralised government,<sup>493</sup> and it is these developments of civic responsibility which are explored next.

### **Civic responsibilities of the mayor and aldermen**

As officers of the town the mayor and aldermen were responsible for protecting Nottingham’s assets in the form of property (land and houses) owned by the town

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<sup>491</sup> NA CA 4613.

<sup>492</sup> Stevenson, ‘Appendix’, IV, p.418; in one year his name is given as Brownlay.

<sup>493</sup> P Clark, ‘Introduction’, in P Clark (ed), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Vol. II, 1540-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), p.5.



and its income from tolls and market fees. In 1452, for example, it was agreed that the merchants of Coventry and Nottingham should be free from toll in each town.<sup>494</sup> As both towns were probably in economic decline in the middle of the fifteenth century, it is likely that this agreement was intended to boost trade and protect the merchants who made up the council. In 1480, when Nottingham was beginning to make some economic recovery, the mayor pursued the burgesses of Retford for unpaid tolls.<sup>495</sup> In 1516, when the incomes of both town and Priory were probably much reduced, an agreement was reached with the Prior of Lenton about tolls and the letting of booths and shops at Lenton Fair to Nottingham burgesses, again probably to boost trade.<sup>496</sup>

When necessary the town went to court to enforce its rights. The 1480s, for example, saw the protracted dispute with John Mapperley over a piece of land called Cornerwong, already mentioned several times. As well as the services of Thomas Hunt, whose role was mentioned above, this complicated case required an exemplification of the deeds by the Archbishop of York, a deputation from the Mickletorn jury to the Prior of Shelford who at one time had held the deeds, and the engagement of Master Fitzwilliam and Master Robert Molyneux as legal council.<sup>497</sup> John Mapperley petitioned the king and the dispute was arbitrated on his behalf by Sir Gervase Clifton and Sir Charles Pilkington.<sup>498</sup> The legal expenses of the case totalled £14 15s or 55% of the total town expenses for that

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<sup>494</sup> NA CA 4472b, Stevenson, *II*, pp.362-65.

<sup>495</sup> NA CA 4516, Stevenson, *II*, pp.310-17, CA 4516b, 4562, 4517c, Stevenson, *III*, pp.426-27.

<sup>496</sup> NA CA 4568, Stevenson, *III*, pp.345-52.

<sup>497</sup> NA CA 4522, Stevenson, *II*, pp.340-46; NA CA 4534, Stevenson, *II*, pp.392-94; NA CA 4731, Stevenson, *II*, pp.396-97.

<sup>498</sup> NA CA 4532, Stevenson, *II*, p.395-96; CA 4524, 4525, Stevenson, *II*, pp.398-400.

year.<sup>499</sup> Some of the costs were probably met by loans in return for long leases granted by the town as pointed out in Chapter One.

The collection of rents owing on town property was one of the chamberlains' duties, but management of leases was the mayor and council's responsibility. The town rentals, which begin in 1531, show that Nottingham owned considerable property ranging from gardens, particularly on the south and west near Greyfriars and the Castle, barns in Barkergate, houses, tenements, fishing rights, mills, booths and shops, as well as the crops from East and West Croft which were let to burgesses.<sup>500</sup> This portfolio of property increased over time. The commercial development of land next to the Guild Hall, bequeathed by John Pool has been discussed in Chapters One and Two.<sup>501</sup> At about the same time, in 1469, John Mapperley enfeoffed land on Ryehill for the use of the town.<sup>502</sup> Seventy years later, in 1543 Elizabeth Gelstroppe bequeathed the corporation two stables, a messuage on Fishergate and another on Smithy Row. A further three messuages on Barkergate were to be used as bede houses, and a garden and house on Fairmaiden Lane was given with the particular request that 8d from the rent was paid each year to the Common Sergeant for overseeing the bede houses.<sup>503</sup> She also left two gardens with the condition that the mayor use their rent to pay for lights on the altars at St Mary's Church and St Peter's or, if this was not allowed by law – injunctions issued in 1536 and 1538 had condemned the use of lights and images – for the maintenance of the Trent bridges. The transfer of the Tanners

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<sup>499</sup> NA CA 1602; L Attreed, *The King's Towns: Identity and Survival in Late medieval English Boroughs* (New York, 2001), pp.140-41, Table 6, note 2.

<sup>500</sup> NA CA 2166.

<sup>501</sup> NA CA 4513, Stevenson, *II*, pp.304-308.

<sup>502</sup> NA CA 4496, Stevenson, *II*, pp.276-79.

<sup>503</sup> NA CA 4581, Stevenson, *III*, pp.394-398.

property just prior to the Chantries Act, described in Chapter Three, is another example of such nervousness.

The Reformation, which was the source of Elizabeth's fear for her lights, both benefitted the town and added to the workload of the mayor, aldermen and chamberlains. As a result of the Chantries Act of 1547, the charitable foundation which maintained Hethbeth Bridge (as Trent Bridge was called until the later sixteenth century) was disbanded. Where formerly the mayor and aldermen had only appointed the collector of alms and auditing the Bridge Warden's accounts, they became responsible for 'mending, sustaining, and repairing of their bridges over the water of Trent'.<sup>504</sup> To replace lost charitable donations the lands belonging to the Chantry of St Mary and the former Hospital of St John were given to the town by Edward VI in 1550-51, for the support of the Trent Bridges.<sup>505</sup> The lands of St John's were extensive; in addition to the buildings and grounds there were thirty acres of arable land, four acres of meadow, and a hundred acres of pasture with their appurtenances.<sup>506</sup> St Mary's Chantry brought to the town tenements in Fisher Gate, Lister Gate, Goose Gate, Stoney Street, Fairmaiden Lane and St Mary Gate; closes near Goose Gate, a shop in the Shambles on Middle Pavement and a barn with tenements in Barker Gate which in 1504 had been assessed for tax at £8 13s 4d.<sup>507</sup> The Tanners' gift similarly added to the property portfolio and financial responsibilities of town officials.

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<sup>504</sup> NA CA 4493, Stevenson, *II*, pp.264-267; for example NA CA 1902; NA CA 4176, Stevenson, *IV*, pp.14-21.

<sup>505</sup> NA CA 4176, Stevenson, *IV*, pp.14-21.

<sup>506</sup> NA CA 4593, Stevenson, *IV*, p.23.

<sup>507</sup> Mastoris, 'Tax Assessment of 1504', pp.39 & 43.

The mayor and aldermen as Justices of the Peace were, however, also officers of the sovereign, responsible for maintaining the law and keeping the peace. As well as presiding over the town's courts, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, they made ordinances to ensure the town was in good order. Some are recorded in the Mayor's and Hall books, but most have been lost because Nottingham's Red Book was severely damaged by fire in the mid-seventeenth century.

They were also responsible for implementing and administering central legislation which became increasingly prolific during the sixteenth century. Between 1509 and 1603 there were ninety-seven statutes in the Statute Book conferring powers specifically on mayors and other town officials, and virtually no statutes limiting their power.<sup>508</sup> The prosecution of Thomas Nix and the registration of apprentices, discussed in Chapter Three, are examples of the implementation of statute. The growing number of lay subsidies which had to be assessed and collected, and legislation designed to control vagrants and beggars are yet more. The chamberlains' accounts for 1568-69 include four payments made to messengers or 'pursuivants' bringing proclamations; one is described as being about the lottery, another concerns ships and the French and a third is carried under the Great Seal.<sup>509</sup> There are also two payments for making notice boards for displaying these proclamations, suggesting improved literacy.<sup>510</sup> Other accounts contain similar payments.

So far the responsibilities of the council have been discussed in terms of town administration, but the mayor and aldermen were also expected to represent

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<sup>508</sup> R Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture c.1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), p.240.

<sup>509</sup> NA CA 2168.

<sup>510</sup> NA CA 1610.

Nottingham's worth and dignity through ceremonial and social duties. Charles Phythian-Adams has argued for a 'pre-Reformation dichotomy of the year'.<sup>511</sup> He describes the months between mid-summer and Christmas Eve (25 June – 24 December) as secular when there were few, if any, public occasions. The second, 'ritualistic', half of the year, was characterised by processions and ceremonies, many connected to religious festivals, and culminated in the observance of Corpus Christi,<sup>512</sup> which, as Mervyn James points out was a visual representation of the 'structure of precedence and authority' in a town.<sup>513</sup> The extent of Nottingham's Corpus Christi procession is unknown because the only surviving fragmentary evidence is found in the accounts of St George's Guild, which list the cost of banners and torches and the purchase of beer and cheese to feed the carriers.<sup>514</sup> There were other processions, although again the evidence is limited. The chamberlains' accounts for 1530-31 list the costs of the 'Gate' or procession to Southwell on Whit Monday (6 June).<sup>515</sup> Payments were made for plates, dishes, dancers, ale, fabric for the Morris Men's coat as well as a sum to Robert Dampont for carrying the cross. The total was 17s 7d, but this may have included some costs for May Day celebrations.<sup>516</sup> Such activities were replaced after the Reformation by more extensive May Day activities. The chamberlains' accounts for 1568-69 and 1571-72 record the costs for dancers and waits who brought in

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<sup>511</sup> C Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen: the Communal Year at Coventry, 1450-1550', in P Clark and P Slack, *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (London, 1972), p.73.

<sup>512</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony', pp. 73-74.

<sup>513</sup> M James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town', *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), p.4.

<sup>514</sup> J A Mills, 'The Guild of St. George, the Parish of St. Peter's and the Town of Nottingham: 1459-1546', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 111 (2007), pp.82-83.

<sup>515</sup> C R Cheney, *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History*, new edition revised by M Jones, (Cambridge, 2000), p.209.

<sup>516</sup> NA CA 1608.

May Day, as well as gunners and gun powder which added to the festivities.<sup>517</sup> They are omitted from later accounts, though, perhaps because of Protestant disapproval of such revelry.

There were other ceremonial occasions; under the 1449 Charter, Nottingham's aldermen were granted the same gowns, hoods and cloaks as that worn by the mayor and aldermen of London as a livery.<sup>518</sup> Notes on Nottingham's Red Book show that both the aldermen and the Clothing were to wear their livery at Michaelmas after the election of the new mayor and the Saturday following in procession and at mass, both occasions which fall into the 'secular' part of the year.<sup>519</sup> They were also to wear it at Christmas, Candlemas and Easter, again in procession and at mass.<sup>520</sup> By the sixteenth century, the aldermen's wives ('aldersis') also had a livery and were exhorted to wear it 'as hath bene vused of aunsiant costome one suche daies as is usiall and apontyd'.<sup>521</sup> The dignity of livery was clearly something the town desired, to the point that the Mickletorn jury of 1599 requested that 'M[aister] Mayor shalle nott walke the towne withe outt his gowne and tippette'.<sup>522</sup>

Probably more idiosyncratic of Nottingham was the Mayor's Fishing, although when it was held is never mentioned and therefore whether it fell into the 'secular' or 'ritualistic' part of the year is unknown. This annual event is mentioned in the

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<sup>517</sup> NA CA 1611, 1612.

<sup>518</sup> Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, *II*, p.205.

<sup>519</sup> NA CA 4770, Stevenson, *III*, pp.448-49 and footnote 3. The use of the word 'Clothing' suggests a post-Reformation date (see above), but the list is an eighteenth-century copy of extracts from the Red Book, destroyed by fire in that century. The original list, which Stevenson dates to Henry VII, may not have used that term.

<sup>520</sup> NA CA 4770.

<sup>521</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>522</sup> NA CA 3020.

Red Book<sup>523</sup> but what it entailed is only traceable through the town's accounts. It is first mentioned in the chamberlains' accounts for 1464-65 when 2s 6½d was paid for the 'fishers that laboured', 12d for fishing line and 4d for two fishers for two days at 4d per day.<sup>524</sup> By 1485 the event had extended to three days and the expense increased to 8s 9d which included not just the cost of line and labour but the purchase of white and red herring, salt fish, oil, salt, bread and ale and the payment of 4d to a man to watch the pole after 'þe fift nyght aft[er] hit was kut'.<sup>525</sup> A more lavish version of the meal may have occurred in 1494, although it is referred to as the mayor's dinner. The menu, which included turbot, salmon, pike, ling fish, cinnamon, saffron, sugar, mustard, bread and ale cost, 31s 8d. The accounts show two receipts against this cost; 14s was received at the dinner and 6s 8d was paid for the fishing poles – presumably they were sold off after the occasion – leaving 11s 'lost'.<sup>526</sup>

Entertaining was clearly part of the mayor's duties as other dinners hosted by him are found in financial statements. The 1503-4 accounts alone record 2s for the Mickletorn feast, 5s 5d for a breakfast held in a chapel of St Mary's for a meeting between the mayor and aldermen, Master Pierpont, Master Beryn and Master Neville, and 7s for wine, flour, pepper and other spices when the king's gift of venison was eaten.<sup>527</sup> The visiting Assize judges were regularly wined and dined; the chamberlains' accounts for 1558-59 show 12d was paid for a 'pottell of wyne gyffen to the Justice of the Contrey at the Cessions holden at Not[tingham] at

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<sup>523</sup> see note 87 above.

<sup>524</sup> NA CA 1601a.

<sup>525</sup> NA CA 1603.

<sup>526</sup> NA CA 1604.

<sup>527</sup> NA CA 1601.

Mighelmasse'.<sup>528</sup> In 1572-73, 5s 2d was spent on two gallons of wine and two pounds of sugar for the Justices of Assize at Lenton and a further 5s 2d for more wine and sugar when the mayor and aldermen breakfasted with the Justices.<sup>529</sup>

Above these more formal occasions, the mayor was responsible for providing popular entertainment for the community. There is a note in the Red Book which may date from the reign of Henry VII that the mayor should give his brethren 'knowledge of ev[ery] bere baityng and bull baiting within the town to see the sport of the game aft[er] the old custom and usage'.<sup>530</sup> Other than this, information about town entertainment appears in the chamberlains' accounts from the end of the sixteenth century. As part of the growing use of statute, an Act of 1572 designed to control the movement of vagabonds required that the mayor licence visiting troupes, which is perhaps why so many appear in the accounts around this date.<sup>531</sup> In that year alone, as the list below shows, there was some entertainment sponsored by the council in every month except September, which saw the election of new civic officials, and December and April. The latter exceptions were perhaps because Advent and Easter fall at these times and probably reflect changing cultural practices in line with Protestant sensibilities.<sup>532</sup> It is evident from the accounts, though, that there were more public 'entertainments' in the earlier, ritualistic part of the year when traditionally ceremonial events took place.

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<sup>528</sup> NA CA 1610.

<sup>529</sup> NA CA 1610, 1612.

<sup>530</sup> NA CA 4470, see note 87 above.

<sup>531</sup> S Keenan, *Travelling Players in Shakespeare's England* (Houndmills, 2002), pp.4-5.

<sup>532</sup> Easter Day fell on 6 April in 1572. C R Cheney (ed), *A Handbook of Dates for Students of British History*, new edition revised by M Jones (Cambridge, 2000)



The accounts for 1571-72 include the following payments<sup>533</sup>

		£	s	d
20-Oct	Sir Thomas Cocken's musicians			8
20-Oct	Wakefield waits			8
16-Nov	Derby waits		1	
16-Nov	Newark waits			8
20-Nov	Lord Willoughby's musicians		1	4
02-Jan	six minstrels		1	6
06-Jan	Leeds waits & Barton on Humber waits			10
11-Jan	Leicester waits		1	
	Derby and Codnor waits		1	4
09-Jan	Earl of Shrewsbury's bearward		6	8
09-Jan	Earl of Worcester's players		6	8
20-Jan	Sir Richard Stapleton's players		3	4
20-Jan	Sir John Gresley's musicians		1	
22-Jan	Sir William Holles' musicians		1	
16-Feb	Master Forman's minstrels			4
02-Mar	Chesterfield waits			6
16-Mar	Master Pollyt's musicians		1	
19-Mar	Lord Monteagle's bearward		5	
26-Mar	Leeds waits			6
	Wyle of Wymeswold for baiting a bull		2	
Sunday after				
May Day	gunners, dancers and others, and gun powder	1	4	
23-May	Queen's Players	1		
23-May	Annesley and Cropwell Players			8
07-Jun	Dancers at Clifton Bridge		1	
07-Jun	Dancers from Kinoulton		1	
12-Jun	Radford Waits			4
17-Jun	Lord Monteagle's players		6	8
29-Jul	Newark waits			6
	a poor man for showing a strange beast			6
20-Aug	Earl of Leicester's players		10	
20-Aug	Grantham waits			6

The accounts for 1568-69 show a similar list, but subsequent accounts indicate a decreased in the number of 'players' who visit the town. In 1586-87, for example the accounts include only two specific payments for players: one for 13s 4d given to the Queen's players and musicians and one to Thomas French and his fellows, although there are thirty-four payments for musicians, minstrels and waits, almost double that of fifteen years earlier.<sup>534</sup>

<sup>533</sup> NA CA 1612.

<sup>534</sup> NA CA 1626.

The appearance of troupes of players in Nottingham is an intriguing development. It is generally thought that Protestantism was opposed to dramatic performance, but this is really only the case in the last twenty or so years of Elizabeth I's reign. In the 1540s, troupes such as the King's Men, the Duke of Somerset's Men and the Lord Admiral's men presented Protestant-oriented drama, and despite attempts at suppression by Mary and Philip, such works continued to be performed.<sup>535</sup> The Earl of Leicester's players and the Queen's players, which were both in Nottingham in 1571-72, were distinguished groups. The Earl of Leicester was known to have been at the forefront of Protestant propaganda, so at least one of the groups visiting Nottingham on a regular basis probably performed plays and interludes with a Protestant message.<sup>536</sup> The Queen's Men, on the other hand, were 'a tool of government policy' and it is suspected that they may have acted as spies for Walsingham.<sup>537</sup> The fall-off of visiting troupes in the 1580s must reflect a Protestant-inspired change of attitude to players, although the increased number of musicians suggests that the appetite and audience for entertainment was not diminished.

The 1586-87 accounts reveal another aspect of the new responsibilities for local administration, and of the social problems of the later sixteenth century.<sup>538</sup> Ten pages of this account are devoted to 'Presents and Rewards'. Some of these were to musicians and players and others to local worthies, but there are ninety payments made to poor men and women passing through the town. Some of these

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<sup>535</sup> P W White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1993), p.58.

<sup>536</sup> White, *Theatre and Reformation*, p.63.

<sup>537</sup> A F Johnson, 'Tudor Drama, Theatre and Society', in R Tittler and N Jones (eds), *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p.441.

<sup>538</sup> NA CA 1626.

were to soldiers lamed or maimed while in service; seventeen had been fighting in Ireland, twenty-six in Flanders and eight are unspecified. There were also seven payments made specifically to men who had suffered losses due to fire. The majority of other payments were to poor men, women and children passing through, usually with a passport. They are often blind, deaf or crippled – one was brought into town on a cart, another in a barrow – and some have a guide. The list includes a lame man and his guide travelling from Cambridge to Bath, two poor scholars from Oxford and three poor maidens going to London. There was a payment of 12d to a poor man in the Bars (the lock-up) for debt, some collections for the hospitals in York and Beverley and 10s was given towards a collection at the request of Sir Gervase Clifton. Only one recipient is named: Whitehead, a glover, and his children received 6d, and it is possible that he is the only Nottingham resident to receive such a payment. Excluding the 10s paid to the Clifton collection, the town expended in excess of 44s 7d on the poor.<sup>539</sup> Although insignificant compared to the £10 6s paid for a fat ox for the Earl of Rutland, this is still a large sum for which the town would receive no practical benefit.

In the following year thirteen pages are given over to ‘presents and rewards’ and again these include many payments to the poor, sick and transitory. One interesting entry is for 6s 8d given to ‘a souldiar whose name was Johnsone, for and towarde the Ransomyng of a Captayne beine taken prysoner’.<sup>540</sup> These few examples give some idea of the mobility, and poverty, of the population in late sixteenth-century England, and it is perhaps no surprise that local and central governments were keen to control poor migrants.

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<sup>539</sup> A few of the entries are obscured by conservator’s tape.

<sup>540</sup> NA CA 1627.

## **Conclusion**

There can be no doubt that in 1400 Nottingham's local government was oligarchic comprising a mayor, two bailiffs and an undefined and informal, but powerful, group of men. As well as governing the town, several also represented it in Parliament. Furthermore, in the absence of tax returns for the early fifteenth century, their occupations indicate that they were, as their successors would be, the wealthiest men, many of whom were connected to each other through family networks while others had links to the royal court. The 1449 Charter did not introduce a new system of government, but simply ratified and formalised the existing oligarchic structure. In doing so it reinforced and formally defined the responsibility of a small group of men and recognised their new authority through their appointment as Justices of the Peace and the status of a prestigious livery. Once in place this structure remained unchanged until the end of the sixteenth century.

One continuity in local government is the existence of family dynasties and networks, even if the families themselves evolved or moved on. Entry into the mayoralty was restricted by wealth, but family networks such as the Samons and Alestres in the early fifteenth century and the Alvys and Bonners at the end of the sixteenth made it even more exclusive. The only time this additional pre-requisite for mayoral office was relaxed was in the early sixteenth century when the prevailing economic conditions resulted in instability and the need to widen the field of potential candidates. Even so the Mellers family network extended into four generations. This argues for a degree of social separation on the grounds of not just wealth and civic status, but through the exclusivity of family networks

that exercised political influence. This, however, is as perceptible in the fifteenth century as it is in the sixteenth, if not more so.

In contrast, there is considerable evidence that the authority and responsibility of the Council developed over time, particularly after the mid-sixteenth-century Reformation. The Council not only managed more property but was responsible for a wide range of activities from maintaining the Trent bridges to executing legislation, and authorising entertainment to controlling beggars. These greater powers of regulation can only have emphasised the authority of the Council, and with it the personal status of its members and their families. Unlike the provisions of the 1449 Charter which were essentially a ratification of existing practice, the central government imposition of greater responsibilities and greater authority at the end of the sixteenth century must have been felt by all Nottingham residents.

## Chapter Six: The Courts

The previous Chapter looked at the Council's responsibility for town management and administration, but much of the mayor's power derived from his role as legal arbiter. He presided over the Borough court and made judgements on all manner of social misdemeanour, from the pettiest of theft to major felony. One of the aims of this Chapter is to look at the work of Nottingham's courts to extract further details of the affects of social, economic, demographic and political change.

Courts were not simply places where justice was administered, they also offered opportunities for burgesses to participate in the management of their community through minor court offices or membership of the presentment juries that reported to the mayor and aldermen. In this they are Nottingham's equivalent to the substructures of local government identified in London by Ian Archer.<sup>541</sup> This Chapter, therefore, also examines the composition of these juries and their relationship to each other and the courts to further evaluate the social complexities of the town. It also looks briefly at the administrative procedures of these courts to investigate Robert Tittler's argument that bureaucracy and administrative professionalism expanded to keep pace with social and economic change and that the 'end of the middle ages ... had a great deal to do with political and administrative change'.<sup>542</sup>

Nottingham's right to administer its own justice came through the accretion of privileges granted in a series of charters. These were first defined in Edward II's

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<sup>541</sup> I W Archer, *Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1991), p.14.

<sup>542</sup> R Tittler, 'The End of the Middle Ages in the English Country Town', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 184 (1987), pp.472-73.

Charter of 1314 which allowed the mayor and bailiffs to hear all actions pertaining to Nottingham burgesses without interference from the king's justices, to which was added the return of writs under Henry III's Charter of 1355.<sup>543</sup> Yet more independence was achieved in 1399 by Henry IV's Charter which granted to the mayor and Recorder and 'four other upright and lawful men' the authority to hear 'all matters, plaints, defaults, causes and articles that pertain the office of Justice of the Peace of Labourers and Artificers' and retain the 'fines and amercements, issues and profits arising from the same justice-ship'.<sup>544</sup> By 1400, then, the mayor and bailiffs of Nottingham were able to deal with all types of crime except felony in their own right subject, of course, to them applying the king's law.

Full judicial authority was finally granted in 1449 with the Charter of Incorporation which made the newly created aldermen Justices of the Peace with the

full power and authority to inquire, hear and determine as well all manner of felonies, murders, trespasses and misprisions as all manner of other causes, plaints, contempts and evil deeds, and other things whatsoever that do pertain or may or ought hereafter to pertain to any Justices of the Peace within our realm<sup>545</sup>

If, as argued in the last chapter, the Charter of Incorporation was intended to provide financial protection for Nottingham's wealthy merchants it also conferred benefits such as the title Justice of the Peace, which brought with it considerable social status.

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<sup>543</sup> NA CA 4160, Stevenson, *I*, pp.76-81; CA 4155, Stevenson, *I*, pp.40-41

<sup>544</sup> NA CA 4166, Stevenson, *I*, p.9.

<sup>545</sup> *potestatem et auctoritatem ad inquirenda, audienda et terminanda tarn omnimodas felonias, murdra, transgressiones et mesprisiones, quam omnimoda alia causas, querelas, contemptus et malefacta, ac cetera quaecumque, quae ad aliquos Justitiarios Pacis infra regnum nostrum Angliae*, Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, *II*, pp.202-3.

## The Borough court

The jurisdiction of the Borough court was limited to ‘trespasses, covenants, contracts, affairs and cases whatsoever, arising or done within the liberty aforesaid and the precinct of the same town’.<sup>546</sup> As the longest established institution, Nottingham’s Borough court has the most extensive records, albeit with some significant breaks in the series, particularly in the middle of the fifteenth century and again in the mid-sixteenth.

The form of these records probably changed more than any other of Nottingham’s documents. Until 1455 court records were written on parchment and each roll comprised many membranes. The entries reflect the running order at each sitting, recording suits in default for lack of plaintiff, defendant or jury, suits where the defendant acknowledged the fault and those referred to inquest when he or she did not. New suits were normally entered at the end of each membrane in the form of ‘X complains of Y. Plea of debt, trespass ...’. The full plaint was only recorded later, probably when the defendant appeared in court to answer the accusation. When the series recommenced in 1481, these practices had changed radically. The parchment rolls were replaced by paper books; this may have been to reduce cost, although at this date all paper had to be imported as there were no paper mills in England.<sup>547</sup> The details recorded were greatly reduced comprising simply the initial formulaic statement ‘X complains of Y’ followed by a gap of a third to half a page into which the full plaint was sometimes entered and occasionally the defendant’s response. Many pleas, however, were left blank, the plaint being

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<sup>546</sup> *quam de transgressionibus, conventionibus, contractibus, negotiis et querelis quibuscumque, infra libertatem praedictam ac procinctum ejusdem villae emergentibus sive factis*, Charter of Henry IV, Stevenson, II, pp.4-5.

<sup>547</sup> D McKitterick, ‘The Beginning of Printing’, in C Allmand (ed), *New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. VII, c.1415-1500 (Cambridge, 1998) p.287.



either inserted into the book on a separate slip of paper or omitted completely. The books are written in what Stevenson describes as a 'sprawling hand' and the omission of complaints is attributed by him to carelessness on behalf of the clerks.<sup>548</sup> This change in record keeping practice has also been noted in Colchester as either a tactic to reduce administrative workload or because the cheapness of paper (despite it being imported) allowed 'clerks to slip into more ephemeral and informal styles of recording'.<sup>549</sup>

At the end of the sixteenth century clerical practice changed yet again. From 1596, although the 'X complains of Y' formulae was retained, the amount of debt or damages claimed was often omitted and instead of the formal complaint the space below was filled with a record of the legal process, such as dates on which documents were received by the court. The suits were also indexed by the surname of the plaintiff which required numbering the folios, something which had not happened in previous years, and there is a contents list written on the back of the 1596-97 book which still bears its original parchment cover.<sup>550</sup> All this may seem minor or even irrelevant detail, but these changes are an indication of the growing professionalism in Nottingham's approach to administration.

There were, essentially, two Borough courts both presided over by the mayor and bailiffs, or after 1449 the mayor and sheriffs. One, which sat regularly every two weeks, heard suits between burgesses. The other heard suits between burgesses and resident non-burgesses and non-resident men and women, referred to as 'foreigners'. This court sat irregularly but equally frequently probably coinciding

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<sup>548</sup> Stevenson, *III*, p.x.

<sup>549</sup> R H Britnell, 'Colchester Courts and Court Records, 1310-1525', *Essex Archaeology and History*, 17 (1986), p.139.

<sup>550</sup> NA CA 1429.

with markets and fairs. Both courts dealt with cases of debt, trespass, detention of goods and breach of contract.

### *The burgess court*

Over the 200 years of this study, the work of the burgess court changed very little, although the number of cases and the balance in the type of suit evolved over time. In 1401-2, there were 170 pleas brought by 113 plaintiffs; 145 of these were for debt, fifteen for trespass, seven for detinue and three for breach of covenant.<sup>551</sup> By 1421-22, there were only 120 suits brought by eighty plaintiffs, the majority were for debt.<sup>552</sup> The last complete burgess court roll which dates from 1449-50 comprises only sixty-seven pleas brought by forty-four plaintiffs; fifty-five of these were for debt, nine for trespass, two for breach of covenant and one is unspecified.<sup>553</sup> Sixty years later in 1511-12, the number of suits was about the same, with sixty-seven pleas and sixty-five plaintiffs.<sup>554</sup> Both these decades have already been identified as economically difficult for Nottingham, when less business would have been transacted, leading to fewer suits being brought to court.

These symptoms are still recognisable five years later since, although the number of suits increased to eighty-two, there were only fifty-two plaintiffs and consequently many claims and counter-claims. Henry Stepar, for example, sued Christopher Hegyn on three occasions and was sued in return once. He was also sued by Thomas Mellers, who appeared seven times as plaintiff in this court. Robert Shemeld brought three separate suits against John Lokay, William

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<sup>551</sup> NA CA 1299.

<sup>552</sup> NA CA 1317; Foulds online CA 1318.

<sup>553</sup> NA CA 1338.

<sup>554</sup> NA CA 1384.

Bendbow went to court twice against Richard Turner, who was also in debt to Richard Dalderbury.<sup>555</sup> It seems that, in this difficult decade, business was being transacted between a smaller group of men, who went to court more frequently. Such litigation probably did little to improve the popularity of, say, Thomas Mellers, with less wealthy burgesses.

The demographic problems of the early sixteenth century, noted in Chapter Two, are illustrated by a rather complicated set of suits which occurred in 1518. Roger and Agnes Wade, as executors of Richard Langford, her late husband, sued Alice Copeland widow and executor of Richard Copeland.<sup>556</sup> Roger and Alice sued Agnes for 14s 6d and Agnes counter-claimed for 9s 4d; both debts probably ensuing from business conducted between the now deceased husbands. Roger and Alice were also pursued for debt by Thomas Langford, who must have been related to Alice's late husband. Agnes and Alice were not alone in acting as executors as in this year six other people were suing or being sued as representatives of deceased burgesses.

The 1520s were also identified in Chapter Five as a time of economic instability, and the consequence of this is seen in the Borough court book for 1526-27 which comprises only twenty-eight pleas made by nineteen plaintiffs.<sup>557</sup> These plaintiffs include some of the most prosperous Nottingham men, including Thomas Mellers, Thomas Hobbs and Robert Hasilrig, all aldermen. The records show that on seven occasions the court was convened but no new pleas were entered. This does not mean, of course, that existing suits were not heard on these dates, only that no

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<sup>555</sup> NA CA 1392.

<sup>556</sup> NA CA 1392.

<sup>557</sup> NA CA 1398.

new suits were recorded. This court, however, follows immediately after payment of the first two installments of the extensive 1523-27 lay subsidy which, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Hoyle suggests contributed to the economic downturn of the 1520s because it reduced the amount of coin in circulation. It is not unreasonable to propose that the lack of business in the Borough court was connected in some way to this taxation. The following year, the number of cases increased to a more healthy seventy-nine, indicating the temporary nature of the episode.<sup>558</sup>

The trend of decline in the number of suits brought to court continued across the sixteenth century but an interesting change observable in the last twenty-five years is the number of cases of trespass matched by a decline in pleas of debt. In 1578-79 only thirty-one new pleas were entered, thirteen of which were for trespass.<sup>559</sup> Trespass was also involved in twenty of the fifty-six suits brought in 1581-82, twenty-nine of the forty-eight cases in 1594-95 and sixty-one of the seventy-seven pleas in 1598-99.<sup>560</sup> Why this decrease in pleas of debt should occur is unclear given the apparently thriving market and increased population, but Chris Briggs's work on debt litigation in the fourteenth century has shown that a court's reputation for success or failure in debt recovery 'served ... to encourage or to discourage new debt complaints'.<sup>561</sup> The decline may well reflect a distrust in the ability of the court to deal effectively with debt. This degree of trust or distrust,

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<sup>558</sup> NA CA 1399.

<sup>559</sup> NA CA 1426.

<sup>560</sup> NA CA 1427, 1428, 1430.

<sup>561</sup> C Briggs, 'Manor Court Procedures, Debt Litigation Levels, and Rural Credit Provision in England, c.1290-c.1380', *Law and History Review*, 24:3 (2006): para 54.  
<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/24.3/briggs.html>

however, also affected the willingness of men to give credit<sup>562</sup> so in an apparently buoyant economic other factors may also have operated. One of these may be that debt was increasingly referred to the central law courts and another may be a change in legal practice: until the mid-sixteenth century the majority of cases were made by the plaintiff and defendant in person, after this date it became the norm for attorneys to represent both parties, making legal proceedings more formal and expensive.<sup>563</sup>

Another perceivable change in the burgess court is the size of debt: in 1401-2 the largest suit was brought by John Ward against Thomas Kay for 13s 6d for wine, and most of the other pleas in that year were between 6d and 20d.<sup>564</sup> In 1505, the largest sum demanded was £18 owed by John Wales to John Rose, and there were other large amounts: William Hegyn sued Henry Brentingham for £3 10s and John Rose for £4 6s 8d, and John Nicholson complained that John Cottingham owed him a head of John the Baptist and 10s worth of gold.<sup>565</sup>

Mid-century, none of the pleas are exceptional, but the end of the century is in sharp contrast to these earlier records. Despite there being fewer cases overall, burgess pleas in 1598-99 include suits against Edmund Jowett, as executor of Richard Green, for £170, George Stockley and Richard Wood for £70, Thomas Beck for £20 while John Stanley was sued for a silver salt worth £7 10s and sixteen silver spoons worth £6 8s.<sup>566</sup> The much briefer record of complaints means, regrettably, that the details are not known. Small increases in the amounts claimed

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<sup>562</sup> C Briggs, *Credit and Village Society in Fourteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2009), p.18.

<sup>563</sup> R O'Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450-1800* (Harlow, 2000), pp.116 & 173.

<sup>564</sup> NA CA 1299.

<sup>565</sup> NA CA 1401.

<sup>566</sup> NA CA 1430.

for debt can be accounted for by price inflation which prevailed throughout the sixteenth century, but these much larger sums indicate that large scale business transactions were taking place. The increased cost of litigation may have reduced the number of small claims, nevertheless, these transactions reinforce, yet again, the idea that the town's economy was flourishing and even suggest that the foundations were being laid for Nottingham to becoming a prosperous retail centre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>567</sup>

### *The foreign pleas court*

The foreign pleas court was identical to the burgess court except that it heard suits in which one or more of the parties were not Nottingham burgesses. It always handled more suits than the burgess court. Like the burgess court, there are small shifts in the details of the cases, the most obvious being the distances which people travelled in order to trade in Nottingham.

The foreign pleas roll of 1431-32 lists men hailing from ninety-two places outside Nottingham; some, like Arnold, Beeston, Bramcote, Gedling, Lenton and Sneinton, are now part of the Nottingham conurbation. Others such as Cotgrave, Ilkeston, Mansfield, East Leake and Hucknall are up to twenty miles away. Much further afield are Alrewas (near Lichfield) Coventry, Derby in Lancashire (now West Derby, Liverpool), Leicester and London.<sup>568</sup> The court rolls for the rest of the 1430s show men from Bourne in Lincolnshire, Chesterfield, Grimston in Leicestershire, Lincoln, Scarborough, Sheffield, Wakefield and York, as well as many places close by, although the lists are shorter comprising about forty

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<sup>567</sup> A Henstock, 'The Changing Fabric of the Town, 1550-1750', in J Beckett (ed), *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006), pp.121-23.

<sup>568</sup> Foulds online CA 1322/II.

towns.<sup>569</sup> Sixty years later foreigners still travelled from about forty different locations, but the distances were much smaller. In 1508 the most distant places named are Garthorpe (near Melton Mowbray) and Heather (south of Colville) both in Leicestershire, while Coventry, Kettering and Newark are the furthest places mentioned in the records for 1512.<sup>570</sup> By the 1530s the lists of places had reduced considerably; in 1532-33 only fourteen places are named, the furthest being Mansfield and Grantham.<sup>571</sup> The following year there are three men from London and a Frenchman in town, but the list does not get any longer.<sup>572</sup> The end of the century shows no change in this pattern of few, relatively local traders, though a Francis Southworth, goldsmith from London was sued by Stephen Bampton for £26 in 1598-99.<sup>573</sup>

All these suits reinforce the arguments made in Part I regarding the changing nature of Nottingham's economy and the status of its market. In 1400, Nottingham drew in people from considerable distances; the furthest travelled may have come to the fairs and the closest to the weekly market or maybe to live and work, for a while at least. The discussion of market rentals in Chapter One established that the market waned in the early sixteenth century, as the national and local economy contracted and Nottingham's population was probably at its lowest. As a result traders travelled less distance to market. The revival of the town's overall economy is confirmed by the amounts of money sued for in the burgess court discussed above, but the shorter distances travelled by market traders suggests that they came in response to demand from the increased

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<sup>569</sup> Foulds online CA 1327, 1328/II, 1331.

<sup>570</sup> NA CA 1382, 1385.

<sup>571</sup> NA CA 1406.

<sup>572</sup> NA CA 1408.

<sup>573</sup> NA CA 1430.

population. Whatever the cause, a strong local market was developing, a fact which corresponds closely to national trends identified by Alan Everitt.<sup>574</sup>

Many aspects of the Borough court – whether burgess or foreign – remained unchanged between 1400 and 1600. Even the administrative change after 1449 when the court was presided over by the mayor and sheriffs instead of bailiffs was a simple change of title, not personnel or function. The type of cases presented to the court was the same, and the procedure also probably changed very little. There were, though, some changes in the detail: records were kept differently, the number of cases contracted while the sums of money involved increased, and people came to the ‘foreign pleas’ court from much smaller distances, and many of these adjustments were a consequence of changing economic and demographic pressures.

#### *Court officers*

Apart from the mayor and bailiffs/sheriffs presiding over the Borough court, there were two sets of minor officials who appeared regularly in the records of the early part of the fifteenth century. The first is affeerers who decided on fines and damages. They always worked in pairs, so potentially fifty-two could be named in each year. The second is appraisers who valued goods taken *in lieu* when the guilty party was unable to pay in cash. Appraisals were usually carried out by four men but happened irregularly so there is no guide to how many might have been appointed in any one year. Changing clerical practice means that after 1419-20 affeerers were no longer listed and appraisers also disappeared after 1422-23, apart from the occasional entry in the later sixteenth century.

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<sup>574</sup> A Everitt, ‘The Market Towns’, in P Clark (ed), *The Early Modern Town: A Reader* (London, 1976), p.169.



One of the most complete records occurs in 1419-20 when forty men were listed as affeerer, some being named twice.<sup>575</sup> There were also seventy-two entries for appraisers but only forty-six names. With three exceptions the affeerers were chosen from the list of plaintiffs bringing new suits to each court. The most likely reason for these exceptions is that the potential candidates were thought unsuitable or, perhaps, inexperienced. In one instance, two affeerers were chosen from men who already had suits in process but on that occasion only two new suits had been brought to the court, so potential candidates were limited. In the second instance the court bailiff acted as affeerer. Some consideration of suitability must have been made as in 1421-22 there were 130 men named as plaintiff or defendant, making this degree of repetition unnecessary unless appropriateness for office was taken into consideration.

Some men seemed to have specialised in holding these minor offices. Robert Woodborough appeared nineteen times as affeerer and ten times as appraiser between 1400 and 1401,<sup>576</sup> Richard Alwynt is listed five times as affeerer and thirteen times as appraiser between 1401 and 1419, and John Yle acted four times as an affeerer and ten times as an appraiser between 1401 and 1413.<sup>577</sup> There is more information on some men than others. John Bryan, for example, an affeerer five times and appraiser twice, was also a decennary, responsible for controlling and reporting public arguments and street fights.<sup>578</sup> Decennary lists for the early part of this century only survive for 1407-8 and 1414-15 but thirty-six of the men named in these two documents can be found acting as either affeerer or appraiser

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<sup>575</sup> Foulds online CA 1315, 1316.

<sup>576</sup> NA CA 1298, 1299, 1300, 1301, 1303, 1304/I, 1305.

<sup>577</sup> NA CA 1299, 1300, 1301, 1302, 1304/I, 1305; Foulds online CA 1306/I, 1308, 1309, 1312, 1313.

<sup>578</sup> NA CA 1302, 1303, 1304/I, 1305, 3943.

between 1400 and 1421.<sup>579</sup> Given the disparity in survival rates between the decennary lists and the court records, this is likely to be a significant correspondence and which must reflect their social standing in the community.

This status though must have been relatively low as only thirty-one of the 435 men named as affeerer or appraiser in the first twenty-five years of the fifteenth century were later elected bailiff and none were elected as mayor. Unlike some of those mentioned earlier, the men who did become bailiff usually only appeared once and never more than twice in these minor offices, and there are often several years between the minor post and the major one. Thomas Strete, for example, was both affeerer and appraiser in 1400 and bailiff in 1412.<sup>580</sup> This interval is similar to that which elapsed between a man becoming a sheriff or chamberlain and his appointment as mayor; or the normal gap between repeated office holding, as noted in Chapter Five, and marks yet another stage in the personal social mobility of a burgess.

This mobility though, as these few progressions suggest, was limited to only a small proportion of the community. It seems that the boundaries identified in Chapter Three, which prevented certain occupational groups from progressing from beyond sheriff, also operated at this lower level. Factors such as maturity may have counted, but were probably outweighed by measures of worth in the form of wealth and occupation. It suggests the existence of a finely nuanced social structure which did not simply divide the rich from the poor, but the marginally prosperous from those just above or just below them, expressed through court responsibilities.

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<sup>579</sup> NA CA 3943, 3944.

<sup>580</sup> NA CA 1298; Foulds online CA 1307.

### *Borough court juries*

The records of the Borough court show that going to court could be a time-consuming activity as one or other of the parties, or even sometimes the jury, failed to attend when summoned, thus repeatedly delaying the verdict. Furthermore, it could demand substantial commitment from burgesses over and above attending the hearing of their own suits.

Whether in the burgess or foreign pleas court, if a plea was contested a jury was empanelled to hear the case.<sup>581</sup> There are many bundles of Borough court jury lists, some tucked into the bindings of the court books, some separated from the legal record. Each bundle comprises up to sixty slips of paper, pierced in the centre and tied through with a leather thong. Each slip is headed by the suits the jury was to try, which could be as many as five, followed by a list of fifteen to eighteen jurymen, some of whom were sworn and some not. The verdict arrived at is sometimes noted on the back of the slip but often it is not; whether this means a verdict was not delivered or simply was not recorded will never be known.

Two bundles of jury lists survive for 1495, but as the legal process could be protracted, some of the cases were probably initiated in the previous year. The smaller bundle records thirty-five juries empanelled to hear seventy-five burgess inquests.<sup>582</sup> The jurymen were effectively a self-selecting group drawn from men who were active as either plaintiff or defendant in the Borough court and each one sat on several juries. Thomas Johnson was sworn on eight juries and heard twenty-two suits, although he was 'talesman' or reserve for three of these, Henry

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<sup>581</sup> T Foulds, J Hughes and M Jones, 'The Nottingham Borough Court Rolls: the Reign of Henry VI (1422-57)' *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, 97 (1993), pp.77-78.

<sup>582</sup> NA CA 7332.

Hobbs was empanelled seven times but sworn on only four juries, Stephen Townsend was listed nine times, Christopher Benson eight, James Brasenby six and so on.

The longer, foreign pleas, bundle for the same year comprises fifty-three jury lists for about 145 inquests (the top slips are faded and in places illegible) and in general the same group of men appear.<sup>583</sup> Henry Hobbs sat on two juries, Stephen Townsend on six, Christopher Benson and James Brasenby both sat on five. As a consequence of going to court, these men had effectively volunteered to take on a considerable amount of work.

Occasionally, however, the jury seems to have been specially chosen. One jury was empanelled to hear three suits, one of which was between Sir Henry Gray, Lord of Codnor and Henry Newham. The list of jurors comprised twenty-four names instead of the usual fifteen-eighteen.<sup>584</sup> Of these, twelve had been or were to become senior civic officers, many of whom rarely appeared on a Borough court jury. It seems likely that they were chosen specifically to hear Sir Henry's case.

### **The Sessions court**

The Sessions court, created by the 1449 Charter, was presided over by the mayor and a quorum of aldermen, in their newly acquired role as Justices of the Peace. It met quarterly but could be held more frequently if necessary to hear felonies for which a king or queen's jury was convened.<sup>585</sup> The majority of its work, however, came through three presentment juries; one from the east side or English borough,

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<sup>583</sup> NA CA 7333.

<sup>584</sup> NA CA 7333.

<sup>585</sup> for example NA CA 8d, 26b, 53.

one from the west side or French borough and a jury of constables which reported on misdemeanours and social misbehaviour. Their presentments follow waves or trends that mirror the concerns of the townspeople. In 1484, for example, eleven people were presented for keeping a brothel; in the 1510s there were twenty-three presentments for barking or tanning sheep or horse skin and from the 1540s, responding to the series of statutes for the treatment and relief of the poor and beggars which began in 1531, there were many presentments for harbouring vagrants.<sup>586</sup>

An interesting administrative development is the format of the presentment lists. Until the end of the fifteenth century, the presentments lists were written in Latin, probably by William Easingwold, the Mayor's Clerk whose signature appears at the end of some of the documents. He died shortly after the turn of the century and from this time the presentments are written in English, by a member of the jury. This has consequences for record keeping as the presentments for 1505, for example, are illegible (it is one of the few sets of presentments made at this time that Stevenson did not publish).<sup>587</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century, the presentments are much clearer, and some even carry the name of the foreman of the jury who probably wrote up the presentment list, implying a greater degree of literacy than at the beginning of the century.<sup>588</sup>

The Sessions presentments are some of the few documents in which the consequences of the Protestant Reformation can be directly observed. After 1573 there are thirty-six presentments for not going to church, four for scolding in

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<sup>586</sup> *Statutes*, Vol. 3, part 2, pp.328-32 & 558-62.

<sup>587</sup> NA CA 13a.

<sup>588</sup> for example NA CA 51a.

church and one, against ‘Gud wyffe Bottere’, for allowing her geese to honk during divine service.<sup>589</sup> In 1588 Edmund Richardson was presented for ‘keeping secret persons who do not come to church’ and two years later William Parmatour, one of the sheriff’s sergeants was accused of ‘receiving strangers and suspected persons during service time’.<sup>590</sup>

This number of presentments is interesting as the Archdeaconry Act Books list only five people as being recusant.<sup>591</sup> In May 1587, Margaret (Margery) Morey or Morehagh, Alice Collinson and Henry Dand were reported to the archdeacon by St Mary’s churchwardens. Margaret was the wife of Richard Morehagh a common councillor who became mayor in 1594-95. She had already been presented twice to the Sessions court in 1587-88.<sup>592</sup> Her husband had also been presented to the Sessions court once in that year, but was not reported to the Archdeacon. Henry Dand, who had been sheriff in 1558-59, was presented to the Sessions court three times for not attending church. Alice Collinson, daughter of John Collinson who had been mayor in 1552-53 and 1563-64, does not appear in the Sessions rolls, but Robert Collinson, an apothecary who may have been related, was presented five times in 1587, 1593 and 1594 for non-attendance at church, and was fined 20s in 1593.<sup>593</sup>

John, Winifred and Rachel Skevington and James Halltoye and his daughters, Ann and Francis, were all repeatedly presented to the Sessions court in 1587-88 at the same time as Margaret Morehagh and Henry Dand, but not to the Archdeacon.

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<sup>589</sup> NA CA 46, 48, 51a, 52a&b, 53, 55.

<sup>590</sup> NA CA 51a, 53.

<sup>591</sup> R F B Hodgkinson, ‘Extracts from the Act Books of the Archdeacons of Nottingham’ *Transactions of the Thorton Society*, 30 (1926), pp.15-16. Hodgkinson claims that these are the only entries he was able to find relating to recusants in the town.

<sup>592</sup> NA CA 51a.

<sup>593</sup> NA CA 51a, 52a&b, 53.

The reason for so many Sessions presentments in 1587-88 may be related to a heightened sensitivity to threats from supporters of the Catholic Church as Mary, Queen of Scots, was executed in February 1587 and the ongoing war with France and Ireland. The risk of invasion from Spain was also known, although the Spanish Armada did not sail until in July 1588, after the Archdeacon's visit.

Non-attendance at church is a signal that the Reformation was not well received by all Nottingham people. There are, however, subtle indications to be found in the language of the presentments that its teachings were being absorbed into the culture. In 1583-84 Robert Labrar was presented for 'keping unlawful games in his howse upon the Sabboth day in evening prayer tyme' and John Labrar for 'kepyng his prentices locked in a howse and there working upon the sabboth daye'.<sup>594</sup> Before 1550 misdemeanours such as gambling, drinking and unruly behaviour were described as 'keeping misrule'.<sup>595</sup> After this date the phrasing of accusations changed. In April 1588, Bartholomew Manby, Nicholas Wilson and Robert Webster were presented for keeping an ale house and 'evil company' and in 1593 William Kingston, a tiler, and John Garle, a labourer, were accused of 'viteling unbound and keeping evil rul'.<sup>596</sup> More serious moral issues were reported using even stronger language. In October 1574 the west side jury presented 'Henry Oldfelloe bellfounder for mayntayn[ing] his dawghtar w[i]thin his house as a common brothel contrarye to the lawse of god and the peyuice [peace]'.<sup>597</sup> In January 1575, the east side jury made a similar accusation, presenting

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<sup>594</sup> NA CA 50b.

<sup>595</sup> for example NA CA 8d, 9, 14b&c, 16.

<sup>596</sup> NA CA 51a, 52b.

<sup>597</sup> NA CA 49.

... Henry Oldfellow bellfounder on the longe Row for keeping and mayntaynyng a dawhtar of his as a common hore or strumpet w[i]<sup>th</sup> in his dwelling house w[hi]<sup>ch</sup> dawghter is well knowne at this p[re]sent tyme to be w[i]<sup>th</sup> chilled w[hi]<sup>ch</sup> is bothe odius unto god and his people of this towne<sup>598</sup>

What happened to Oldfellow and his daughter is not divulged but George Wilkinson a blacksmith of Wheeler Gate was imprisoned for tippling, unlawful games, entertaining men's servants and also because he

... doeth kepe howse with a woman under the p[re]tence to marye herr, w[hi]ch hee dothe nott, and haythe so contened with herr of longe tyme, contrarye to Godes lawes and the Quenes...<sup>599</sup>

All these presentments show an awareness of, and sensitivity to, not just the law but also to the teachings of the reformed church and a keenness to ensure that the town and its people complied with both.

All three juries reported almost identical offences. In addition to unruly behaviour and non-attendance at church these included market offences, impeding the highway, misuse of the town's common lands, petty theft, playing games such as tennis, quoits and bowls, gambling, vagrancy and harbouring vagrants, and many other social misdemeanours. Two butchers, John Rose and Robert Wales, for example, were presented by the constables in 1496 for forestalling the market and selling oxen and sheep to London butchers, and the west side jury presented Joan Litster for buying grain and re-selling it in smaller measures.<sup>600</sup> William Atkinson, Ann Wynsell and John Helryc were named in the constable's presentment of 1555 for 'pouring muck at the Church stile' while Laurence Debdale, the Common

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<sup>598</sup> NA CA 49.

<sup>599</sup> NA CA 50a.

<sup>600</sup> NA CA 7b, 7a.



Sergeant, was rebuked by the east side jury for allowing muck to collect.<sup>601</sup> All three juries made presentments against men, including some of the aldermen, who left town in 1593 to avoid plague.<sup>602</sup>

Complaints against town employees like Laurence Debdale were not uncommon, Humphrey Bird, the Mayor's Sergeant-at-Mace was presented in 1573 because 'he wylnott take no penes in ys offysse, as other offyser hathe done be fore ys ty[me]',<sup>603</sup> but the Sessions juries also complained about town officers. The chamberlains of 1500, John Rose and John Williamson, were admonished for not marking the town boundaries and in 1543 the mayor was reminded that he should control the salt and oatmeal sellers because they were selling in incorrect measures.<sup>604</sup> The 1531 and 1536 Acts against vagrancy made local authorities responsible for the impotent poor with the power to prevent them wandering from town to town.<sup>605</sup> In January 1545 the east side jury presented the justices – who were, of course, the aldermen – for not searching their wards for 'valiaunt beggars' and who were requested to authorise their constables to make such searches.<sup>606</sup> Perhaps more seriously in 1556, William Atkinson, one of the aldermen, was accused of revealing the Council's 'sekreyt cownsell' concerning the subsidy.<sup>607</sup> The oath taken by the alderman has been lost, but common councillors swore to 'observe and keepe the Maires counsell' and aldermen would

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<sup>601</sup> NA CA 47a&b.

<sup>602</sup> NA CA 52b.

<sup>603</sup> NA CA 48c.

<sup>604</sup> NA CA 41a.

<sup>605</sup> J Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London, 1971), p.40.

<sup>606</sup> NA CA 43a.

<sup>607</sup> NA CA 47c.

have made a similar promise; clearly this was a serious charge.<sup>608</sup> Other complaints against councillors and aldermen will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

### *Sessions court juries*

The establishment of the Sessions court shows a transition in the manner in which misdemeanours were reported. Prior to 1449 decennaries reported twice a year to the mayor. The oldest surviving presentments, which date from 1370-71 or 1378-79, concern only abuses against the assize of ale for a whole year.<sup>609</sup> The next two sets of presentments date from 1395-96; the first concerns affrays – fighting or scolding – and the second, dated six months later, names men and women for forestalling the market, selling incorrect measures, tippling without a licence and other market offences.<sup>610</sup> After 1449, these offences were reported quarterly to the Sessions court.

Over time the terms decennary and constable became synonymous. Twenty-seven of the thirty-five men who made up the constables' jury for 1467-68 are listed in the Mayor's books of 1459-60, 1463-64, 1467-68 and 1478-79 as decennary.<sup>611</sup> After 1525 the Hall books, which replaced the Mayor's books, only refer to constables. With this change of title, the responsibilities of the constables seem to have expanded from reporting assaults and market infringements to dealing with gambling, brothel keeping and general bawdiness, and receiving stolen goods, although they continue to report dung heaps. They were also required to patrol the streets for beggars and vagabonds, organise the watch and find post-horses for the town's use – an activity that may not have been popular as Thomas Reeve,

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<sup>608</sup> NA CA 4770, Stevenson, 'Appendix: Greaves papers', *III*, p.447.

<sup>609</sup> NA CA 1280, Stevenson, *I*, pp.200-7.

<sup>610</sup> NA CA 3942, Stevenson, *I*, pp.292-309.

<sup>611</sup> NA CA 1b, 4478, 3955, 3350, 4494.

Mistress Cockyng, Peter Clark, Harry Cost and John Hunt were all presented for calling the constables ‘knaves and villains’ when the were asked to give up their animals.<sup>612</sup>

Decennaries, who normally worked in pairs, had been responsible for one or two streets. There were thirty-three listed in 1395, thirty-five in 1407, thirty-two in both 1459 and 1463 and thirty-nine in 1478; the varying numbers may mirror changes in the size of population.<sup>613</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century the constables were allocated to one of the town seven wards and reported to the aldermen of that ward. After 1583-84 the constables’ jury lists in the Sessions court rolls were organised by ward.<sup>614</sup> There were four constables to each ward, making a total of twenty-eight, nine less than one hundred years earlier despite the larger population and an apparently increasing workload. This suggests that the constables were better organised than previously, supporting the earlier proposition that by the end of the sixteenth century town management was becoming more administratively professional and efficient.

Although the constables now reported to the Sessions court, what is clear from Table XXVII below is that they rarely held the posts of chamberlain or sheriff. When men did progress to the higher office there was usually the same ten or more years interval identified in other progressions to higher office: Hugh Cook was a constable in 1452 and chamberlain in 1466-67, Edmund Jowett was constable in 1575 and sheriff in 1587-88. The gap was somewhat shorter in the early sixteenth century, Laurence Wirehorn was constable in 1525 and sheriff in

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<sup>612</sup> NA CA 48.

<sup>613</sup> NA CA 3842, 3943, 4478, 3955, 3350.

<sup>614</sup> for example NA CA 51a, 52b, 53, 55.

1528 for example, but this may be because of the much lower population and the difficulty in appointing new town officers, described in Chapter Five.

Table XXVII: Constables holding other civic offices

	<b>total jurors</b>	<b>number who become chamberlain, sheriff, common councillor or mayor</b>	<b>percentage</b>
1452	23	3	13.0
1467	35	3	8.6
1499	35	2	5.7
1509	37	1	3.7
1525	23	4	17.3
1549	25	4	16.0
1566	25	1	4.0
1575	37	3	8.1
1594*	25	0	0

\*men on this jury may have held civic office in the seventeenth century which has not been surveyed

This pattern is different from that seen in an analysis of the east and west side juries, where the trend is for an increasingly large proportion of these jurists to be drawn from the group of men who would go on to hold the more senior civic offices. As Table XXVIII shows, in the fifteenth century about one-third to one-half of Sessions jurors went on to become chamberlain, sheriff or hold an even higher office. In the last third of the sixteenth century this proportion had risen to two-thirds.

Table XXVIII: East and West side jury members holding civic office

	<b>total jurors</b>	<b>number who become chamberlain, sheriff, common councillor or mayor</b>	<b>percentage</b>
1452	48	16	33.3
1467	47	25	53.2
1499	68	29	42.6
1509	69	27	39.1
1525	43	12	27.9
1549	44	17	38.6
1566	45	28	62.2
1575	62	39	62.9
1594*	48	25	52.1

\*more men on this jury may have held civic office in the seventeenth century which has not been surveyed

One conclusion to be drawn from this is that there was a social difference between the constables' and the east and west side juries. An examination of the occupations followed by constables shows that they were employed as weavers, tanners, ropers, labourers and similar trades identified in Chapter Three as being the lower paid and less important, while the east and west side juries include merchants, mercers, bell founders, fishmongers and inn keepers, that is the wealthier trades. Overall, this difference did not change across the 150 years for which records are available, but the percentage of constables who became chamberlains was highest in 1452 and 1525 while the opposite applied to east and west side jurymen in the same years when the number progressing to higher office is less. The decades surrounding these dates were identified in Chapter Five as times of political instability, when men held civic office in consecutive years. The appointment of men from a lower social status to fill gaps accents the severity of the economic and demographic circumstances. The general pattern of progression, though, is yet more evidence for finely delineated hierarchy throughout civic society.

A second observation is that the membership of the east and west side juries changed very little from court to court and, as a general rule the same men were chosen year after year. John Anyan appeared on all the east side jury lists sampled between 1496 and 1514, and Edward Edmondson is recorded as sitting on both east and west juries fifteen times between 1545 and 1576.<sup>615</sup> Even when there are gaps in the record series, as there are at the end of the sixteenth century, this holds true. Nicholas Baguley, William Kneveton, George Newbold, Thomas Reeve and many others all appear regularly in the Sessions jury rolls between 1575 and 1600.<sup>616</sup>

A third, and important, point is that because as many as two-thirds hold some kind of civic office, the majority of the east and west side jurors, particularly at the end of the sixteenth century, were drawn from the same social group as town officials, and therefore from only a small proportion of the burgess population. The 1604 terrier lists 375 burgesses alive in that year.<sup>617</sup> Nottingham's population in 1604 was greater than the 1570-80s, nevertheless, the inference is that the fifty or so men who sat on east and west juries were drawn from less than 20 per cent of burgesses, who themselves were a fraction of the total population. Furthermore, the bigger the population, the more proportionally select the group became, as the percentage of jurors moving on to higher office became larger.

This, of course, leaves a substantial proportion of the juries who did not become civic officials, but further analysis shows that many held some other responsibility

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<sup>615</sup> NA CA 7b, 8a,b,&c, 9a&b, 13c, 14c, 15b, 20b, 43a, 45a, 48a&c, 49, 50a, 1383b, 7330/1, 7330/6, 7330/4.

<sup>616</sup> NA CA 49, 50a, 51a, 52b, 53, 55.

<sup>617</sup> NA CA 4635. There may have been more as some names have been crossed through, possibly later.

within Nottingham. Michael Bonner, Edward Goodwin and Richard Alenson were all Woodwards and William Morey was a Sheriffs' Sergeant. The 'searchers' of the market were well represented: William Humphrey for the tanners, Thomas Alynson for the glovers, John Anyan (amongst many others) for the bakers, Richard Smith and Steven Stout, both for the fresh and sea water fishers and fishmongers.<sup>618</sup> William Goldring was a guardian of the Shoemakers and Thomas Barrow of the Tailors guild.<sup>619</sup> Both were also chamberlains of St George's guild, as were other Sessions jurists Thomas Shepard and Christopher Benson, and Maurice Orrell was a guardian of the Free School.<sup>620</sup> There are some jurists for whom nothing is known – some were identified in Chapter Two – but it seems clear that the majority held some responsibility in Nottingham, even it was not the most senior civic office. The east and west Sessions juries were, then, highly selective and exclusive bodies drawn from the top ranking burgesses and therefore part of the elite of Nottingham's civic society.

### **The 'Great Court' and the Mickletorn jury**

The name of the Mickletorn jury is said to derive from *Magnum Turnum*, or Great Tourn, to which the jury reported twice a year.<sup>621</sup> The *Magnum Turnum* or Great Court was the Leet court of Nottingham responsible for maintaining the peace, electing constables, enforcing the assize and keeping the highways open.<sup>622</sup> It was probably one of Nottingham's oldest institutions.

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<sup>618</sup> NA CA 3352, 3358, 4547.

<sup>619</sup> NA CA 1386, 1393.

<sup>620</sup> NA PR 21599.

<sup>621</sup> Stevenson, 'Glossary', I, p.448; 'mickle' is Anglo-Saxon for 'great'.

<sup>622</sup> M K McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, 1998), p.36.

Perhaps because of the name, Stevenson appears to have regarded the Mickletorn jury and the Great Court as the same body. For example, in 1308 Isolda Arundel was arrested by the decennaries for theft. She was tried in the Borough court and the court roll records that she was first presented by the decennaries to the Great Court (*per disenarios ad Magnum Turnum*) but Stevenson headed the published entry as ‘Presentment by the Decennaries at the Mickletorn’, presumably because he assumed the Court and the jury were the same body.<sup>623</sup> He gives a similar heading to a list of decennary presentments made in April 1396, although the preamble to this presentment states that it was made at ‘The Great Tourn held before John de Plumptre, Mayor ...’.<sup>624</sup> The decennary list is immediately followed by the presentments of a ‘Great Tourn’ jury comprising twenty-five men, made on the same date.<sup>625</sup> The decennaries and the Mickletorn evidently were two separate bodies that both reported to a Great Court. It is true that by 1407-8, the decennary presentments are grouped with the assize of bread and classed as part of the Mayor’s roll, while the Mickletorn lists are in a separate document, nevertheless the offences they present, including the assize of bread, fall within the responsibility of the Great Court and the separation may be more an accident of history and later cataloguing rather than a deliberate, contemporary act.<sup>626</sup>

There are only four surviving Mickletorn presentments that pre-date the Sessions court. The roll of July 1395 comprises blanket accusations such as

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<sup>623</sup> NA CA 1251b, Stevenson, *I*, pp.67-69.

<sup>624</sup> *Magnum Turnum tentum coram Johanne de Plumptre, majore ...*, NA CA 3942.

<sup>625</sup> *Praesentationes Magni Turni*, NA CA 3942.

<sup>626</sup> NA CA 3943, 2761a.



all the bakers are guilty because they take too much from the common people ... all the butchers sell meat which has been kept too long ... all the fishers ... sell fish which are dead and have been kept too long<sup>627</sup>

These are followed by complaints against individual offenders about blockages to King's Highway, common lanes and the River Leen, fouling of streets and waterways, and building on common soil. Its companion roll from April 1396 follows the same pattern while the rolls for October 1407 and April 1408 are chiefly concerned with blockages to the highway and building on common land.<sup>628</sup> Later rolls include presentments or reports on problems such as blocked gutters, unpaved or damaged streets, repairs needed to the pillories and stocks and the number of animals to be kept in the meadow. People as well as things were presented: in 1553 complaints were made against the school master because 'there hath bene dyvers men afore hus and hath co[m]plenyd of hym: where fore we desyer you to haue hym chaunged' and it was pointed out that Master [Humphrey] Quarnby was disqualified from being a School Warden because he was married to a granddaughter of the founder.<sup>629</sup> There is one example in the Mickletorn presentments of the consequences of the Reformation. In 1588, the Mickletorn jury asked that the mayor, all the Council and the Clothing set an example for the townspeople and attend the 'most Godlye exercise of preachinge' every Friday.<sup>630</sup> The mayor was asked to enforce this attendance by writing a special order. This compulsion implies a lack of enthusiasm for Protestant practice from some of the Council, and as the request was made in the same year that the Archdeacon visited Nottingham it may have been a token gesture to conformity.

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<sup>627</sup> NA CA 3942, Stevenson, *I*, pp.268-83.

<sup>628</sup> NA CA 2761a.

<sup>629</sup> NA CA 3013.

<sup>630</sup> NA CA 3017.

Stevenson states that the Sessions court ‘encroached very considerably’ on the work of the Mickletorn jury and, on the face of it, the presentments of the three sessions juries would seem to support Stevenson’s contention.<sup>631</sup> It is, though, a contention based on the assumption that the Great Court and Mickletorn jury were the same body. If, as argued above, they were different bodies, there is considerable documentary evidence to suggest that the Sessions court simply absorbed the work of the Great Court after 1450.

There are no Mickletorn rolls between 1408 and 1512, and there is a further forty year gap until the next roll of 1553. All Mickletorn presentments after this date were originally filed with the Session court rolls; Stevenson admits that he separated and renumbered them.<sup>632</sup> There are still, in fact, some remnants of the Great Court and Mickletorn jury in the Sessions rolls. In 1506-7 there is a list of fines made in the ‘Great Court’ and the Sessions roll for 1589-90 contains two Mickletorn presentments which Stevenson must have overlooked.<sup>633</sup> This later roll comprises thirty presentments, most of which concern streets in decay for ‘wannt of pavinge’, but Edward Decon was considered unworthy to be the neat herd and another presentment criticised ‘M[aster] Alderman gregorie & M[aster] Alderman Alvie for macking leasses to them selves giving noo p[ro]ffit to the towne’ although this has been crossed through.<sup>634</sup> There are also lists of Mickletorn jurors retained within the Sessions rolls for 1587-88 and 1593, and the

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<sup>631</sup> Stevenson, *III*, p.xiii.

<sup>632</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xxi.

<sup>633</sup> NA CA 13c, 51b.

<sup>634</sup> NA CA 51b.

1599 roll includes bills which list the costs of ‘processes’ issuing from the various Sessions juries, including the ‘Le Magnum Tourn’.<sup>635</sup>

Further evidence is provided by the constables’ juries which, as already pointed out, evolved from the decennaries. Their presentments, comprising infringement of assizes and market abuses as well as disturbances of the peace, fell into the purview of the Great Court. But perhaps even more conclusive proof that Mickletorn jury was part of the Sessions court is that the majority of Mickletorn jurors were also members of the east and west side presentments juries. Table XXIX below shows the number of Mickletorn jurors named in surviving lists the number who were also members of Session juries.

Table XXIX: Mickletorn jurors found sitting on Sessions juries

<b>Date</b>	<b>Mickletorn</b>	<b>Sessions</b>
1553: Easter	24	17
1577-78 Easter and Michaelmas	46	30
1579-80 Easter and Michaelmas	45	41
1587-88 Easter and Michaelmas	43	39
1593-94: Easter	24	23

The jury met twice a year, at Easter and Michaelmas; it usually comprised twenty-four men, although not all were sworn. Normally the Easter jury comprised a different group of men from the Michaelmas, but the same men sat at Easter or Michaelmas. Thomas Huthwaite, for example, sat on the Easter juries of 1577-78, 1579-80, 1587-8 and 1593-4, while William Piggen was a member of the Michaelmas jury for the same years. Occasionally one man sat on both juries, Robert Hallam, for example was a member of both Easter and Michaelmas juries

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<sup>635</sup> NA CA 51a&b, 55.

in 1577.<sup>636</sup> There are, of course, missing lists but despite this, as the Table shows, at least two-thirds of the Mickletorn jurors are known to have sat on the Sessions court panels. In 1587-88 when the Sessions roll contains all the juries for that year, only four of the Mickletorn jurors did not serve on either the east or west jury.<sup>637</sup> In other words, the two juries were essentially the same group of men, with the same set of concerns. It is no surprise, therefore, that they presented similar sets of complaints.

There were differences in the work of the two juries. The Sessions juries of 1587-88, for example, presented five men for walking the streets and ‘misusing the Queines subiecttes’, quarrelling with the watchmen, tippling, keeping an alehouse, regrating and depositing manure.<sup>638</sup> The Mickletorn presentments of April 1588 name twenty-six men for a variety of offences from ale house keeping to encroaching on common land and subletting to ‘foreigners’ but there were also twelve reports of areas of the town needing repairs and a request that a new Usher be appointed to the School.<sup>639</sup> Other Mickletorn jury rolls note lanes and streets needing paving, gutters scouring and walls mending. They also request improvements such as covers over the shambles and St Anne’s Well, the acquisition of post horses, new buildings on the Saturday market and the purchase of new land.<sup>640</sup> There is clearly some overlap, but in general the Sessions jury presentments concern disturbances of the peace while the Mickletorn’s concentrate on town management, both areas formerly the responsibility of the Great Court.

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<sup>636</sup> NA CA 3362.

<sup>637</sup> NA CA 51a.

<sup>638</sup> NA CA 51a.

<sup>639</sup> NA CA 3017.

<sup>640</sup> NA CA 3014 & 3015.

The Mickletorn, however, did have a special status and there was a ceremonial aspect to its meetings. The chamberlains' accounts for 1485-86, 1494-95, 1505-6 and 1529-30 all include 4s to cover the cost of two Mickletorn dinners while in 1556-57, 8d was paid for bread and ale at the Mickletorn.<sup>641</sup> Part of this ceremonial may be because its presentments were made during a perambulation of the town which started at the Leen and its progress through the town would have been visible to all townspeople; resident, non-resident, burgess and non-burgess.<sup>642</sup>

Rather than encroaching on the Mickletorn jury as Stevenson suggests, by the middle of the sixteenth century, if not earlier, the Sessions court had absorbed both the personnel and the responsibilities of the Great Court, and may have even sat as the Great Court rather than the Sessions court on occasions. It is possibly this aspect of the Sessions court that allowed a petition to be addressed to the court by the residents of Barker Gate asking it to take action to control the anti-social behaviour of one of their neighbours, for presentments to be made by the Wardens of the Weavers, for poor weavers to ask for redress against oppression by richer burgesses, and tenant millers to complain of unfair competition from wealthy mill owners.<sup>643</sup>

#### *The Mickletorn jury and the Council*

As the Mickletorn jury and the Sessions court juries comprised the same men, many of whom became sheriffs and chamberlains, and some common councillors,

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<sup>641</sup> NA CA 1601, 1602, 1604, 1608, 2170.

<sup>642</sup> for example NA CA 3013 & 3014.

<sup>643</sup> NA CA 51a, 55, 59, Stevenson, *IV*, p.265-67, 60, Stevenson, *IV*, p.275.

it is worth considering the nature of the relationship between the Mickletorn and the Council.

The earliest list of Mickletorn jurors dates from 1395. Very little is known about the seventeen men listed; some were named in the Borough court from time to time; one was a hosier, while another, John de Wilford was either a butcher or a merchant.<sup>644</sup> If he were the merchant he became chamberlain in 1409-10, but if he were the butcher he was an affeerer in 1401, 1402 and 1404 and decennary of Fletcher (Fleshhewer) Gate in 1407.<sup>645</sup> Another five of the seventeen were decennaries and four appear as affeerers, but none are listed as bailiffs. This suggests that this jury was drawn from the group of upright craft or tradesmen that held minor responsibilities in the Borough court, but did not aspire to civic office.

There are no jury lists for the fifteenth century, but in 1485 four men, John Cost, Ralph Hill, Edward Hilton and John Stokes, the school master, were chosen from the Mickletorn to interview the Prior of Shelton in connection with the dispute over the ownership of Cornerwong, discussed in Chapter Five.<sup>646</sup> John Cost later became an alderman, and Ralph Hill and Edward Hilton were both common councillors. Twenty-seven years later, in 1512, the Mickletorn presentments were signed by four affeerers;<sup>647</sup> three of these, William Turner, Thomas Wasse and Nicholas Fisher were common councillors, while the fourth, James Brasenby, had been sheriff in 1504-5. It is possible to conclude that in the hundred or so intervening years the composition of the jury changed from respectable craft and tradesmen to drawing at least some of its members from a more elite group. This

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<sup>644</sup> NA CA 1299.

<sup>645</sup> NA CA 1299, 1300, 1302, 1304/I, 3943; Foulds online CA 1306/II.

<sup>646</sup> NA CA 4534, Stevenson, *II*, p.393.

<sup>647</sup> NA CA 3012.

impression is confirmed by an analysis of the later Mickletorn jury lists which have survived.

The first full jury list of the sixteenth century dates from 1553.<sup>648</sup> As Table XXX shows, the jury's twenty-four members include eleven who had been or were to become chamberlains and/or sheriffs.

Table XXX: Mickletorn jurors found holding civic office

<b>Date</b>	<b>Mickletorn</b>	<b>Civic Office</b>
1553: Easter	24	11
1577-78 Easter and Michaelmas	46	24
1579-80 Easter and Michaelmas	45	26
1587-88 Easter and Michaelmas	43	22
1593-94: Easter	24	12

One of these, Thomas Harpham, is also noted as a common councillor in 1574, and another, John Brownlow, became mayor for the first time in 1567. In 1577-78, twenty-four of the Mickletorn jurors would go on to hold civic office, including five who became common councillors and three of the jurors of 1579-80 became mayor. The jury of 1587-88 included five men who would be common councillor and one mayor and the 1593 jury comprised another three common councillors.

Rather than being a cross-section of the 'commons' as Stevenson implies, and which seems to have been the case at the end of the fourteenth century, the Mickletorn jury and its companions, the Sessions juries of the sixteenth century, were a select group of top-ranking burgesses. Furthermore, because the Sessions juries and the Mickletorn jury together were responsible for raising issues of public

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<sup>648</sup> NA CA 3013.

order and town management, whether these concerned misdemeanours or the condition of the streets and management of the market, it can be argued that the courts they reported to were an arm of local administration and the jury members active participants in town government. As these members were drawn from the same social group as the Council, and some of them potentially members of the Council, they are yet another illustration of a greater narrowing of burgess participation in the sixteenth century compared to the beginning of the fifteenth.

### **The Mayor's court**

There was one other court held in Nottingham, although the record of its work in the town's Hall books, which replaced the earlier Mayor's rolls and books, is somewhat unclear. In 1818 the Hall books were catalogued by William Illingworth, Deputy Keeper of the Records of the Tower, and he refers to these legal records as the Mayor's court, or occasionally the Borough court or the sheriffs' court, which is probably the best possible description given the lack of further detail.<sup>649</sup> Many suits similar to those found in the Borough court books are noted, including actions for debt and trespass. In 1501-2, for example, William Turner, mercer, sued Thomas Parker, litster for 11d debt and the detention of 'musters' (probably musters de villiers, a cloth) and a yard of 'herdyn cloth'.<sup>650</sup>

Also recorded are deed and property conveyances which prior to 1449 had been noted in the Borough court rolls. Two deeds were recorded in the Mayor's book of 1478-79 and from 1548 enfeoffments and other conveyances appear regularly, fourteen being recorded in that year alone.<sup>651</sup> After 1578-79 the Hall books also

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<sup>649</sup> NA CA 3347, pp.5, 6, 8, 10 and other places.

<sup>650</sup> NA CA 3351.

<sup>651</sup> NA CA 3350, 3357.



record Statutes Merchant bonds, some for large amounts of money. In 1593-94 Francis Fletcher was bound to George, Earl of Shrewsbury for £2,500 and Edward Savage to Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury for £6,000.<sup>652</sup> These agreements must have been registered in Nottingham's Statutes Merchant court, but the page on which they are recorded in, say 1586-87, is simply headed 'Statutes'.<sup>653</sup>

Whether these records comprise the work of several courts or one 'multi-purpose' court presided over by the mayor is impossible to say, but they do indicate yet another aspect of the mayor's large workload which increased in volume and importance as the sixteenth century progressed.

## **Conclusion**

Nottingham's many courts were part of the town's administrative structure; indeed the mayor's authority to a great extent derived from his legal responsibilities to preside over the Borough and Sessions courts. As institutions both these courts demonstrate considerable stability. The Borough court dealt with civil suits for debt and trespass following a well established process. Even the creation of the Sessions court, which gave new responsibility and authority of the aldermen, was a development of the existing system of town management through the agency of the medieval Great Court.

An examination of the details of suits and presentments, though, reveals some changes in practice. There is some evidence that the town became better organised as Borough court records became briefer and more clerically efficient, while constables, whose workload increased as a result of legislation and population

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<sup>652</sup> NA CA 3373.

<sup>653</sup> NA CA 3368.

growth, were organised by wards and more closely associated with the aldermen to whom they reported. Mickletorn and Session jury presentments had always reflected legislation, but the Protestant Reformation led to presentments of harbouring vagrants and recusancy, and above this the language of the presentments hints at changing social attitudes and the absorption of Protestant teaching into local culture.

Further evidence of the effect of economic and demographic change is provided in the number and type of cases which passed through the Borough court. On the one hand, the gradual lessening of suits together with the contracting hinterland, indicate a narrowing of the trading interests of burgesses. On the other, the amounts of money contested in debt cases, and the size of enrolled Statutes merchant, indicate a strengthening of the economy at the end of the sixteenth century and the development of a domestic market.

Finally, this Chapter has added to the complexity of the social structure by suggesting that below the level of bailiff or sheriff there was a group of burgesses – respectable trades and craftsmen – who held minor civic responsibilities such as affeerer, but would not, and probably did not aspire to, hold civic office, although they may appear on Sessions juries from time to time. Perhaps the most significant issue discussed is the composition and role of the east and west side Sessions juries and Mickletorn juries. Together, these three panels made a significant contribution to the management of the town and its people. The juries were part of the town's administrative system and their members active participants in local government upon whose co-operation and consent the ruling groups had to depend. They, therefore, functioned as what Ian Archer might refer

to as sub-structures of local government.<sup>654</sup> This does not mean, though, that local government was broad-based. Analysis of the membership of these juries has shown that increasingly they were composed of men who, potentially and actually, would hold senior civic office. Even those who did not become chamberlain or sheriff had other responsibilities for regulation and organisation. Consequently, across the sixteenth century burgess participation in local government became progressively more narrow. At the same time, through shared jury membership and overlapping responsibilities, these branches of local government became interconnected and even more restrictive of wider burgess participation. The consequences of this are discussed in the next Chapter.

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<sup>654</sup> Archer, *Stability*, p.14.

## Chapter Seven: Challenges to authority

It was established in the previous chapter that the relationship between the Sessions and Mickletorn juries and the Council was close because they were ‘staffed’ by the same men, or by men from the same social groupings. Other chapters, though, have given examples of criticisms of the Council and its members, suggesting a degree of social and political tension. There is, of course, a debate about whether medieval towns were harmonious or fractious, the potential for social and political conflict, the degree of empathy between elites and commons, and their willingness to co-operate with each other.<sup>655</sup>

Stevenson’s assessment of the relationship between the Council and the town is of disharmony, where opposition to the Council was voiced in three ways: presentments by the Sessions and Mickletorn juries, potential or actual insurrection, and calls to reform the Council. He described Nottingham as having two factions: an oligarchic and tyrannical Council opposed by a body of honest burgesses.<sup>656</sup> This concept is reinforced by David Marcombe who describes the Mickletorn jury as capable of waging an ‘effective guerrilla war’ against the mayor and aldermen, which saw the Council endeavour ‘to exclude the burgesses from all control over their constitution, and the burgesses constantly opposing these attempts’.<sup>657</sup> Stevenson states

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<sup>655</sup> P Fleming, ‘Telling Tales of Oligarchy in the Late Medieval Town’, in M Hicks (ed), *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2001), p.178; P Clark and P Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History* (London, 1972), p.30; I W Archer, *Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1991), p.14; S Rappaport, ‘Social Structure and Mobility in Sixteenth Century London’, *London Journal*, 9, part 2 (1983), p.108.

<sup>656</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xii-xvii.

<sup>657</sup> D Marcombe, ‘The Late Medieval Town, 1449-1560’, in J Beckett (ed) *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, second edition (Chichester, 2006) p.92; Stevenson, *IV*, p.ix.

We can see how jealously the commonalty regarded the ceaseless encroachments of the Council and how resolutely they resisted their gradual exclusion from the ruling of the town.<sup>658</sup>

This assessment is based on Stevenson's interests as a constitutional historian. A careful analysis of the records, though, leads to a different interpretation.

### **Micklethorn and Session jury presentments**

The Micklethorn jury presentments for October 1407 name ninety-three men and women for a variety of infringements.<sup>659</sup> Three of these men were or would become mayor: William Brodholm (mayor 1429-30 and 1434-5) was presented for putting dung on the highway, Robert Squire (mayor 1401-2) for dung near the Rowell (a water course) and for setting palings on the 'common soil' and Henry Wilford (mayor 1398-99 and 1412-3) for throwing cinders and dung outside the town walls and blocking the entrance to the common caves. Six months later, six town officers were presented for encroaching on common land, a problem discussed in Chapter One. The small proportion of presentments against these men show that town officials were not committing any offence that ordinary burgesses were not also guilty of, although they might be expected to set a better example.

There are no further surviving Micklethorn presentments until April 1512, and there is then by a further gap of forty years, after which there are six more Micklethorn rolls to 1599.<sup>660</sup> Each contains presentments against men who held civic office, although the tenor of these changes over time.

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<sup>658</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.viii.

<sup>659</sup> NA CA 3011.

<sup>660</sup> Stevenson published seven, but one has since been re-dated to 1631-35.

In 1512, former and future sheriffs, chamberlain and mayors were presented for the common problems of adding to an unwanted muck heap and letting foul water into the street, and similar accusations were made in 1553.<sup>661</sup> In 1588 Edward Goodwin, who was sheriff that year, was presented for enclosing part of the Pingle and Humphrey Bonner, who would be mayor five years later, was presented for setting palings too far into the street. Alderman John Gregory was reported for subletting his share of the last crop from East Croft to a foreigner and for ‘supporting’ a foreigner who enclosed land in the open field, for which he was discharged by the mayor (*Disoneratur per Majorem et Justitios*), as was Alderman Peter Clerke was for building a lean-to and planting a hedge which encroached onto Carter Gate.<sup>662</sup> All these accusations, like those of 1412, indicate a demand for land and resources resulting from the increase in population in the last half of the sixteenth century, exacerbated by an apprehension of intrusion by non-burgesses. They cannot, however, be taken as criticisms against civic officials because of their office as similar presentments are made against less prominent burgesses, some of which were also discharged.

The Sessions jury presentments show a similar pattern: between 1450 and 1500, men who would at some time hold civic office were presented to the Sessions court for regrating and forestalling the market, gambling, selling putrid meat and disorderly behaviour.<sup>663</sup> The economic instability of the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, as noted in Chapters Three and Six, lead to presentments

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<sup>661</sup> NA CA 3012, 3013.

<sup>662</sup> NA CA 3017.

<sup>663</sup> NA CA 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9a.

against tanning sheep and horse skin and baking bread with fetid wheat, some of which name civic officials, amongst other burgesses.<sup>664</sup>

There was one curious, and perhaps telling, incident in 1504 when five prominent men were presented by the east side jury to the Sessions court for dragging a barrel full of stones through the streets in the middle of the night, terrorising the town.<sup>665</sup> The first of these was John Wetherley who had been mayor 1503-4. He was discharged from office in 1509-10 for 'evil governance', the same year that another of the revellers, John Williamson, first became mayor.<sup>666</sup> The other three, John Rose, Thomas Mellers and William English all became mayors in the 1510s. Williamson and Rose had been Chamberlains together in 1500 when they were presented by the east side jury for not properly marking the town boundaries.<sup>667</sup> Thomas Mellers' extensive family network was discussed in Chapter Five, and he must also have had a close relationship to John Wetherley because he acted as executor of his will in 1511.<sup>668</sup> This incident was probably the result of some excessive celebration, but it does reinforce the interrelatedness of senior officials and illustrate that they sometimes did not respect the townspeople they were supposed to govern.

Complaints in the following Sessions' presentments reflect the social and economic concerns of the later sixteenth century. In 1540, Robert Stanley who would be sheriff six years later and mayor in the 1570s, was accused of lodging beggars in his property in Fletcher Gate, one of six similar complaints made this

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<sup>664</sup> NA CA 14b, 14c, 19a, 20a&c, 21a, 28.

<sup>665</sup> NA CA 12.

<sup>666</sup> Stevenson, *III*, p.462, footnote 2.

<sup>667</sup> NA CA 9d.

<sup>668</sup> NA CA 1384.

year.<sup>669</sup> This was one of the earliest of this type of presentment, the first being John Bamforth and Richard Dafte who were presented by the constables for harbouring beggars and vagabonds in 1534, only three years after the first piece of legislation aimed at controlling beggars was enacted in 1531.<sup>670</sup> Similar complaints about beggars and harbouring poor in-migrants were raised regularly in the court; in 1593 for example, Peter Clerk, mayor in the 1580s and 1590s, was accused of converting his barns and letting them to disreputable people.<sup>671</sup> Town officials were among those who were presented for leaving town in during an attack of plague in the 1590s, and, as already discussed, some were presented for recusancy.<sup>672</sup>

Whatever the seriousness of the complaint, none of these accusations were aimed at men in their capacity as town officials, but because, like other men and some women, they contravened either the law or behaved in ways that were regarded as unacceptable and against the well-being of the town and its people.

There were though some town leaders who abused their position. Clearly John Wetherley had been one of these, and in 1512 the Mickletorn jury presented John Howett, for ‘occupying’ the Common Sergeant so that ‘eyu[er]e q[ua]rt[er] of the towne ys corupte’.<sup>673</sup> In the same roll, he was also named for selling herring while, as Clerk of the Market, excluding others who would have sold the fish cheaper.<sup>674</sup> William Barwell, the Mayor’s Clerk, was accused of maligning the burgesses and commons, and the mayor and aldermen were taken to task for

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<sup>669</sup> NA CA 39c.

<sup>670</sup> NA CA 35a; *Statutes*, Vol. 3, part 2, pp.328-32.

<sup>671</sup> NA CA 52.

<sup>672</sup> NA CA 51a, 52a&b.

<sup>673</sup> NA CA 3012.

<sup>674</sup> NA CA 3012.



allowing twenty-two marks which the former Mayor's Sergeant had held for the town to be retained by his executors.<sup>675</sup> John Howett was fined 12d for his misuse of the Common Sergeant and 20d for selling herring. These figures are, however, comparatively light; Mistress Pykerd, for example, was also fined 20d for allowing her cattle and sheep into the meadow while John Ketterick had to pay twice that amount, 3s 6d, for cutting brushwood, as did Robert Mellers for digging clay from the highway.<sup>676</sup>

Financial irregularities are the subject of complaints against civic officers, particularly in the last fifty years of the sixteenth century. In 1556 William Atkinson was presented by both east and west side juries for disclosing Council discussions about the lay subsidy, and the Chamberlain's account of 1557-58 includes an entry for 4s 8d 'for Master Cockeyn and Master Collenson' who were arrested for their accounting when mayor and escheator.<sup>677</sup> In 1575, Robert Burton, who was mayor that year, was accused of 'embezzling and taking the town's goods for his own use.'<sup>678</sup> Others relate to the personal conduct of aldermen. In 1577, Henry Newton was accused by the Mickletorn jury of being unworthy to hold the office of alderman and for 'abusyng him sellffe w[i]t[h] a nowghte quene'.<sup>679</sup>

Perhaps the most serious of all the complaints, though, was made in 1527 when a letter or petition was addressed to the mayor and his brothers by the Mickletorn

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<sup>675</sup> NA CA 3012.

<sup>676</sup> NA CA 3012.

<sup>677</sup> NA CA 47c, 1610.

<sup>678</sup> NA CA 50.

<sup>679</sup> NA CA 3362.

Jurors listing seven complaints.<sup>680</sup> The first specifically cited John Williamson, John Rose and Thomas Mellers. These men, all associated with the barrel-rolling incident of 1504, were also identified in Chapter Five as being the only three in this politically, economically and demographically unstable part of the century with any longevity in office. Not only did they dominate the mayoralty, but they were also highly litigious: Mellers appeared as a plaintiff in the Borough court at least ninety-one times in twenty years, Williamson was plaintiff in the Borough court on at least forty-five occasions for sums ranging from 16d to £20 and John Rose was also a regular party in Borough court suits, albeit more frequently as a defendant. As the number of complaints brought to the Borough court was much reduced in these economically difficult times, this visibility suggests their business relationships with the community may well have been strained.

Together they were accused of having contrived, with the support of some ‘adherents’, the election of John Howes, inn holder, and Costlin Pykerd, baker, as aldermen without consulting the burgess community. There were two problems with their appointment. First, that as elections had not been held, the new appointments went against the ‘Corporacion’ of the town. Second, that as victuallers Howes and Pykerd were prevented by statute from holding the assize of bread. The first element of this complaint was partially valid as the Charter of Incorporation of 1449 allowed for the election of seven aldermen by the burgesses but as already established, in reality all new officers were elected by a group of former chamberlains, common councillors and the aldermen.<sup>681</sup> As some members

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<sup>680</sup> NA CA 4763.

<sup>681</sup> Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, *II*, pp.200-1.

of the Mickletorn jury were probably former chamberlains, they may have been by-passed on this occasion.

The second element of this grievance is incorrect as the statute to which they referred had been repealed in 1511-12 on the grounds that towns had fallen into so much decline that there were not enough ‘men of substance’ and victuallers had to take office.<sup>682</sup> The concern about the assize is, however, valid. The economic problems of the 1510s and 1520s are highlighted as shortages cause the price of grain to rise. In 1509-10 St George’s Guild sold its surplus grain for 1s 8d per quarter, in 1513-14 this had risen to 5s per quarter and by 1520-21 barley was sold for 9s a quarter.<sup>683</sup> The price had fallen to 3s 3d a quarter by 1524-25, but this was still double the price of fifteen years earlier. John Williamson, who was mayor that year, was requested by the constables ‘to be gud master to hus, and se a remedy for owre bruers’.<sup>684</sup> In July 1525 he was asked to ensure that the Common Sergeant brought corn into the market while the constables presented eight men for buying and selling corn before the market bell had rung.<sup>685</sup> In the same year as the Mickletorn complaint, all the town bakers were presented for baking with ‘foghtted’ [fetid] wheat ‘not sensible for mens bodies’.<sup>686</sup> Not holding the assize was clearly a serious dereliction of duty at this difficult time.

The second complaint concerned the integrity of the two new aldermen who were described as both abusers of the town’s franchises and liberties and of lacking discretion and reason ‘as it is welle knowyn ... as the co[m]men voice and fame

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<sup>682</sup> *Statutes*, Vol. 3, part 1, p.30.

<sup>683</sup> NA PR 21599.

<sup>684</sup> NA CA 26a.

<sup>685</sup> NA CA 26b.

<sup>686</sup> NA CA 28.

runyth thurgh the same towne and the shire'.<sup>687</sup> There is little evidence for or against the validity of these claims in the surviving records. Costlin Pykard had been presented on several occasions for forestalling the market and regrating and was one of the bakers presented in 1527 for using fetid flour.<sup>688</sup> John Howes, on the other hand, had been sheriff in 1507-8, and was a common councillor from at least 1520. There are no Session court charges against him, and he appeared infrequently in the Borough court. Since 1522 he had been churchwarden at St Peter's Church and in 1512 was chamberlain of St George's Guild.<sup>689</sup>

John Rose, who had been mayor the previous year, was the subject of the next two complaints: first that during his mayoralty he had not carried out the assize and second that had he not called the Mickletorn jury together – another example of the Mickletorn being by-passed. The absence of Hall books between 1525 and 1533 means that there is no way of verifying these charges, which may not have been accurate. Three years earlier, in July 1524, a similar charge was made against William Kirkby, mayor that year, for allowing bakers to make bread contrary to the assize.<sup>690</sup> The Hall book for 1524-25, however, records the assize being held on at least fourteen occasions.<sup>691</sup> Concern over Rose's lack of attention to the Assize, like the appointment of victuallers, must reflect community concerns resulting from the social and economic problems of these years.

The penultimate complaint of 1527 again named Williamson, Rose and Mellers together with John Revelle. They were accused of falsifying the subsidy because,

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<sup>687</sup> NA CA 4736.

<sup>688</sup> for example NA CA 14, 18b, 22.

<sup>689</sup> NA PR 21599.

<sup>690</sup> NA CA 25c.

<sup>691</sup> NA CA 3356.

having been assessed as having goods of £50 or £60 or more, they then ‘imbeselid and ‘*nichil*’ returnyd’.<sup>692</sup> The certificate returned to the Exchequer bears this out as it states there are no chargeable persons in the town.<sup>693</sup> This complaint was valid because the subsidy for 1526-27 was, as explained in Chapter Two, levied on goods valued at over £50. In the earlier collections of this subsidy, Williamson had paid £5, meaning he had goods worth £100, the largest amount contributed by any townsman. Mellers paid £3 which meant he had goods worth £60, and Rose, should also have paid £3 in 1523-24, but disappeared from the undated list of 1524-25.

It is not possible to properly identify John Revelle, but he is likely to have been a baker who later became chamberlain (1536-7) and sheriff (1537-8). Nor is it possible to say if he was related to Thomas Revelle who is the subject of the final grievance. This Revelle is not the object of criticism, rather the presentment is a demand that he should continue to act as ‘lernyd Councelle of the p[re]sent boro’ and be paid his rightful fee,<sup>694</sup> which is an implied suggestion that the Council had dispensed with his services, against the wishes of the Mickletorn.

The Mickletorn petition, which in essence is a set of complaints against three men who had survived and probably taken advantage of the insecurities of the 1510s and 1520s, is symptomatic of the underlying demographic and economic environment of the decade. It also indicates fractures in the community. Stevenson argues that there was a gulf between the Council and the burgesses and

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<sup>692</sup> NA CA 4736.

<sup>693</sup> TNA, E179 database of taxation,  
[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/details.asp?piece\\_id=9062&doc\\_id=4873&doc\\_ref=E179/91/101](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/details.asp?piece_id=9062&doc_id=4873&doc_ref=E179/91/101)

<sup>694</sup> NA CA 4736.

that the petition proved that the Mickletorn had not ‘entirely forgotten its ancient powers, for they still claim to give their approval in the name of the ‘Burgesses and Commonalty of the town’.<sup>695</sup> It is noticeable, however, that two other recently appointed aldermen were omitted from the Mickletorn letter, yet their integrity may have been equally doubtful as the five who were named.

Robert Hasilrig, mayor in 1525-26, was no less litigious than Rose or Mellers and considerably more so that Costlin Pykard and John Howes, appearing as plaintiff in the Borough court on at least fourteen occasions between 1518 and 1528, and a further thirty-seven times after that date. Likewise William Parmatour, who was mayor in 1526-27 and to whom the letter is addressed, was frequently seen in both the Borough court and the Sessions court. Between 1511 and 1537 he was plaintiff at least twenty-three times, and in 1512 he was in debt to Thomas Mellers for an unnamed sum.<sup>696</sup> In 1517 he was accused by John and Costlin Pykard as executors of Hugh Pykard, of detaining goods worth 105s 4d plus £17 in cash.<sup>697</sup> In 1514 and 1515 he was presented by both the east and west side juries for barking sheep and horse skin and in 1522 for forestalling the market.<sup>698</sup>

There is no surviving Mickletorn jury list for the 1520s, but the analysis of Sessions juries lists in Chapter Six suggests that the correlation between these juries and civic office was at its weakest in the 1520s, probably because of the difficulty, discussed in Chapter Five, of finding suitable candidates. As these the Sessions and Mickletorn juries shared the same personnel it is likely that the same correlation applied. This does not mean, though, that the complaints of 1527 were

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<sup>695</sup> Stevenson, *III*, p.xiii.

<sup>696</sup> NA CA 1385.

<sup>697</sup> NA CA 1385, 1389.

<sup>698</sup> NA CA 20b, 20c, 21a, 23a.

made by common burgesses, only that the group which comprised civic officers may have been less well represented. The complaints suggest that the jury was bypassed or ignored on important issues, so although it claimed to speak on behalf of the commons it could equally well have been concerned about its own status, at a time when its composition was less elite. It may even have represented a faction, perhaps led or at least supported by Hasilrig and Parmatour, in opposition to Williamson, Rose and Mellers. The particular set of circumstances surrounding these complaints presents a more nuanced understanding of the political environment in Nottingham in the early sixteenth century. Williamson, Mellers and Rose, as befitted their status, were the wealthiest men in Nottingham, but they had come to power at a time of economic and political instability, and it is likely that they took advantage of that position. Hasilrig and Parmatour, both recently appointed as alderman, were a 'new guard' to whom the Mickleton jury turned to see some redress. This was not social conflict in the sense that it is generally applied – between elites and commons – but between one administration and another, fuelled by personal as well as community concerns.

All the complaints discussed so far, whatever they concerned and no matter how they were voiced, were clearly targeted at individuals. They are also the products of the social and economic conditions operating at the time, whether this was demand for common land, domination of the society by just three men or in response to national legislation. The personal rather than institutional nature of these complaints is apparent, but there were incidents which did directly attack the town's institutions.

## Insurrection

Three years after the 1408 Mickletorn jury made its presentments against encroaching on common ground, there was an attempt by town burgesses to replace the elected mayor and bailiffs. There are no Nottingham records concerning this incident, but it is described in some detail in a commission to the Sheriff of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.<sup>699</sup> It was clearly a serious affair which lasted from 29 September 1411 to December 1413. In brief, the mayor and forty-eight former mayors and bailiffs gathered at St Mary's Church to elect the new mayor, Henry Wilford, and bailiffs, Thomas Bythestreet and John Clerk. St Mary's was surrounded by an armed mob of over one hundred led by eighteen named burgesses, imprisoning the electors, who were threatened with death unless they elected John Alestre as mayor and John Braidsall as bailiff; a fate they avoided by escaping through a 'secret door'. Later that day Wilford made the customary proclamation about the assize but many of the burgesses denied his authority and appointed John Stoke or Stook as their 'sumnour' who, over the next few months, called them together in opposition to the mayor. In January 1412, Thomas Mapperley and John Odynges were elected as MPs and the event was again threatened by an armed mob demanding the election of Robert Sutton. The mayor's seal was called for so that the protestors might make the return themselves. The mayor tried to find shelter in John Odynges house, but was turned away and in the end conceded to all the crowd's demands.

In December 1413, an unnamed group met at the Friars Minor and declared that they would not obey any ordinance made by the mayor who by this time was

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<sup>699</sup> TNA C145/292/24-26, translated in PRO, *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, Vol. 8, 1399-1422 (1968), No. 469.



Robert Glade. In response, Glade arrested and imprisoned Stoke and twenty others. A jury was empanelled and an inquest held before the Sheriff of the county in September 1414, but one of the conspirators, Ralph Botiller, attempted to undermine the hearing by noting down the names of the jurors with the aim of informing those arrested of their indictors. A second jury was empanelled and a second inquest held.

One of the jury lists has survived; it comprises twenty-nine men, fifteen of whom were 'sworn'.<sup>700</sup> These include John Heth who had been mayor in 1411-12, Thomas Cay, mayor in 1405-6, and five bailiffs, all men who would have been part of the electoral college. There were also two men who would become bailiff later in the decade and three decennaries: for Fletcher Gate, Barker Gate and Great Smith Street. Decennaries for Stoney Street and St Mary Gate, streets which surround St Mary's Church, were included in the list of men who were not sworn. The jury, then, was comprised of men who were senior members of the town's hierarchy, responsible for peace keeping.

An examination of town records provides more information about the protagonists and the consequences of the incident for them and for Nottingham. Henry Wilford, the new elected mayor, had been mayor once before in 1398-99. He was an ironmonger and as already discussed had been accused by the Mickletorn jury of encroaching on common ground.<sup>701</sup> Thomas Bythestreet was a draper who had been active in the Borough court as both affeerer and appraiser and had witnessed

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<sup>700</sup> TNA C145/292.

<sup>701</sup> NA CA 1302, 3011.

some property transactions.<sup>702</sup> Little is known of John Clerk except that he was a barker who witnessed property transactions in 1409-10.<sup>703</sup>

John Alestre, the alternative mayoral candidate, was a merchant and a member of the influential Alestre family. His father Nicholas, had been a bailiff and John had already been mayor in 1409-10. John's son, Thomas, became mayor on three occasions and also represented the town in Parliament. The opposition group wanted to elect only one new bailiff, John Braidsall, or Braydsale, but whether he was to replace Bythestreet or Clerk is not said. Braidsall was a lawyer who appeared at most sittings of the Borough court from the 1390s to the 1410s.<sup>704</sup> He had never been bailiff so he was probably chosen by the protestors for his knowledge of the law rather than his experience of town government. In 1413 he held a tenement in Bearward Lane, but does not appear to have practiced law after 1411.<sup>705</sup> Both Alestre and Braidsall, as a merchant and a lawyer, probably had greater social status than Wilford, Bythestreet and Clerk and therefore may have been regarded as the more worthy candidates.

It was not only the appointment of the mayor and bailiffs which was challenged but also that of the burgesses returned to Parliament. As with the bailiffs, the crowd called for only one man, Robert Sutton, to be elected. Sutton was active in the Borough court and had been decennary of Fletcher Gate in 1395.

Of the eighteen named confederates, there is only one, Ralph Botiller, who does not appear in the Nottingham records; it was Botiller who tried to undermine the

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<sup>702</sup> NA CA 1298, 1299, 1301, 1305; Foulds online CA 1306/I.

<sup>703</sup> NA CA 1305.

<sup>704</sup> for example NA CA 1299; Foulds online CA 1306/I.

<sup>705</sup> Foulds online CA 1308.

inquisition. Another of the group, Thomas Gay, is named in a property transaction as *armiger*, otherwise there is again no mention of him in the Borough Records.<sup>706</sup>

It is possible that neither were residents of Nottingham. The remaining sixteen were all burgesses, active in the Borough court both before and after this incident, so presumably they suffered no greater punishment than a fine. They followed a range of occupations: John Stoke, the summoner, was a weaver, John Wyrsope a fisher, Richard Whetecroft a baker, Nicholas Holbeche an 'ostyler',<sup>707</sup> John Glen a smith, John Eperston a tailor and John Albeyn a tanner. Many had acted as appraiser or affeerer in the Borough court but only one, Richard Coteller, also known as Richard Franklin, had been bailiff in 1419.<sup>708</sup> They were, therefore, respectable townsfolk who, it must be assumed, felt that the town was poorly governed and that their voice was not being heard.

Possibly connected to these incidents is a recognisance for £40 dated 1 May 1413 upon condition that eleven men 'shall make or procure no insurrections or unlawful assemblies within the town of Notyngnam or elsewhere which may tend to disturbance or terror of the people'.<sup>709</sup> All eleven can be traced in Nottingham's records. The first, William Pomfret appeared in the burgess court five times as defendant for trespass and debt and was presented by the Mickletorn jury for obstructing Timber Hill causing the death of John Ward.<sup>710</sup> He may be the same man as William de Pontefract, in which case he was a spicer;<sup>711</sup> he was probably the ring leader as he is named twice. William de Stable was a fisher, Richard

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<sup>706</sup> NA CA 1305.

<sup>707</sup> This may mean groom or 'hosteller'/inn keeper.

<sup>708</sup> Foulds online CA 1315.

<sup>709</sup> PRO, *Calendar of the Close Rolls, Vol. 1, 1413-1419* (London, 1929), p.70.

<sup>710</sup> NA CA 1299, 1302; Foulds online CA 1306/I.

<sup>711</sup> NA CA 1302.

Estwaite or Estwhet a butcher, John Crophill and John Bower, both skinnners acted as affeerer and appraiser in the Borough court.<sup>712</sup> Reynold Geffecoke or Gefcok, Nicholas Fossebrooke, William de Rhodes were also affeerers and appraisers, and William Cooke appeared as a plaintiff.<sup>713</sup> John Reynalde was decennary of Cookstool Row and Smithy Row and John Wyrle is probably the same as John Wyrehall who was decennary of Bridlesmith Gate in 1395.<sup>714</sup> Like the eighteen named in the Commission, these eleven men were respectable craft or tradesmen and burgesses. Their mainperners, William Stapulford, Thomas Strelley, Reynold Shaw and William Aston, were probably from the county rather than the town. Stapulford is noted as being from Nottinghamshire and Shaw from Eastwood.<sup>715</sup> The others are not found in the Borough records.

It is difficult to assess how serious this series of incidents was. Despite the protestations, Henry Wilford was mayor, John Bythestreet and John Clerk were bailiffs and although Robert Glade appeared to concede to the protestors' demands, it was Thomas Mapperly and John Odynges who attended Parliament while Robert Sutton and his supporters were arrested, even if they eventually returned to Nottingham. Within a year of the indictment John Alestre was elected mayor in 1414-15 (and again in 1420-21 and 1430-31) so the protestors eventually got their way, though Braydsale possibly retired.

The series of events does not argue for an harmonious community but rather for one in which the necessary consent and co-operation between the Council and the community had broken down. The burgesses must have felt they had a right to

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<sup>712</sup> NA CA 1298, 1302, 1303, 1305; Foulds online CA 1309, 1308, 1316, 1322/I.

<sup>713</sup> NA CA 1298, 1301, 1302; Foulds online CA 1306/I, 1309, 1319.

<sup>714</sup> NA CA 3943, 3942.

<sup>715</sup> NA CA 1322.

participate in local government and were prepared to protest their cause, with violence if necessary. It is testimony to the factious nature of medieval towns that the dispute was resolved not by reconciliation but by the intervention of the Crown to suppress the revolt.

One of the accusations made against the protestors was that the disturbances damaged business and trade in the town as

the said mayor, bailiffs and burgesses dared not for fear of death attend publicly to their business and trade within the town or without save with a great power, to the extreme disturbance of the peace of the late and present king and the manifest ruin of the town.<sup>716</sup>

There are no Borough court rolls between September 1411 and April 1413, though this may simply be a question of survival because the roll for 1414-15 also covers only the last six months of the year.<sup>717</sup> There is a mayoralty roll for 1414-15 which lists fifteen pledges to keep the peace but as this is a rare survival it is not possible to say if this is an abnormal number.<sup>718</sup> The implication is that despite the language of the indictment these disturbances were temporary inconveniences. On the other hand, in May 1414 Henry V confirmed the Charter granted by his father in 1399. The confirmation cost the town of £10, considerably more than the five marks that Henry VI received for granting the Charter of Incorporation in 1449 or the two marks it took to have it confirmed by Edward IV.<sup>719</sup> Henry V had been on the throne for only two years in 1414 so a confirmatory charter is not unexpected, but given the events of the previous eighteen months its purpose could also have been to underpin the authority of the mayor and prevent a

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<sup>716</sup> PRO, *Calendar*, No. 469.

<sup>717</sup> Foulds online CA 1307, 1308.

<sup>718</sup> NA CA 3944. The next roll dates to 1459-60 and contains no such pledges.

<sup>719</sup> Charter of Henry VI, Stevenson, *II*, p.208; Charter of Edward IV, Stevenson, *II*, p.246.

repetition of this disorder, which reinforces the argument that resolution was reached not through agreement but by the imposition of royal authority.

One hundred years later the burgesses yet again threatened the mayor and aldermen, who again elicited support from the Crown. Evidence for this is slight but authoritative as it comes from two letters, one from the Recorder, Thomas Babington, and the second from Sir Thomas Lovel, the Lord Treasurer and Constable of Nottingham Castle.<sup>720</sup> In the first of these letters, dated 21 May 1512, Babington warned the mayor and his brethren against the threat from the commons which intended to ‘make Aldermen and oder offec[er]s at y[er] plesure’.<sup>721</sup> He advised the mayor to call all the confederates to appear before him. If that was not sufficient to bring them to order, the mayor should write to the Lord Treasurer and ask him to deal with the matter or, if he was overseas (Henry VIII was at war with France and Scotland between 1512 and 1514), to write to the Privy Seal. Alternately, the mayor should write to the Lord Steward with whom Babington had already discussed the matter. Finally, he warned the mayor to avoid calling a common hall at the request of the burgesses saying

I dowte not bot diu[er]s of you remembre the saying of M[r] Tresorer of the inconveniences that hath ensued upon the callyng of the comons to ged[er] in the Cite of London, and in od[er] Cites and Borowes.<sup>722</sup>

Clearly, Nottingham was not the only town where there was discontent; there had, for example, been electoral riots in York in 1504 which were repeated in 1516-17.<sup>723</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> NA CA 4733, 4734, Stevenson, *III*, pp.341-3.

<sup>721</sup> NA CA 4734, Stevenson, *III*, p.341.

<sup>722</sup> NA CA 4734, Stevenson, *III*, p.342.

<sup>723</sup> D M Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), p.68.

The second letter from Sir Thomas Lovel, dated 17 June, was addressed to the deputy mayor, probably John Rose, as Thomas Alestre, who had been elected mayor in September 1512, died on 10 June 1513.<sup>724</sup> Rose was ordered to forward the names of all those attempting to subvert mayoral authority. There is no direct evidence of the effectiveness of this order, but the town may have been quieter because of tighter control. In October 1511 and May 1512 the constables made a total of five presentments, while the west side said they had nothing to report and the east side presentment sheet is blank except for the heading.<sup>725</sup> In October 1513, the east side again made no presentments and the west side made only two, both for scolding, suggesting that everyday frictions were much reduced.<sup>726</sup>

The reasons for this threatened insurrection are not mentioned in either the Recorder's or the Lord Treasurer's letters, but the events occur only three years after John Wetherley had been discharged as alderman. The threats mark the beginning of the period of political instability already noted, which perhaps ended with the 1527 Mickletorn petition. On the face of it, there is a continuity between the events of 1512-13 and 1527 with John Williamson, John Rose and Thomas Mellers being the linking factors. In 1512 they were in the early stages of their time as aldermen; by 1527 they were coming to the end of their careers. A closer examination, though, shows that there are differences. Babington's and Lovel's letters suggest the burgesses' attempt to replace the mayor and aldermen with men of their choice was not an isolated incident but part of a more national discontent. This, according to Babington would be 'contrare to alle good and politke order

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<sup>724</sup> Stevenson, 'Appendix', *III*, p.462.

<sup>725</sup> NA CA 17a&b.

<sup>726</sup> NA CA 18a.

and rule', and therefore warranted the intervention by the Lord Treasurer.<sup>727</sup> The events of 1527 were local and, despite the apparent severity of the grievances, there is no suggestion that the town's business was in danger of disruption. Instead, it was probably the poor economy combined with an unstable and exploitative administration which was the spur to its production. The 1527 Mickletorn complaints against Mellers and his colleagues did not result in insurrection, which suggests that either they were not as serious as the document implies, or that recent experience had made insurrection an unviable option for common burgesses, leaving intervention by the jury as the preferred, and perhaps only avenue open to them. If burgesses discontent had to be filtered through a body such as the Mickletorn, which was part of the town's administrative structure, it implies a considerable lessening in the capacity of common burgesses to participate in local government; it also sets a precedent for future actions.

There is one final incidence of potential insurrection which Stevenson cites as an example of the burgesses flexing their muscles which at the same time shows 'the way in which the Aldermen attempted to overcome their opponents by holding over them the fear of causing the loss of the corporate franchises'.<sup>728</sup>

In 1597-98 concern about the lease of the Tithe Hay resulted in some burgesses holding a meeting in opposition to the Council. Evidence for this comes from a series of depositions recorded in the Hall book for that year, taken at the meeting which the Council interrupted.<sup>729</sup> All but one of the seventeen men questioned were constables. Their evidence is varied. Edward Garland testified that he and

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<sup>727</sup> NA CA 4733, Stevenson, *III*, p.341.

<sup>728</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xvi.

<sup>729</sup> NA CA 3376.



John Bell had taken it on their own authority to call the burgesses of their ward to the meeting to ‘gyve there voyces about the townes leases’, while John Wood and Richard Goodhall claimed they had not told anyone about the meeting. William James stated that William Cook and Percival Millington had assigned the constables to warn their wards of the meeting and that some burgesses assembled in the Spice Chamber had offered 10s or 20s ‘apiece toward[es] the mayntenance of the sute’, and that six burgesses had paid 6d each.<sup>730</sup> This suggests that some burgesses were expecting a legal contest.

The only man questioned who was not a constable was Percival Millington. He seems to have been the ring-leader, a point emphasised by Stevenson who published his testimony first, although he appears ninth in the original deposition. Unlike the other witnesses the questions asked of him are noted in the margin. He was asked four things: did he ask the constables to convene a meeting, did he order any burgess to collect money towards a suit, had he ‘practysed or wished that this Corporation might be ou[er]throwen and become a bailywyck’ and finally what was the intent of the meeting? He did not answer the first two and denied the third. To the fourth he answered that its purpose was to ‘move’ or propose that the Tithe Hay should be not be leased but ‘redown to the gen[er]all benefyt of the wholl Burgesses amongst them’.<sup>731</sup> He then addressed one of the aldermen, Richard Hurt, directly and said ‘Yow are but Burges as I, and therefore

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<sup>730</sup> NA CA 3376.

<sup>731</sup> NA CA 3376.

I will answere the Maior and not yow'.<sup>732</sup> Millington lived in Richard Hurt's ward so his denial of Hurt's authority is interesting, and may have been personal.<sup>733</sup>

This incident reflects concerns expressed throughout the last fifty years of the sixteenth century about the management of town land and in particular its leases. In 1553 the Mickletorn jury wrote 'M[aster] Mayre, as we vnderstande you and your brethern ar detarmynyd to let the Armytage Closse by lease, the which we woulde you shoulde not do'.<sup>734</sup> In 1577 they found that Master Newton's lease on West Steynor was void and recommended that the 'pore Bordgesses may have it for a cove pastur'.<sup>735</sup> Another request made in 1577 was that no more 'foreign' burgesses should be made, unless they paid £10 because there were already so many that the 'pore Burdgesses co[m]mons is eatten up' highlights the problem of increasing burgess numbers and limited amount of common land. Later in the same presentment they asked that any man having a 'part' of East or West Croft but not using it himself should sublet it to burgesses, not foreigners.<sup>736</sup> As the body responsible for monitoring the management of town lands, the Mickletorn regularly reported on the misuse of the common fields and meadows and many examples have been given in earlier chapters. These later, more serious complaints fall into the same category, but expose the growing pressures on the town's common areas resulting from the ever increasing population.

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<sup>732</sup> NA CA 3376.

<sup>733</sup> NA CA 4623.

<sup>734</sup> NA CA 3013.

<sup>735</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>736</sup> NA CA 3014.

One of the rolls in the Sessions court record of 1574-75 is a faded sheet headed 'Presentment of Assize'.<sup>737</sup> It comprises five complaints, one against William Mys for forestalling the market, one complaining about the inhabitants of ale houses and back lanes and two against the wappentake of Bassetlaw for not maintaining its portion of Leen Bridge.<sup>738</sup> The longest entry is a request for a ruling on the leasing of property to foreigners.

My lord where has the poure burgesses of this towne had off old custom and right off this towne had commons in our felde off nobdy [ ? ] now there is a closse called Howe crofts letton a way frome the bordgeses for ever and the poure bordgesess shall losse oure commons contrary to all right and costom There is other in this towne that haythe takyne in oredy [already] any and sum that wyll take more in and remyde [remedy] be nott foude ther we dessyre you honnars to be oure good lord to in form oure mare and jusysse that oure commons may be has they have been afre tyme<sup>739</sup>

There are two possible interpretations of this presentment. The first is that it was drawn up by the Mickletorn jury, which normally dealt with such matters, in order to force the Council into taking action. If this was the case, the Mickletorn was acting on behalf of the burgesses, in opposition to the Council.

A second interpretation is that this document was drawn up by a group of burgesses dissatisfied with the action, or inaction, of the Mickletorn jury, which looked to the visiting Justices of Assize for support. Under the 1449 Charter, the Assize or circuit judges had no judicial authority in Nottingham, but they visited twice a year because the county gaol was within the town's precincts. During their visits they were entertained by the mayor at the town's expense.<sup>740</sup> These presentments were an appeal to their legal expertise and authority, in support of

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<sup>737</sup> NA CA 49.

<sup>738</sup> Leen Bridge was maintained by the town of Nottingham and six adjacent wappentakes. See NA CA 4477, Stevenson, *II*, pp.222-241.

<sup>739</sup> NA CA 49.

<sup>740</sup> for example NA CA 1610, 1612.

the wider community. As a unique survival it is difficult to say if this was a common occurrence. Similar petitions, for example those from poor weavers and millers, were made directly to the Council through the Sessions court, so this may be an extension of that practice. Millington and his associates also acted independently of the Mickletorn jury over the Tithe Hay and it is possible they had a similar appeal in mind in 1597-98. As will be discussed later, questions concerning the expansion of the common council were also referred to the Assize judges. There is no suggestion in future records that the Council's approach to leasing land was greatly changed so, as in 1411 and 1512, the Crown's representatives supported the Council against the commoners. The existence of this document, though, does suggest that there were times when the common burgesses acted independently of the Mickletorn and Sessions juries, rather than through them.

### **Constitutional change**

The last twenty-five years or so of the sixteenth century saw changes to the constitution which are perhaps even more significant than the 1449 Charter, although less well acknowledged. Integral to these changes were the Mickletorn and Sessions juries. The stages in this protracted development are described in detail by both Stevenson and Grey, and Stevenson in particular see them as significant evidence of burgess' opposition to an oligarchic Council.<sup>741</sup> For this reason it is worthwhile analysing each step in more detail.

The latter part of the sixteenth century, as described in earlier chapters, saw a more stable mayoralty combined with better economic conditions and 1577-78

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<sup>741</sup> Stevenson, IV, pp.xiii-xvii; D Grey, *Nottingham Through 500 Years: a History of Town Government* (Nottingham, 1960), pp.55-62.

was perhaps something of a reforming and re-organising year in Nottingham. The butchers' craft presented new rules under which they were to trade, all apprentices were registered and two men were prosecuted for trading as ironmongers without serving an apprenticeship. The Mickletorn jury called for improvements to the market place and it is the first year that a record of ward boundaries is found in the Hall book.<sup>742</sup> Its recommendation that 'foreign' burgesses should pay a £10 entry fine seems, however, to have been ignored.<sup>743</sup>

It was also the year that the first known move towards a reconstituted Council was made. An agreement was reached between the aldermen, common council and '45 in all, being then all of the degree of Chamberlaynes',<sup>744</sup> that the common council should be expanded from six to twelve; something Stevenson describes as a 'decided victory' for the burgesses.<sup>745</sup>

How the new councillors were to be elected seems to have been the cause of some dispute. The Mickletorn jury of the same year asserted that according to the Red Book it should be by a group of forty-eight and ordered that anyone who thought forty-four to be the right number should 'set [sit] downe, and so to end'.<sup>746</sup> Stevenson interprets this as an agreement that forty-eight should be added to the Council, but the wording clearly relates to the 'chossing of the Co[m]mon Counsell according to the grement'.<sup>747</sup> This pronouncement therefore records a disagreement between jury members themselves, not between the aldermen and burgesses as Stevenson contended, and as three of the newly elected councillors were members

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<sup>742</sup> NA CA 3014, 3362.

<sup>743</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>744</sup> NA CA 4771, Stevenson, *IV*, p.409.

<sup>745</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xiii.

<sup>746</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>747</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xiv; NA CA 3014.

of this jury it was in their interests to have this procedural issue settled. It may be significant that the term ‘le Clothing’, referring to the group that elected the mayor which comprised mainly chamberlains, is first used in the Hall book of 1578-79, following the agreement to expand the common council.<sup>748</sup>

As Stevenson points out, the enlargement of the common council was an ‘acknowledgement of the *status* of the Clothing as a subordinate member of the Council’.<sup>749</sup> Another presentment made at this sitting stated that the common council should attend the ‘vardyth of the myddyllturne; and that it may be so ever here after’, which must also be a recognition of the status of the Mickletorn in relation to the Council.<sup>750</sup> The combined effect of these two presentments was to clarify the composition of the Clothing and more closely define and formalise the relationship between it and common council, and between the common council and the Mickletorn jury.

Another of Stevenson’s contentions is that the enlargement of the common council did not provide any ‘popular representation’ because new members of the Clothing were nominees of the Council.<sup>751</sup> This implies an assumption that the agreement to extend the Council and associate it with the Clothing was intended to increase popular representation. This may not have been the case, as subsequent events show.

The next step to a re-constituted Council came in October 1579 when the Mickletorn jury recommended to the aldermen that all the common councillors be

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<sup>748</sup> NA CA 3363.

<sup>749</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xiv.

<sup>750</sup> NA CA 3014.

<sup>751</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xiv.

removed from office and that ‘xlviij may be joyned to youe to confer in aney matters for the towne’.<sup>752</sup> The reason for this reform was given to be that ‘othar place[s] wher ther corporations are bettar govorned then this is’ had governing bodies of this size.<sup>753</sup> This can be seen as a criticism of the Council for failing in its duties, but the word ‘governed’ can also mean regulated or controlled.<sup>754</sup> The proposed model for the new Council was similar to that which operated in towns like Leicester, Northampton and York, and these were ‘closed’ administrations, where burgess participation in local government was limited.<sup>755</sup>

There is evidence that the Mickletorn attempted to control Nottingham’s burgess community to prevent it acting independently. At the same meeting that the dissolution of the common council was proposed, the Mickletorn jury requested that Red Book be read at every Sessions court ‘in the hering of the Burgeses ... that the Burgeses may the bettar dyscharge ther owthe and there dewtey for the comen welthe of this towne’.<sup>756</sup> It may be significant that the Red Book was to be read at the Sessions court, where petitions were also made directly to the mayor, suggesting it was used by the burgesses as a ‘common hall’ as well as a court room. This Mickletorn presentment was an unmistakable reminder to the burgesses that they had their own responsibilities to the community and the Council. The fact that it came only four years after the Assize justices were approached to rule on the leasing of common land and other matters of town management, supports the earlier suggestion that this had been generated by a

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<sup>752</sup> NA CA 3015.

<sup>753</sup> NA CA 3015.

<sup>754</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. VI, second edition (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>755</sup> M Bateman, ‘Introduction’, in *Records of the Borough of Leicester 1509-1603*, Vol. 3 (Leicester, 1905), p.xxiv; C A Markham, ‘Introduction’, in *The Records of the Borough of Northampton*, Vol. 1 (Northampton, 1898), p.xxxi; Palliser, *Tudor York*, p.61.

<sup>756</sup> NA CA 3015.

group of common burgesses taking affairs into their own hands. The proposed Council reform and the reminder to community of their duty may have been a reaction to such independent actions. A similar reminder was made twenty years later in October 1599, the year after the Tithe Hay protests, when the burgesses were told by the Mickletorn jury that the common council was chosen to confer with the aldermen 'for the good of the Commons and in steade of the commeneres'.<sup>757</sup> At the same meeting, though, the jury asserted that councillors often neglected their duty and the mayor was asked to issue an order that any councillor absenting himself without good reason should be expelled from the Council.<sup>758</sup> It cannot be co-incidence that both examples of unilateral action by the burgesses resulted in reprimands for them and the common council equally. This is a good example of the 'balancing act' that, according to Stephen Rigby, local governments had to practice.<sup>759</sup>

The 1579 proposal was not acted on. Why is not clear. There could have been a lack of support for such a radical change, but there may have been a legal stumbling block as well. The 1449 Charter of Incorporation, as noted in Chapter Five, made provision only for those elements of the Council that were innovations in administration, that is the aldermen and the sheriffs. The common council was omitted and for that reason it was probably relatively easy to enlarge it to twelve, as happened in 1577, especially as there was a precedent in 1446 the committee of twelve. The *joining* of forty-eight burgesses to the seven aldermen might have

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<sup>757</sup> NA CA 3020.

<sup>758</sup> NA CA 3020.

<sup>759</sup> S H Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Houndsmill, 1995), pp.171-72.



been less legally achievable, possibly requiring an amendment if not complete revision of the 1449 Charter, which the administration had no desire to undertake.

In 1601-2, shortly after the Mickletorn jury again reminded the commons of the role of the common council, there was another call for a reform. This came from the Sessions juries not the Mickletorn, as before. It was suggested earlier that the Sessions court was also used as a common hall by the burgesses, so these petitions may indicate a coming together of influential burgesses with members of these powerful juries to reach an agreement over long-standing problems. Another difference is that rather than replace the common council the request was for the Clothing to merge with the common council.

This does not mean there was complete agreement, but, as before, the arguments came from within the juries themselves. The east side and constables juries asked ‘that thear may be added to the Councell of the town xxxvj Borgissis to make them xlvij’, that is twelve common councillors and thirty-six others.<sup>760</sup> The west side jury wanted a more complicated arrangement, asking for ‘xlvij<sup>tie</sup> of the Clothinge and other Burgesses of one companye, and xxiiij<sup>tie</sup> of a nother company with oure Maior’ in other words, a two-tier system of forty-eight burgesses in one house and twenty-four, including the mayor, in a superior one.<sup>761</sup> These calls were combined with an appeal that ‘there not be anie officers chosen, nor forryners made Burgesses, but with consent of all those’, echoing the concerns about foreigners found elsewhere in both Mickletorn and Session presentments.<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> NA CA 57.

<sup>761</sup> NA CA 57.

<sup>762</sup> NA CA 57.

The primary purpose of government was to maintain the peace and prevent discord, and the function of both the Mickletorn and Sessions juries was to ensure the good management of the town, hence the need to control independent action by the common burgesses. There seems, however, to have been an understanding and sympathy for the concerns of the burgess community, and even a genuine desire for better government structures. The Council's increased responsibilities for regulation and control had given it greater authority, yet little attempt was made to stifle opposition as had happened in 1411 and 1512. Instead, the proposals made in 1601-2 allowed some limited commons representation in government, but at the same time reinforced the authority of the Council to make decisions on behalf of the community and emphasised the duty of the commons to not oppose the Council.

The improved economy of the period may also have had some influence. Many of the sheriffs and chamberlains had occupations which were not commonly found amongst the civic elite, but as they and some of the common burgesses became more prosperous they became more suitable for office; wealth of course being a qualifier for civic responsibility. Avner Grief, for example, attributes the changing political organisation of Genoa to the increased wealth of its citizens who demanded a greater say in town government.<sup>763</sup> They may also have been better educated – the later Sessions rolls testify to an improved literacy compared to the beginning of the century. Another reason why this reconstitution may have been more acceptable in 1600 is that after 1580 the relationship of the Clothing and the Sessions and Mickletorn juries as substructures of government had been more clearly defined. The merging of the Clothing with the common council twenty

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<sup>763</sup> A Grief, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy* (Cambridge, 2006), p.287.

years later was, thus, a more natural progression. There might have been personal motivations as well because, as members of the Clothing, many of the men who sat on the Sessions and Mickletorn juries would benefit from the 'promotion' to common councillor and the status that it would bring. The mounting burdens of the Council due to population growth, an increasing workload and the need to satisfy the more frequent demands from central government discussed in Chapters Five and Six may also have made an expansion acceptable as there would be more people to share the load.

Whatever the reasons, the principle that the common council should be reformed was accepted. This, perhaps, is unsurprising as two of the aldermen in 1601-2, Humphrey Bonner and Anker Jackson, had been members of the 1579-80 Mickletorn jury which had originally called for change. Other members of that 1579-80 group were common councillors Thomas Huthwaite and Nicholas Sherwin, and several members of the Clothing, as well as Percival Millington. As part of the group that first raised the question of constitutional reform they must have been more receptive to the Sessions jury requests. It does imply, however, that control of the burgesses was as at least as important as understanding their concerns.

Despite the apparent concord, the detail continued to be disputed, and as in 1577, the main point of contention was the election of new Council members. In 1603-4, for example, the west side jury, which had also called for the more complicated structure the previous year, requested that all new town officials be elected by the burgesses.<sup>764</sup> In February 1604, the aldermen, common councillors and the

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<sup>764</sup> NA CA 59, Stevenson, *IV*, p.265.

Clothing agreed with seventy burgesses that a subcommittee should meet to reach an agreement about the composition of the new Council. Their recommendation was for a Council of fifty-six, to include all the Clothing, but the final decision was deferred to the Recorder, who as the town's legal adviser could rule on any legal complications. Five days later a second subcommittee was set up comprising all the aldermen and seven burgesses, with 'Maister Recorder Umpyer'.<sup>765</sup> This second group comprised all the aldermen and seven burgesses, most of whom had some civic responsibility. Nicholas Kynnersley was the Sheriffs' Clerk and George Balderston was a constable and had been a member of the 1577 Mickletorn jury which had requested the dissolution of the common council. Another constable was William Mathews, who had been questioned about the Tithe Hay incident, as had George Walker, and John Stanley had been one of the petty collectors of the 1595 lay subsidy. Only Richard Hare, who was an apothecary and Percival Millington, the ring-leader of the Tithe Hay protest, do not appear to have held any official position.

Together they proposed that there should be two committees or houses of twenty-eight; the upper house comprising the mayor, Recorder, aldermen, common councillors and members of the Clothing; the lower house the remaining members of the Clothing and 'commoners'. The more important decision was probably the agreement that vacancies in the upper house were to be filled with men from the lower house and new members of the lower house be elected by four burgesses from every ward. This two-house system recognised the seniority of the aldermen implicit in the 1449 Charter which would have been eradicated by a flatter structure, while allowing for a limited degree of burgess participation. The

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<sup>765</sup> NA CA 3379.

structure was accepted and the first page of the Hall book of 1604-5 records the composition of the Council to be the mayor, recorder and six aldermen, followed by two coroners, twelve common councillors, and eight members of the Clothing. Nineteen other members of the Clothing, together with nine others, are listed under a heading of '2<sup>nd</sup> company'.<sup>766</sup> Of these nine, six including Percival Millington, had been members of the sub-committee that had devised this new structure. The remaining three were Ludovic Oxley, who had been a member of the 1587 Mickletorn jury, George Riley who had sat on the east side Sessions jury in 1599, and James Seele about who little is known, but may have been related to John Seele who sat on the Mickletorn jury of 1592.<sup>767</sup>

Yet again, though, the dispute about the election of new officers continued; there is a note in the Hall book for August 1605 that a meeting was to take place with the Burgesses 'in hope to settle a peace and quyett in the towne'.<sup>768</sup> The note does not explicitly state that the grievances concerned the composition of the Council, but Stevenson makes this not unreasonable assumption.<sup>769</sup> On 13 January 1606, there was another meeting between six aldermen and six burgesses to 'consider of the grevances, and to indeavour to bringe the controuersies to an end' and a week later it was noted that an agreement had been reached for twenty of the Clothing and eight of the commons to be added to the Council.<sup>770</sup> Although it is not apparent from the note, this agreement can only refer to the lower house and its rather odd composition of the nineteen and nine. By this date, the dispute had

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<sup>766</sup> NA CA 3779. Conservator's tape used to secure the bottom of the page has obscured some of the names and only twenty-five are legible, consequently, Stevenson's comments have been relied on for accuracy.

<sup>767</sup> NA CA 51b, 52b, 55.

<sup>768</sup> NA CA 3380, Stevenson, *IV*, p.274.

<sup>769</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xvii.

<sup>770</sup> NA CA 3381, Stevenson, *IV*, p.279.

been referred to the Assize court and the Privy Council for settlement, and the purpose of the agreement was ‘so that the Lordes of the Councell [the Privy Council] and the Judges [Justices of Assize] bee pleased therewith’.<sup>771</sup> How this referral was made is not obvious, but as noted above, there had been appeals in the past to the Assize judges for legal advice on leases; it is probable that they were consulted over this matter in the same way. The mayor though, had direct access to the Privy Council through the Earl of Shrewsbury, a member of the Privy Council since 1601, who had been appointed High Steward of Nottingham in January 1606.<sup>772</sup>

In March 1606 the Privy Council issued an order that a Council of twenty-four should be elected by the mayor and all the burgesses, or the majority of them, comprising eighteen members of the Clothing and six commoners who together with the mayor, Recorder and aldermen had the power to make orders for the government of the town.<sup>773</sup> As Stevenson point out, it is ‘difficult to reconcile its provisions with the evidence of the Hall Books’ as there were fifty-five councillors including the Recorder, the Mayor’s Clerk and the Sheriffs’ Clerk at the first sitting of the new Council held on 23 April 1606.<sup>774</sup> As the order was made only two months after the execution of Guy Fawkes, the Privy Council probably had more important things to consider than the squabbles of a provincial town, which may account for the mis-match. Its wording does, however, support the argument that by this stage any dispute concerned only the composition of the

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<sup>771</sup> NA CA 3381, Stevenson, *IV*, pp.278-79.

<sup>772</sup> P E J Hammer, ‘Manners, Roger, fifth earl of Rutland (1576–1612)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, 2008, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17962>]; NA CA 3381, Stevenson, *IV*, p.278.

<sup>773</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xvii.

<sup>774</sup> Stevenson, *IV*, p.xviii, footnote 4.

lower house, which included common burgesses, and the appointment of new members to the Council. The order also overcame – or by-passed – problems associated with amending the 1449 Charter as it did not deal with the composition of the upper house.

In the short term, the Council may have allowed greater burgess participation through the election of six or eight ‘commoners’. The tradition of an electoral college was such that, whatever the Privy Council’s order, in the longer term vacancies on the Council were filled by former chamberlains. Effectively the Council was at least as closed as before and more importantly its composition was legally defined and more hierarchical.

To a degree Stevenson was correct in identifying a split between the burgesses and the Council. He was, however, less accurate in suggesting that the Mickletorn and Sessions juries both represented the burgesses in opposition to the Council. Composed, as they were, by future members of the ruling groups, it was in their interests to regulate disaffected burgesses such as Percival Millington. Furthermore, although the Mickletorn was critical of the common council and supported its replacement, it also regularly criticised the burgesses for overstepping their authority. By including men like Millington in a revised and more closed Council structure, his actions and those of his colleagues were absorbed and neutralised. There does, though, appear to have been an acknowledgement of the plight of ‘poor burgesses’, perhaps because as Ian Archer argues, first-generation members of the elite had many contacts with members of the lower social orders.<sup>775</sup> If that was the case in London, then it would be even

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<sup>775</sup> Archer, *Stability*, p.51.

more so in a small town like Nottingham. The range of occupations followed by chamberlains and sheriffs, and even mayors, identified in Chapter Three suggests they may have had more in common with the burgess community of 1600 than the Staple merchants had with the same community of 1400. What is unambiguous is that both sides sought a legal solution and demonstrated a willingness to negotiate, co-operate and adapt to circumstances, an attitude very different from that of the burgesses of the early fifteenth century. The result was a Council which was probably better fitted to deal with the responsibilities of seventeenth-century local government than the medieval structure that was the legacy of the 1449 Charter.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the potential for social unrest, specifically events which challenged the authority of the Council, asked by the fourth research question. Criticism of council members came in a variety of forms. The first of these saw complaints made against council members, through the Mickletorn or Sessions juries, for infringements of communal rules and acceptable behaviour. These are similar, if not identical, to complaints made about any other burgesses; they may be expressions of dissatisfaction with individual men but cannot be seen as a rift in the community.

There are, though, several examples of fissures between the Council and the burgesses. The insurrections of 1411-13 and 1512 resulted in interventions by the Crown in support of the local authority. The cause of the former is unknown, but the latter was part of a pattern of urban unrest, fuelled by local economic and



political instabilities. It was these conditions, which allowed three men to dominate the town in the 1520s, that led to protests and possibly factionalism.

The final examples, at the end of the sixteenth century, do suggest a fracture between the common burgesses and the Council, caused to a great extent by the influx of new burgesses and the stress this placed on common land. The interesting and important difference between these events and those at the beginning of the century was that a solution was reached not through direct action but through negotiation and compromise.

This leads to the question of the role of the Mickletorn and Sessions juries in challenging the Council. As well as pointing out individual misdemeanours, they were critical of the common council as an institution which did not fulfil its function. But the Mickletorn in particular was also quick to remind the burgesses of their responsibility and duty to the community. The majority of their members had some civic responsibility and increasingly they were identified with local authority and the eventual merger of the Clothing with the common council recognised that connection. By composition and function, these juries were not representative of the common burgesses although they may have sympathy with them. The association between civic office and social status has been discussed at various times in this thesis; the consequence of the reforms of the later sixteenth century was to produce a delineated hierarchy and narrower burgess participation in local government, and more rigidly defined social structure.

As part of the analysis in this chapter, Stevenson's interpretation of the role of the Great Court and the relationship between the Sessions court and Mickletorn juries has been reassessed. Rather than being in competition with each other, these

groups were complementary, with their own range of interests. Overlaps in responsibility may have resulted from their shared membership and because they were part of the same court structure. The absorption of the Great Court by the Sessions court shows the flexibility of that structure at this time.

Stevenson's interpretation of the social relationships within the burgess community has also been challenged and reinterpreted. There were frictions, but each had individual causes dependent on the economic and social conditions of their time. Furthermore, these frictions were not always between burgess and Council. The Mickletorn and Sessions juries were comprised of many men who were the peers of Council members and their criticisms cannot be described as part of a continual rift in the community. Rather than being tyrannical, the actions of the Council at the end of the sixteenth century show considerable efforts were made to reconcile the concerns of the burgesses with its duty to prevent unrest and maintain a harmonious community. Instead, it is the beginning of the fifteenth century that the greatest disharmony is apparent. This does not mean that the government of 1606 was democratic, only that the responsibilities and relationships within the community were defined and understood, reducing the potential for political unrest.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion to Part II**

The three chapters in Part II have concentrated on the development of the institutions of local government in Nottingham in order to identify the nature and extent of oligarchic government in Nottingham. It has also shown how changes in the structure of government were influenced by the economic and demographic changes identified in Part I, and added further to the details of these changes.

There can be no doubt that Nottingham's local government was always oligarchic. Authority in 1400 rested in the hands of the mayor and two bailiffs. Although these were elected annually, it was the custom for the electoral group to be small and composed of an elite group, some of whom were related to each other and all were from the more prosperous sections of the community. Overtime, the nature of the oligarchy became more defined and hierarchic, first in 1446 with the election of a council and more formally as a consequence of the 1449 Charter which by default created a two-tier system that further excluded burgess participation. The changes at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century at first appear to present a paradox, as they allowed some limited contribution to government by common burgesses, at a time when it is generally argued that oligarchies became more defined. Further investigation showed, though, that in the intervening years, the Mickletorn and Sessions court juries had become more integrated with the group who elected the mayor and aldermen, now known as the Clothing. The merger of the Clothing with the common council simply recognised its role in local government. Any wider burgess participation was short-lived, and the paradox is thus reconciled. The early seventeenth-century Council was still an oligarchy defined by wealth and

family networks but the hierarchy was more rigorously distinct and precise. With a legally prescribed fifty-six members it was only fractionally larger than the more informal grouping of mayor and forty-eight who were in control at the beginning of the fifteenth century – the difference being represented perhaps by the other six aldermen and the Recorder. The narrowness of this oligarchy is further emphasised when the great increase in population is taken into account, thus making the elite group of 1600 proportionally smaller than its counterpart of 1400.

All the major constitutional changes were, partially at least, prompted by external influences. The 1449 grant of Incorporation offered financial protection to town officials who were affected by the declining wool and textile trades. Underlying the 1600-1606 reconstitution was a discontent with the management of common land and the lot of poor burgesses. This highlights a difference in the economic environment of the two events. The evasion of office by middle ranking burgesses in the mid-fifteenth century suggests it was this group which was most seriously affected by the loss of markets. In contrast, the middle ranking burgesses of the late sixteenth century were prosperous and willing to take office, while it was the poorest of the burgesses who suffered because of competition from in-migrants. In both cases the wealthiest appear to have been unscathed, and even flourished.

The changing economic and demographic conditions affected the mayoralty in other ways as well, in particular the early part of the sixteenth century saw political instability. A consequence of this was that, temporarily, the higher civic offices became accessible to men who would, in all probability, have been excluded in other circumstances. It also allowed the opportunity for three men,

John Williamson, John Rose and Thomas Mellers, to dominate the mayoralty and abuse their position, leading to discord and factionalism.

The criticisms made against Williamson, Rose and Mellers, are probably the most serious found in the Borough Records, but they were, of course, not the only members of the Council to abuse their privileges. Several examples have been given of mayors taking actions which were perceived to be detrimental to the well-being of the community. This was not unique to Nottingham, as Friedrichs points out, and neither was it limited to post-Reformation Nottingham.<sup>776</sup> The Mickletorn petition criticising Rose, Williamson and Mellers itself pre-dates the Reformation by several years, and there are examples of presentments against men like Henry Wilford and Robert Squire at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

These were not the only examples of discontent within the burgess community. Some, such as the discord in the fifteenth century, led to insurrection which had to be quashed by the Crown. There were similar problems in the early-sixteenth century, related to national unrest, which were again controlled through central government intervention. In contrast, in the later sixteenth-century, when Stevenson suggests there was a great rift between the burgesses and the Council, the Council chose not to use its authority to over-rule burgesses' concerns but displayed a degree of flexibility and adaptability similar to that perceived by Rappaport in his studies of London.<sup>777</sup> There may be many reasons for this, including the improved prosperity of the group which called for change, but in

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<sup>776</sup> C R Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450-1570* (Burnt Mill, 1995), p.309.

<sup>777</sup> S Rappaport, 'Social Structure and Mobility in Sixteenth Century London' *London Journal*, 9, part 2 (1983), p.107.

itself, that indicates a concern for the poorer members of society not apparent in the previous century. Furthermore, the causes of the burgesses' fears were not the political motives attributed to them by Stevenson, but the social, economic and demographic problems discussed in previous chapters. As a result, his description of Nottingham's oligarchy has been reassessed and reinterpreted. The various examples of criticism of town officials are not part of a continuum but individual events, stimulated by particular events and circumstances.

Much of the evidence for the connections between the Council and the sub-structures of government which underpinned its work of preserving the peace and maintaining social harmony, comes from the discussion of the court system in Chapter Six. This discussion also added to the description of the changing economic circumstances of Nottingham. The gradual reduction in suits brought to the Borough court is an indication of the steady economic decline through the last half of the fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth. In particular the severity of the economic problems in the 1520s are highlighted by the lack of legal business conducted. The continual decline in the number of cases reflects changing legal practice, but the value of the suits judged at the end of the sixteenth century testifies to a more buoyant economy. Further corroboration of this decline is given through the lessening of distances travelled by the men and women who traded in Nottingham, however, there is also evidence of the later strength in the domestic market.

The discussion of courts has added to the understanding of the social structure of Nottingham based on office holding, suggesting that there was a hierarchy of minor court officials from affeerer to constable, with very few men able to

progress beyond these levels. Even at these low ranks, suitability was probably assessed by wealth, which though difficult to quantify at these levels, is echoed in occupations. Occupational analysis shows clear distinctions between the men who were able to rise to higher office and those who were not. Nevertheless, these lower social groupings also had their leaders such as Percival Millington and the constables who led the Tithe Hay protests, and who later gained status as common councillors, even if this progression was short-lived.

Despite some discernible milestones, the pace of administrative change was, in general, gradual, and many of the modifications which seem new are on further examination, often just affirmations of existing practice. The grant of Incorporation in 1449 acknowledged that Nottingham was already an incorporated town and the creation of seven aldermen to rule it, while conferring status on the individuals, simply formalised existing customary practice. The establishment of the Sessions court was an innovation for Nottingham, but as it assimilated many of the responsibilities and characteristics of the Great Court and common hall it was also an adaptation of existing institutions. Even the reconstitution of the Council after 1600 was to some extent a formalisation of the status of the Clothing which since the 1580s at least had been closely linked to the common council. In the meantime, the role of the Borough court remained almost unchanged, although it became better organised. The most discernable changes are found not in the institutions, but in the responsibilities of local government which were a consequence of the Reformation.

The post-Reformation period brought greater authority to the Council as its responsibilities for the management of the town's assets and for social regulation

increased. Indeed, most of the consequences for Nottingham of the Reformation can only be appreciated through the administrative documents. These record not just the most commonly discussed facets of social regulation such as the control of vagrants and the provision of poor relief – although there are many examples of these – but also some of the less common aspects. The transfer to the Council of the responsibility for the maintenance of the Trent bridges brought with it the financial responsibility for a greater area of land and the regulation of beggars also meant the regulation of troupes of players. Initially, these travelling players were part of the means by which the Protestant message was transmitted. The assimilation of this message into the consciousness of Nottingham people is demonstrated by the Sessions court presentments against immorality, while the same presentments reveal the degree of resistance to the movement. This augmented authority can only have served to emphasise the social distinctiveness of local officials, particularly the mayor and aldermen.

This examination of Nottingham's administration has shown, then, that the function of most of its institutions remained unchanged, but the breadth of responsibility increased particularly in response to the Reformation and increasing amount of centralised legislation which was a consequence of its imposition. This gave the town's leaders greater authority which, combined with the wealth and social status identified in Part I, must have added to their social distinctiveness. Nevertheless, in face of opposition from burgess groups, the post-Reformation council was far more prepared to negotiate and co-operate than its predecessors whose members, in theory at least, were socially more closely related to the wider community than the urban gentry who comprised the elite in 1600.



## **Conclusion: Continuity or Change?**

This thesis opened by stating that the world in 1600 was different from the world of 1400, yet the overarching themes have been continuity as well as change. Inevitably there is more evidence for change than for continuity because almost by definition continuity goes unrecorded. It is also true that over long periods of time very little remains unchanged. Consequently, all aspects of Nottingham discussed have shown modifications, but some are minor and the pace gradual and evolutionary. Men and women living through these modifications, as Friedrichs asserts, were probably aware of little change; it is only the longer time-scale of this study which makes them visible.<sup>778</sup> On the other hand, some changes happened perceptively quickly, and this seems particularly true in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, observations made from just one viewpoint cannot tell the full story. The three foci of this study – the town, the people and the administration – were chosen because they allow the same stimuli to be studied from three perspectives, thus confirming or modifying arguments, adding detail, and creating a more complete account of events.

The first of these subjects, the town, shows both gradual and rapid change, and some considerable continuity. The street plan of Nottingham in 1600 was fundamentally the same as in 1400. From 1400, however, until the middle of the sixteenth century the streets became steadily emptier as the population declined. Houses were uninhabited and rents unpaid, and the fabric of the town dilapidated. There is no direct evidence of the immediate effect of the sixteenth-century re-edification but it is possible to infer that property repairs and new building

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<sup>778</sup> C R Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450-1570* (Burnt Mill, 1995), p.333.

resulted in in-filling, with little expansion except to the north of the Saturday market into Back Side. The stimulus for this investment was the increasing population which must have filled the streets and crowded the market.

Residential patterns within Nottingham also remained much the same. Butchers occupied the streets around the Weekday market, tanners lived in Broad Marsh and Narrow Marsh, although there were more of them in 1600; a consequence of both a larger population and the greater importance of the industry. Mercers, corvisers, fishmongers, bakers and suppliers of other household items lived around the Saturday market. Men dwelt near to the sources of their income so there is no evidence of wealthier or poorer areas, but as some occupations generated more wealth than others a few streets, such as Long Row, probably seemed more prosperous.

Like the streets, the market saw few real changes. Market rents fell and, like houses, stalls were left untenanted, but the organisation of the market was unchanged. The Weekday market continued to supply both meat to townspeople and hide to the tanners. The Saturday market dealt in a wider range of household goods and attracted traders from outside town, although they travelled less distance than their predecessors. Greater prosperity in the later sixteenth century saw an increase in the number of shops and the introduction of luxury goods. By the end of the sixteenth century, the market was crowded and thriving; this sparked other commercial development such as the new mills which had consequences for tenant millers who were unable to compete. At the same time, there is evidence of greater regulation of the market, probably in response to its growth and the potential for unfair trading by a greater number of people. The

improved economy of the 1570s led to calls for additional buildings to accommodate incoming traders, yet at the same time there was a fear of the strangers and ‘noughte rookes’ they would attract.<sup>779</sup> These almost conflicting attitudes exemplify many of the concerns of this later period when the town and its burgesses sought to exploit the improving economy but feared the consequences of such development.

One of the most obvious, but hardest to quantify, changes is the use of the streets as the setting for public events, whether these were the ritual processions of Whit Monday and Corpus Christi or the more secular event of the Mayor’s fishing. The Reformation changed the nature of many of these occasions but the venues remained the same. The atmosphere of communal and public areas must have been affected by the closure of the friaries and chantries, and by the many licensed and unlicensed poor men and women, including maimed soldiers and homeless paupers, moving from town to town. The appearance of these strangers created an impression of insecurity which demanded greater control and regulation.

Unlike the streets and markets, there is evidence for much greater change in the demand for common land, particularly to support poor burgesses. Yet again population growth at the end of the sixteenth century was a key factor in the management of these communal assets, as burgesses demanded that leases were not renewed and plots not sub-let to ‘foreigners’; a concern which illustrates the town’s continuing relationship with and dependence on agriculture.

Population change was an important factor in altering the urban environment in Nottingham, whether this was decline or growth. The gradual decrease in

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<sup>779</sup> NA CA 3014, 3015.

population over the fifteenth century, followed by accelerated shrinkage at the beginning of the sixteenth threatened to undermine the town both economically and politically. Rapid population growth, fuelled by in-migration, in the latter half of the sixteenth century probably doubled the number of inhabitants. Some of the consequences, or fear of the consequences, of this migration have already been mentioned, but migrants were not just transitory paupers or dishonest vagrants. The presence of 'foreign' burgesses led to protests and calls to restrict their numbers, while a small proportion of migrants were also men of wealth and status. Still relatively insignificant in 1600, they foreshadow a greater presence in the later seventeenth century. Together with other wealthy men they attracted manufacturers of luxury goods into Nottingham.

The history of people, though, is not simply the history of numbers. Perhaps the easiest way of describing the people of Nottingham is through the framework of the social structure of the town. Status was accorded to civic office and civic office was dependent on income. All but the later taxes, which focus on only the wealthiest, describe a pyramid with few people at the apex and a broad base of men and women whose worth just qualified them for taxation. Those men at the top of the ladder were invariably mayor and some aspired to gentry status. In the mid-fifteenth century this necessitated the acquisition of land or honour, hence the Samon family gained a knighthood and moved to Annesley Woodhouse while Thomas Thurland became Lord of the Manor of Gamston and married into a noble family. By 1600, gentry status was bestowed on the basis of civic responsibility (and therefore wealth), testifying to the increased status of civic office at the end of the sixteenth century. In the middle of the pyramid are the

sheriffs and chamberlains, then minor civic officials. Below them, of course, are the significant number of individuals with so few assets they did not warrant taxing.

There is a correlation between civic office, wealth and occupation from which it is possible to observe a parallel or complementary hierarchy. Men who held minor office practiced the least prestigious crafts while senior officials were important tradesmen and manufacturers. Some crafts are never seen associated with the higher offices, suggesting some were considered unsuitable or insufficiently respectable. These, of course, are broad generalisations. There are, though, some indications that a narrow hierarchy of occupations operated at the beginning of the fifteenth century and again at the end of the sixteenth, when the spectrum of occupations followed by civic officials is comparatively small. The intervening period saw the appointment of men from a much greater range of occupations, probably as a result of the prevailing economic conditions which caused evasion of office by middle-ranking burgesses and a shortage of suitable candidates. This was an adaptation in response to specific circumstances, which was rectified as soon as economic conditions permitted.

As the urban textile industry failed over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Nottingham developed a more mixed economy, with a greater preponderance of manufacturing industries, initially bell founding, but by 1600 tanning and the manufacture of leather products were dominant in both numbers and in the civic and social status of the industry leaders. The wealth, social status and civic responsibilities of these men separated them from the rest of the community, but it is possible that as employers they had more in common with their employees and

less wealthy burgess colleagues than the rich Staple merchants of the previous century.

This stratification, of course, does not tell the whole story. It omits all those who did not pay tax, or paid tax but did not, or chose not to, hold civic office. It does include some better off women, usually widows, but there were many other women actively employed in Nottingham. Nor does this structure allow for the fifteenth century alien community or the poor migrants of the sixteenth. One constant throughout both centuries, though, is the importance, in numbers, of the manufacturers and suppliers of food and drink, almost matched by the social status of many of the people employed in this trade. Another constant is the presence in Nottingham of men who can be called entrepreneurs, although the direction and scale of their enterprise changed.

These discussions of the town and people of Nottingham show that both follow a pattern of small changes in some areas and significant modifications in others. The administrative structures of Nottingham follow a very similar model. The Borough court provides not only the longest series of records but also displays the greatest continuity, indeed its jurisdiction remained unchanged after 1399. Any changes are small: its record keeping became more systematic, attorneys more prominent, and the cost of litigation may account for the reduction in small debt cases in the last twenty years or so of the sixteenth century. The significantly larger sums contested, though, reflect the more prosperous economic environment.

The creation of the Sessions court, authorised to hear the most serious felonies, is an important development in the court system. In many ways, however, it was an

adaptation or continuation of existing institutions and the majority of its business concerned the day-to-day management of the town and people. Integral to its structure were the Mickletorn and Sessions juries, and membership of these juries allowed limited burgess participation in local government. These men, though, were drawn from a relatively small group of the more senior burgesses who increasingly were also civic officers, thus narrowing the relationship between the juries and the governing administration even further. Furthermore, as the population grew, proportionally the juries were drawn from an increasingly small sub-set of the expanding community.

The structure of the Council underwent a number of mutations during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 1400, it comprised a small oligarchic elite, formalised by the 1449 Charter which in many ways simply acknowledged the existing organisation. The sixteenth century extension of the common council and the early seventeenth century re-composition of the Council are some of the biggest changes observed in Nottingham, but even here there are underlying continuities, as they were, essentially, a recognition of the role already played by former chamberlains and sheriffs in town management. A contributing factor to both restructures was the economic environment. The 1449 Charter provided financial protection for civic officials faced with recession, while the economic boom of the later 1600s forced constitutional change. The greater prosperity of the burgess group may have also made them more acceptable in the eyes of the aldermen (and the town) as partners in local government.

As a result of the examination of the Council, courts and juries it has been possible to challenge some long-held conceptions about the relationships between

civic institutions and the common burgesses. The first, is that the Sessions court, rather than encroaching on the Mickletorn jury absorbed the responsibilities of the Great Court. Second, it has been shown that the Mickletorn and Sessions juries were not in opposition to the Council, although they might criticise it, but were integral to town administration. Finally, that although there was, sometimes serious, dissention it was not part of a continuous and growing rift between the burgesses and the elite. Each incident had its own stimulus and, if anything, there was greater consensus in 1600 than there had been in 1400, although this may be because of a more rigid hierarchy which limited the ability of burgesses to act autonomously.

No change came about from a single cause, and not all can be identified. The loss of records between 1450 and 1480 and again between 1550 and 1575 means there is little possibility of fully assessing the implications of these troubled years. But it has been possible to identify three prominent factors that contributed to change: an erratic economy, demographic swings and the imposition of Protestantism.

The first two have a 'chicken-and-egg' relationship. Did economic recession in the fifteenth century reduce in-migration resulting in low population figures, or did a decreasing population lessen demand, causing recession? The obverse of this is, of course, did the economic improvements of the mid-sixteenth century create a demand for labour, attracting migrants into Nottingham to raise the population, or did in-migration stimulate the economy? Whatever the position, the consequences for Nottingham have been well rehearsed. Recession affected market and house rents, reduced the workload of the Borough court, and ultimately changed the occupational profile of the town. Recovery increased the



demand for common land, crowded the streets, stretched the social structure widening the social divide, and possibly contributing to social friction. Two features are consistent in both situations: men with the greatest wealth survived whatever the circumstances and both environments provided opportunity for entrepreneurial activity, the difference being purely in the scope.

There is little direct evidence of the effect of Protestantism in Nottingham's administrative records. The most obvious features are the presentments for recusancy in the Sessions court, suggesting resistance to the new faith. Even the Mickletorn jury's request that the Council regularly attend the Friday preaching is questionable. There is evidence that Protestant teaching was being absorbed into attitudes to immorality, but that may have been as much a result of visiting players giving Protestant plays as theological conviction. Indirect effects of the Reformation, though, are evident and important, as the Council acquired new responsibilities which brought with them greater authority and greater status, contributing to the widening social and economic divide.

In summary, then, in 1600 Nottingham was physically slightly bigger and certainly more densely populated than 200 years earlier. The economy was booming but the civic leaders were industrialists not merchants. The administrative institutions fulfilled the same role they had in 1400, but were more bureaucratic. The Council was bigger, but more formally stratified, and access to civic office more limited. The social structure of the town, which to a great extent mirrored the Council hierarchy, must also have been more formal, and the gap between rich and poor was almost certainly wider. The speed of most of these changes, however, was evolutionary at least until the middle of the sixteenth

century. After 1550, through a combination of economic, demographic and political factors, the pace of change increased and many of the changes must have been noticeable to the townsmen and women. Medieval Nottingham had become 'modern' Nottingham.

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