

A Town 'Governed by a Company of Geese in Furred Gowns': Political and Social Conflict in Reading c.1620-40¹

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Although the fortunes of English towns varied and fluctuated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there can be no doubt that many towns – and particularly those with a clothing specialisation – suffered serious difficulties during the subsistence and trading crises of the 1550s, 1590s, 1620s and 1630s. Whilst the mid-Tudor crisis followed close upon the heels of the Henrician and Edwardian religious reformations and facilitated the rise or consolidated the authority of leading freemen in struggling towns, the later crises required urban governors to demonstrate their mettle and confirm their worthiness to wield the wide-ranging powers acquired. They faced a formidable challenge. The willingness of Tudor and Stuart rulers to delegate urban government to local elites coincided not only with a period of rapid population growth, escalating unemployment and increased subsistence migration but also with a deterioration in social relations due to evolving concepts of neighbourliness, changes in employer and employee relations, rising inequalities of wealth and a decline in deference. This article explores the problems faced, and strategies adopted, by the mayor and burgesses of Reading as they struggled to cope with economic decline in a once prosperous clothing town during the two decades preceding the civil war. It examines relations between the corporation, the agencies of central government and the urban community, and the role each played, individually and co-operatively, in the promotion of good governance. It traces the escalation and resolution of multi-layered political and social tensions, exacerbated not only by trade slumps and harvest failure but by the dominance of a highly restrictive and self-perpetuating ruling elite and its controversial handling of a substantial charitable legacy.

I

The urban constitution established in Reading by the Elizabethan charter of 1560, and confirmed and consolidated by Charles I in 1638, was exceptionally oligarchic and hierarchical. Whilst a number of recent studies have highlighted factors mitigating the impact of oligarchic rule in the early modern town, their impact upon the negotiation of power relations in early seventeenth century Reading appears to have been minimal.² The government of the town was placed securely in the hands of the mayor and eight capital burgesses (increased to twelve and renamed aldermen in 1638). The ruling group was supported by twelve or more secondary burgesses (later called assistants and capped at twelve) and the usual civic officers. The mayor was elected annually by members of the corporation from three candidates nominated by the retiring mayor and capital burgesses, with preference normally accorded in order of seniority to candidates who had not already occupied the mayoralty and then to those with least recent service. Promotion to capital burgess was also usually based on seniority. New secondary burgesses were co-opted from the ranks of the freemanry.³ The establishment and consolidation of oligarchic rule in Reading follows a pattern found by Robert Tittler in other middle-ranking towns such as Beverley, Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme during the period.⁴ Unlike larger provincial centres such as Norwich, Bristol, Exeter and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the freemanry and common people in Reading were completely excluded from the political process, including the parliamentary franchise, and compelled to rely upon informal communication and direct action to present their views and protect their interests at town, county and national level.⁵

Whereas the impact of oligarchy was normally diluted in urban corporations by the regular turnover of burgesses due to death, retirement or dismissal, a clique of long-lived capital burgesses dominated the government of Reading during the 1620s and 1630s.⁶ Foremost amongst them were members of the Gunter, Knight, Malthus and Turner families. Thomas Turner's forebears had been active in urban politics since the early sixteenth century. He was appointed a secondary burgess in 1588, served as capital burgess between 1598 and 1643, and through seniority, political lineage and strength of personality, wielded considerable power and influence. Like Nicholas Gunter, he served as mayor on four occasions between 1602 and 1631. During the period 1620-34, whilst the Knight, Malthus and Turner families enjoyed double representation amongst the ruling elite and occupied the mayoralty on ten occasions, only two capital burgesses were replaced.⁷ Secondary burgesses

waited over 20 years for promotion compared with five to 14 years in earlier decades. Although kinship and apprenticeship ties were declining amongst urban elites in some towns and cities by the seventeenth century, the concentration of oligarchic power and authority in Reading remained fortified by the multiple representation and intermarriage of elite families and by the predominance of the clothing interest amongst the capital burgesses.⁸ At least 60 per cent of the secondary burgesses co-opted and 72 per cent of the capital burgesses appointed from 1588 to 1637 were clothiers, mercers or drapers. The remaining burgesses were recruited from the urban gentry and the distributive, victualling and manufacturing trades of apothecary, bellfounder, brewer, chandler, fishmonger, glover, haberdasher, maltster and tanner.⁹

II

The 1620s and 1630s were difficult decades for many urban governors but the social and economic problems facing the mayor and burgesses of Reading were particularly severe.¹⁰ Although the town's economy was diverse, and included a substantial trade in agricultural produce for the London market, there was a heavy specialisation in clothmaking with up to a half of the adult population directly dependant upon the industry for its employment.¹¹ The production of broadcloths and kersies was declining in Reading due to growing domestic and continental competition from producers of new drapery products and woollens with cheaper manufacturing costs and lower tax liabilities.¹² The town's cloth industry survived the unsuccessful Cockayne project of 1614-16 but thereafter fell victim to the commercial pressures of the Thirty Years War which suppressed demand and disturbed trade routes throughout central and northern Europe. Production was severely dislocated by trade depressions in 1620-4, 1627-8, 1630-1 and 1634-5, resulting from currency manipulation, military conflict, privateering and commercial disputes.¹³ In August 1632, the mayor-elect of Reading, William Kendrick, noted '...we have seen a great failing in our town within twenty years last past ...' and '...we are not sure the trade of clothing will continue...'. He backed his gloomy prognostication with the claim that production in the town had declined from 150 to 40 cloths per week.¹⁴

Reading's population had grown rapidly from the 1570s, reaching an estimated 5,500 by 1610 and rising to over 6,000 by 1630, before declining in the late 1630s. The town's three parish registers show a natural increase in population over the five decades but the town also attracted growing numbers of migrants in search of employment or relief.¹⁵ Whilst a flourishing cloth industry absorbed the growing

population, the sustained dislocation and contraction of manufacture in the 1620s and 1630s inevitably caused unemployment, poverty and family breakdown. Despite government pressure, clothiers were only willing and able to maintain production without the prospect of sales for short periods. The only significant source of alternative or additional employment for the wage-dependant population lay in seasonal agricultural work in the surrounding countryside. Few clothworkers produced their own food and savings dwindled. Hardship and poverty were not restricted solely to those dependent upon clothmaking but spread to other sectors of the urban economy as the money in circulation declined. The number of poor in Reading is unknown and clearly fluctuated. Contemporary sources suggest that about one-third of the population of Winchester required relief in the 1620s and that by the 1630s more than half of the population of Salisbury was in desperate straits.¹⁶ In Reading, with 'the handes of thousands of poore people ... emptied of worke' by 1631, the scale of poverty was probably similar.¹⁷ Poor harvests, plague and fire exacerbated both the misery of the poor and the problems demanding the attention of the mayor and burgesses throughout the 1620s and 1630s. A succession of exceptionally poor harvests struck in 1621-2, 1625, 1629-30 leading each time to a sharp rise in grain prices and ultimately to food shortages and hunger.¹⁸ There were outbreaks of bubonic plague in 1625 and 1638 and of smallpox in 1634, all producing high levels of mortality and further hardship to the poor.¹⁹ The urban scourge of fire left poor families in need of relief in 1634.²⁰ Hardship inevitably led to the threat and outbreak of disorder. Frequent prosecutions for petty theft and malicious injury or threat of violence were made in the Mayor's Court of Record during the two decades and in 1631 grain carts were attacked in the streets.²¹

III

Faced not only with the loss of many of their own livelihoods but with the twin spectres of hunger and disorder, the mayor and burgesses took vigorous and wide ranging action to tackle the decline in manufacture, high levels of unemployment and escalating hardship and disorder. They responded to government pressure to improve quality standards in the town's cloth industry by issuing new regulations for the inspection and sealing of cloths in 1633 and appointing additional cloth searchers.²² They petitioned or endorsed petitions to the Privy Council to resolve trade stoppages in 1623, 1630 and 1631, achieving some success in 1623 with their demands '... that there may be more merchants; and to have the same liberty of shipping at all times and at the same charges and as

free as the northern traders do ...' and in 1630 that '...all Marchauntes may have free liberty of transporting coloured cloathes into other partes as well as Delph and Embden for the better taking off of such cloathes from the clothiers handes ...'.²³ Clothiers in the town were already experimenting with the production of a lighter woollen (known as 'Spanish' cloth) developed in Wiltshire to compete with new drapery products, and in 1624, two secondary burgesses, Anthony Brackston and Richard Winch, were despatched to the West Country '... to view the manner of making white cloth ...', but neither initiative staunched the long-term decline of clothmaking in the town.²⁴

The mayor and burgesses exhorted clothiers to maintain employment during trade depressions, summoning the town's clothiers to the Gild Hall in October 1623 to discuss how best to provide employment to the town's spinners and carders and appointing two clothiers as overseers in each parish to supervise the allocation of work and take note of strangers weaving and clothworking in the town to the 'hindrance of the inhabitants'.²⁵ In March 1629, they again appointed overseers in the parishes, but by November 1630 the combined impact of depression and deficient harvest compelled them to order the town's clothiers to '... put all the wevinge, burlinge, sheringe and dressinge of all and every their woollen cloth to and amongst the poore wevers, burlers and workforce inhabitinge in this Towne ...' and to impose a heavy fine upon those who continued to use rural outworkers.²⁶ In January 1631, they took action to maintain spinning rates at levels paid 'in good tymes past'.²⁷ Throughout the 1620s and 1630s the mayor and burgesses strictly enforced apprenticeship legislation and both discouraged the settlement and ordered the removal of subsistence migrants seeking employment in the town.²⁸

As in other towns and cities, vagrants and beggars received harsh treatment. From 1622 the town's constables were instructed to appoint men to apprehend rogues entering the town and from 1625, the town's beadle (later the town's marshal) was responsible for 'clensing the streetes of' vagrants, rogues and beggars.²⁹ Regular payments are recorded for the whipping of 'all the vagrantes and idle people taken in the towne' and 'rogues, vagabondes, sturdye and unruly personnes' were set to work in the house of correction established in Reading in 1614.³⁰ During the 1620s as the problems of poverty intensified, rate collections were made to repair and extend the house of correction and to provide employment, training and accommodation to some of the deserving able-bodied poor of the town.³¹ In 1625 the corporation appointed William Clayton and his wife to run the house of correction and to set the 'boyes, wenches and charewomen' sent to them to work for their keep and to look after and provide training to younger children.³² The mayor and burgesses raised

rates in all three parishes to pay for food, clothing and additional accommodation for the growing number of poor children assigned to the care of the Claytons and to relieve 'impotent, aged, sicke and needye persones' either in their homes or in the hospital.³³ Rates and charitable funds were also used to apprentice poor children in the town.³⁴ In November 1628 the mayor was allocated a one-off allowance to combat the 'extreamity of the tyme for relevinge travellinge souldyers'.³⁵

The subsistence crises of 1622-4 and 1629-31 required and received close attention from the mayor and burgesses. Poor rates were collected and distributed by the churchwardens and overseers of the poor to '... the most poor, by their discretions ...' in each of the town's three parishes, supplemented in November 1630 with 40s from the Charitable Uses fund '... to helpe the reliefe of the poore of St Giles, in regard the number of poore is soe great there and the gevers so fewe'.³⁶ The Privy Council's directions for the regulation and relief of the poor, reproduced and extended in the Book of Orders, issued January 1631, were swiftly and in the main, effectively, implemented. Unlicensed alehouses were suppressed in an attempt to prevent their use as meeting places, discourage the violence, disorder and discontent exacerbated by excessive drinking and reduce the quantity of grain malted.³⁷ Following an attack on grain carts in 1631 the ringleaders were arrested and punished to demonstrate, albeit selectively, the illegality of such action.³⁸ By 1631, corn was so expensive and in such short supply that the Mayor and burgesses agreed to lend 20s a man to purchase corn to sell to the poor at the weekly Saturday and Wednesday markets.³⁹ Members of the victualling trades were summoned to the Gild Hall and warned against engrossing corn for private gain.⁴⁰ The mayor and burgesses were vigilant in implementing precautions to prevent and contain the spread of plague in 1625 and 1638, including appointing watchmen and searchers, restricting the movement of goods and persons in and out of the town, isolating families with suspected cases of plague in their homes and raising rates to pay for the measures and for the relief of the families affected.⁴¹ In 1640 they decided to build a pest-house to improve the containment of plague.⁴²

The mayor and burgesses were fortunate to have a range of charitable funds at their disposal to supplement the rates levied to relieve the poor. These included tradesmen's loan funds, gifts to provide dowries for poor maids, annual doles of cash and clothing and monies left to support the hospital and house of correction. The surviving evidence suggests that they were carefully administered.⁴³ In December 1624, the charitable resources of the town were significantly augmented when the London draper and merchant adventurer, John Kendrick, died, leaving £8,400 in

legacies to his town of birth. Ignoring the financial caution and desire for visible commemoration shown by other mercantile benefactors, Kendrick sought to provide a safety net for the deserving able-bodied poor from Reading's clothing workforce who suffered periodic unemployment and poverty due to personal misfortune or trading difficulties. His legacies included £7,500 to acquire a 'strong house of Brick fit and commodious for setting of the poore on worke', supply 'a common stock to be employed in [the] trade of clothing' and purchase lands generating an income of £50 to be distributed twice yearly to the poor, together with a further £500 to establish a loan fund for poor tradesmen and £100 to provide dowries for poor maids. Similar legacies, to the value of £4,800, were left to the neighbouring clothing town of Newbury.⁴⁵ The size of the bequests inevitably drew attention to the towns' good fortune and to the progress of the projects.

IV

Philanthropy and innovative investment were desperately needed in Reading by early 1625, but it is clear from corporation records that the workhouse legacy was greeted from the start with some misgiving. The proposed project presented an onerous challenge and significant responsibility. Although much was left to the discretion of the mayor and burgesses, Kendrick's stipulation that the balance of the legacy over and above the cost of acquiring and equipping suitable accommodation should be invested directly in circulating capital caused particular concern because the profitability of the workhouse could not be guaranteed in the economic climate of the period. The mayor and burgesses favoured adopting the more prudent course of investing in land to produce a yearly income to provide employment for the poor, but faced the prospect of forfeiting the legacy to Christ's Hospital in London if they failed to observe the terms of the will.⁴⁶ The text of Kendrick's will was studied and discussed during numerous corporation meetings and legal advice sought.⁴⁷ Whilst the equity doctrine of *cy-près* permitted modification of a failed charitable trust, the mayor and burgesses were almost certainly advised against application to the courts because the terms of the bequest could not be presented as uncertain or illegal and it would be difficult to prove that they were unworkable before they had been implemented.⁴⁷

By September 1625, the mayor and burgesses had agreed to purchase a substantial house and workshops in Minster Street from William Kendrick, a secondary burgess and brother of the benefactor, together with a small adjoining plot from Anthony Blgrave. They paid £1,900

for the Minster Street property and land in North Street and £32 for the small plot.⁴⁸ There is no record that they employed independent assessors to value the property and land purchased and Kendrick was later accused of overcharging the corporation.⁴⁹ The high cost of the purchases and staged payment of the workhouse legacy prevented development of the workhouse buildings and site before February 1627.⁵⁰ The corporation's ambitious plans caused further delay. Although the existing residential accommodation was retained, most of the workshops were demolished and three new ranges erected, together with a flamboyant artisan mannerist entrance façade with Corinthian columns, shaped gables and a conch niche, at a recorded cost of £1,846.⁵¹ The mayor and burgesses were clearly more concerned to assuage civic pride and demonstrate gratitude for John Kendrick's munificence than to hasten and maximise the relief provided to the poor. In September 1627, spurred to action by complaints that the poor of Reading were receiving little benefit from the Kendrick legacy, they decided to allow William Kendrick to remain on site until midsummer 1628, with a loan of £1,000, provided he agreed to make three cloths per week and employed poor workers selected by the corporation.⁵²

Deciding how to run the workhouse also proved to be problematic. In May 1626 'some speeches were had of the employment of parte of Mr. John Kendricke's stocke given to the towne, and request was made to every man that consideration be respectively had howe and which wayes it shalbe used for the good of the poore and tomorrowe to declare every man's opinion in that matter'. Nothing was resolved on this occasion or when the subject was revisited in August 1626 and January 1627.⁵³ In February 1627, the mayor and burgesses rejected a proposal put forward by the freemen of the town to secure their own involvement in the workhouse project, but it was not until July 1627, following several meetings with William Knollys, Earl of Banbury and other leading Berkshire gentlemen to examine the freemen's proposal and to discuss the implementation of the will, that they finally opted to operate the workhouse as a 'common clothing house' and to offer shares in the common stock to 12 of the town's clothiers, 'if 12 can be found', to be invested in making cloth and employing the poor.⁵⁴ The decision generated controversy because it provided scope for favouritism and afforded financial benefit to clothiers as well as unemployed cloth-workers. It was doubtless compared unfavourably with the decision made by the mayor and burgesses of Newbury to run their workhouse as an independent business venture managed by a clothier and supervised by a committee of burgesses.⁵⁵

During the summer of 1628 the corporation drafted articles of

agreement for the employment of the residual common stock of £3,600 and operation of the workhouse. The articles required clothiers appointed as undertakers of the stock to produce one cloth per week in the workhouse for each £300 received, using only materials provided by the workhouse and providing employment to as many wool pickers, spinners, carders, spoolers, quillers, weavers, burlers and shearmen from the town as were needed to service 12 looms. A proportion of the profit earned was to be paid to the common stock.⁵⁶ The mayor and burgesses appointed the first 12 undertakers in September 1628. The group included William Kendrick's son and nephew, Thomas Kendrick and William Gandy, his cousin Walter Bye (a secondary burgess) and the son and grandson of Thomas Turner, William Turner (senior) and William Turner (junior). Although Thomas Kendrick and William Gandy had only just completed their apprenticeship and were thus inexperienced, they received £1,200 of the stock and were granted use of the dwelling house and other outbuildings at the workhouse.⁵⁷ It is not known whether there were other potential applicants or what criteria were used for their selection, apart from their ability to provide surety for the stock received.⁵⁸ In October the mayor and burgesses selected 24 weavers, 16 shearmen and 6 burlers from 'suitors' for employment in the workhouse and appointed two overseers to supervise the workshops.⁵⁹ Again, it is not known what criteria were used to determine deservingness, but later dismissals indicate that adequate workmanship and appropriate deference were required to secure continued employment.⁶⁰ No details have survived of the number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers allocated work in the workhouse or their own homes, but they may have numbered some 200 men, women and children, including rural spinners. The workhouse finally swung into action in November 1628 before the building was completed.⁶¹

The workhouse was briefly profitable, although it never produced the 8 per cent annual return upon the common stock optimistically anticipated by the mayor and burgesses. The undertakers manufactured long coloured cloths and Spanish cloths with typical wholesale valuations of £10 17s 0d and £7 0s 0d respectively. They presented their first accounts in June 1629, showing 343 cloths manufactured during the first six months of operation and a contribution of £80 8s 6d (an annual return of 4.5 per cent) to the common stock. As the economic situation deteriorated and cloths stockpiled during 1630, the undertakers' profits plummeted and their contribution to the common stock for the fifteen months period to October 1630 amounted to only £74 9s 0d (an annual return of 1.7 per cent).⁶² Five clothiers withdrew from the project, including Thomas Kendrick whose place was taken by a family friend,

James Winch. In November, Walter Fynmore was loaned £100 to employ 25 poor spinners in the workhouse. In December, in the absence of other potential undertakers, the mayor and burgesses increased the share of the common stock allocated to James Winch and William Gandy to £2000.⁶³ Criticism of the corporation's handling of the workhouse legacy mounted in both town and county and in May 1631, the Privy Council appointed a commission of Berkshire justices of the peace '... to inquire and finde out how a legacy of 8000 li. or thereabouts, given to pious uses by John Kendrick of London, draper, deceased, hath bin disposed of. As also to view and survey ... a certaine publicque workehouse and land thereunto belonging, purchased with parte of the said legacie'.⁶⁴

During the course of the enquiry, the commissioners, Sir Francis Knollys (senior), Sir Thomas Vachell, Sir Richard Harrison, Sir Edmund Sawyer, William Trumbull, and Francis Windebanke, explored the thorny issue of whether Kendrick intended the workhouse legacy to be used for the benefit of the rich as well as the poor and identified grounds for concluding that the terms of the will had been ignored and the workhouse legacy misused.⁶⁵ Petitions were presented to them by the 'poor workfolk' of Reading and by a group of clothiers.⁶⁶ The commissioners investigated suspicions of financial impropriety but ultimately focused upon incompetence rather than corruption. They confirmed that the corporation had been overcharged for the house and land purchased from William Kendrick, declaring the house to be 'valued by hable men that have seen it, not worth £1000 nor can be sould again at that value'. They questioned the high cost of developing the workhouse site and the retention of less than half of the legacy for the common stock. They criticised the use and management of the common stock, particularly the low rate of increase achieved, the inadequate guarantees accepted from the undertakers to secure repayment of the sums loaned and the lack of rigour in the record keeping.⁶⁷ The poor, they found '... have not bene sett on work so well as before the stock was given ...'.

In August 1632 the mayor and burgesses met to discuss the Privy Council's response to the commission's findings and unanimously agreed that '... if the purchase of land may stande and be able with the will of Mr. Kendrick, that they would be readye to doe thereon as they shalbe directed'.⁶⁸ Somewhat surprisingly, and probably because the Privy Council did not wish to risk Reading forfeiting the legacy, the workhouse was reprieved. The following months saw the mayor and burgesses attempting to revitalise the project, principally by reducing William Gandy's share of the stock, revising the articles of agreement and introducing three new undertakers.⁶⁹ In 1635, following a further intervention

from the Privy Council, they took steps to reduce the overheads of the workhouse.⁷⁰ Their efforts were thwarted by the deepening depression in the cloth industry and several undertakers, including William Gandy defaulted on their interest payments.⁷¹ The re-awarding of the Kendrick loan funds in 1632 and 1635 caused further discontent in the town.⁷² In 1637, a group of clothiers presented a petition to the Privy Council claiming that undertakers of the common-stock and beneficiaries of Kendrick's loan fund were undercutting other clothiers and aggravating the decay of manufacture.⁷³ The Privy Council delegated William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury and a native of Reading, to review the administration of the workhouse legacy. He confirmed the main thrust of the complaints and recommended that Reading should in future use its workhouse to provide training and employment for fatherless children and invest any remaining capital in land to provide apprenticeship funds, loans for poor tradesmen, and dowries for poor maids. His recommendations formed the basis of an Exchequer Decree to modify the charitable trust in 1638.⁷⁴ The mayor and burgesses moved swiftly to purchase the land required to implement the decree, probably to forestall moves by the City of London to claim the bequest for Christ's Hospital.⁷⁵ The management and financial losses of the Newbury workhouse were investigated at the same time but, untainted by accusations of incompetence and corruption, the mayor and burgesses of Newbury were eventually left to resolve the future of their bequest for themselves.⁷⁶

V

Reading corporation's misemployment of Kendrick's workhouse legacy attracted criticism at all levels within the town and wider county community, but the earliest and most sustained criticism came from the ranks of the town's freemen. The freemanry numbered some 360 members in the 1570s and appears to have expanded during the early seventeenth century, exceeding 800 members, Manfred Brod suggests, by the mid-1640s. A significant proportion of the freemen – 46 per cent of the entrants recorded from 1604 to 1639 – worked in the cloth industry or associated distributive trades.⁷⁷ Since c.1570 the freemen of the town had been organised according to trade into five companies, but the company structure appears to have provided a system of municipal regulation rather than a means of representation or aid to cohesion.⁷⁸ Trades and crafts remained largely self sufficient within the company structure in the promotion and defence of their own interests, and the solidarity of the freemanry and its constituent companies was further compromised by the hierarchical nature of urban politics and society.⁷⁹

As in other towns, an elite group, recruited from the more prestigious and affluent trades and often including the sons of current or former burgesses, existed within the freemanry. Its members provided direct support to the mayor and burgesses as church wardens, surveyors of the highways and overseers of the poor and coveted co-option as secondary burgesses.⁸⁰ The freemanry remained capable, however, of taking concerted action when the occasion demanded and concerns about the implementation of Kendrick's legacy proved sufficient to unite a group of some 200 freemen in opposition to the mayor and burgesses. In February 1627 they sought permission for Steven Langley to put forward, on their behalf, a scheme for establishing a workhouse and a common stock in Reading 'that by his dissertions the common stock of £7,500 should bee in all respects ymployed and dispursed for the only use and uttermost generall supply and maintenance of all honest industrious poor people'.⁸¹

Very little is known about Langley or why he took up the cause of the Reading freemen. He is described variously as a clothier of Slough or Staines and was an educated man of some substance.⁸² His scheme proposed that ten honest poor clothiers should be chosen by the freemen to employ the stock in the workhouse and that a further ten honest poor clothiers should be appointed by the mayor and burgesses to supervise the management of both the stock and poor workers employed in the workhouse. The workhouse was to be operated as a common clothing house, providing temporary work as needed to unemployed workers. In addition to their wages, the workforce would receive a proportion of the profit earned on the common stock in order to secure their commitment to the project.⁸³ Langley and the freemen were clearly concerned that control of the Kendrick workhouse legacy should not be concentrated in the hands of the rich and powerful in Reading. It is not known whether the freemen's attempt to secure involvement in the implementation and administration of the Kendrick workhouse legacy formed part of a broader political agenda or whether they were driven solely by fears of corruption, fanned by the preferential treatment accorded to corporation members in the allocation of the town's leases and charitable funds.⁸⁴ When the scheme was rejected by the mayor and burgesses, Langley petitioned William Knollys, Earl of Banbury, members of the Berkshire bench of justices and ultimately the King and Privy Council, but without success.⁸⁵

In 1632 Langley's proposal was revived in a petition presented to the commission of enquiry by the poor freemen and workfolk of Reading.⁸⁶ The impact of trade depression and harvest deficiency, as well as anger at the greed, corruption and ineptitude of the political elite, are clearly visible in the petition, which abandons the dialogue of the deferential

petitioner and resorts to the 'language of class' to criticise the implementation of the workhouse legacy. It emphasises the conflict of interest between the rich and poor, claiming that

The rich men will have ye profits of ye stock to bee theirs (they say) because ye moneyes was given to them onely and nott unto ye inferior freemen that ye magistrates aloane should sett ye pore one work with itt & dispose ye encrease as they think fitt, wherein they Err & are deceaved, but they neede nott so to bee deceaved because they finde by ye donors will that no man is authorised to sett ye poor one worke, but ye poore themselves & ye Donor himselfe ...

The petition points out that the clothiers were left their own loan fund 'to sett themselves one worke ... Iff they will yield ye magistrates ye gaines of that stock then so shall ye poore clothiers & workfolkes yield them theirs likewise'. The emphasis placed upon the gulf between the politically and economically powerful burgesses and weak freemen and workpeople and the criticism of social and economic inequality and exploitation suggests that the binary discourse of class was not employed merely as a rhetorical ploy.⁸⁷

In the same year, Humphrey Parker was called to account for his 'relation' before witnesses of Langley's denunciation of the mayor and burgesses as a 'company of geese in furred gowns'.⁸⁸ Whilst the words appear mild compared with the 'opprobrious words' directed against the mayor, burgesses and their representatives by other townsmen and women, Langley's ridicule struck deep at the preoccupations and pretensions of the mayor and burgesses and posed a threat to their authority that they could not afford to ignore. Use of the term 'geese' conveys not only the noise and cackling of the mayor and burgesses as they flocked together and struggled ineffectively to resolve the economic and social problems facing the town in the early 1630s but also their fear of disorder and riot.⁸⁹ Since geese were fattened for eating, there is also a suggestion of corruption – the fat cats of yesteryear. The clothing of the geese in 'furred gowns' represented a direct attack upon the dignity and deportment of the capital burgesses, who since September 1616 had been required to wear red gowns 'furred with foxes or martens' to attend corporation meetings and church services as a visual symbol of their natural authority in the town.⁹⁰

By 1632, a group of clothiers within the freemanry had begun to mount a separate attack upon the mayor and burgesses. Driven perhaps by their own financial exigencies and angered by the benefit wealthier clothiers were deriving from the Kendrick legacies, the group petitioned

for the workhouse legacy to be invested in land and the income used to provide employment for the poor, arguing that it was currently allocated to a few privileged clothiers at the expense of the town's poorer clothiers and consequently causing 'much trouble and hartburning'.⁹¹ In 1637 a group of clothiers, possibly the same individuals, petitioned the Privy Council concerning clothiers enjoying the benefit of the common stock and clothier's loans

... were enabled to pay dearer rates for stock than other poor clothiers can afford to sell at, whereby they have got into their hands the greatest part of the trade, and all the rest of the clothiers, which is the greatest number, are for the most part of the poorer sort, and for whose benefit the legacy was principally intended, are much prejudiced and impoverished ...⁹²

Although the petitioners exaggerated the role played by the Kendrick legacies in the decline in clothmaking in Reading, their complaints – investigated and confirmed by William Laud – finally provoked modification of the charitable trust.

The activism of the freemanry in the 1620s and 1630s reflected not only their grievance with the inequity they perceived in the handling of the Kendrick legacies but their escalating economic difficulties and rising political discontent. Wide variations had long existed in the organisation and profitability of the town's clothmaking businesses but these were doubtless exacerbated by the economic difficulties of the period which wealthy clothiers with a diversified investment strategy were better placed to withstand than lesser clothiers and the clothing workforce. In the face of falling prices and poor sales, lesser clothiers and master craftsmen were often constrained to reduce costs through quality abatement, thereby risking loss of reputation. The bitterness and desperation of the lesser clothiers and master craftsmen were fuelled by their personal fear and experience of stockpiled cloths, bankruptcy and unemployment. Both groups faced sharply rising living costs, with periodic soaring food prices and shortages, whilst cloth sales and prices plummeted. They struggled to meet the mounting burden of loans, taxes and military expenses imposed by Stuart governments and rising poor rates in their parishes. Although no direct evidence survives, it is likely that the frequent collection and distribution of poor relief exacerbated social stresses in Reading and focused greater attention upon the distribution of charitable resources and control of migrant workers.

In the strained political climate of Charles I's reign, members of the freemanry in Reading, as in other towns and cities, became increasingly

resentful of their lack of political rights.⁹³ Although Reading's parliamentary franchise, reserved solely to the mayor and burgesses, was exceptionally restrictive, it does not appear to have been challenged during the contested elections of the 1620s. The mayor and burgesses' decision in April 1640 to elect candidates nominated by Henry Rich, Lord Holland and William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury provided the catalyst for intervention. The election of Sir John Berkley and Edward Herbert was opposed by a minority of burgesses who denounced the candidates as strangers and 'no friends to the town'. Both men accepted other parliamentary seats, forcing a second election, which was interrupted by 'a great number of the Cominaltye of the Burroughe', who only dispersed when 'to ceasse the crye of the Cominaltye, and to have their elleccion effected ...' the mayor announced and received public acclamation of the election of Sir Francis Knollys and his son, also Francis Knollys, both seemingly more acceptable candidates within and without the council chamber because of their opposition to royal fiscal policy and personal connections with the town. The involvement of townsmen in the election was considered sufficiently significant for the note '*et multios alios*' to be included against the totalled votes of the burgesses entered in the corporation record.⁹⁴

It seems likely that the intervention of the freemanry was encouraged by the Knollys family and dissident burgesses, but securing adequate local representation was clearly a priority for many townsmen following the oppressive financial expediences of Charles I's personal rule. The commonalty achieved further involvement in the election of parliamentary representatives in October 1640 which 'Began in the Counsell-Chamber, and ended in the open Hall by a free and general consent of all, without any contradiction, but with great alacctrye'. Three of the 'cheiffe commoners', Edward Brackston, Humfrey Evens and Nicholas Westwood, were 'called into the Counsell-Chamber and acquaynted what eleccion was made'.⁹⁵ Following a sustained campaign, with the support of factions within the corporation, the commonalty's declared ancient right to participate in the election of members of parliament was finally confirmed in 1659.⁹⁶ There is no evidence to suggest that the commonalty agitated to play a part in municipal elections before the 1650s but the Corporation's decisions to admit additional secondary burgesses to the corporation in 1630 and 1635 and to increase the number of capital burgesses in the new charter of 1638 may represent moves to forestall charges of excessive exclusivity.⁹⁷

VI

Although the poor of Reading also expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation of the Kendrick bequests, their complaints were generally subsumed within broader grievances about unemployment and food shortages and peaked at times of severe hardship. The poor not only included widows, orphans, large families, the sick, disabled and aged but also increasing numbers of unemployed and under-employed workers. There were also the marginal poor who usually survived on their own resources but were reduced to poverty in periods of poor harvest, plague or depression. They used a range of mechanisms from grumbling and cursing to petitions and coercion – John Walter's 'weapons of the weak' – to express their discontent.⁹⁸ By the 1620s the poor of Reading, as elsewhere, were well versed in the contemporary discourse of obligation and entitlement surrounding statutory poor relief and expected the mayor and burgesses to justify their exercise of power for the common good by providing employment and sustenance to needy subordinates.⁹⁹ As conditions worsened, they invariably appeared in person at the Gild Hall to table their grievances, advertise their distress and obtain promises of assistance. The town clerk records the 'great clamour of divers poore people lackinge worke and employment in spynninge and cardinge' in 1623 and 1629.¹⁰⁰ The clamour occasionally turned to violence, as in 1631, when grain wagons were attacked, perhaps to prevent the transfer of food supplies to London. More commonly the poor took advantage of the political elite's fear of violence to maximise the assistance they received in times of extreme need. In May 1631, the mayor wrote to the Privy Council that he and his fellow burgesses were operating beyond their means to relieve and maintain order amongst the poor, but that they feared for their own safety in their houses and for outrages.¹⁰¹ Threats of violence – both spoken and unspoken – were experienced by other civic oligarchies during the period and doubtless grew in the telling. The Reading burgesses may have known for example, of the problems encountered in Salisbury in 1627, when a band of desperate poor demanded relief and threatened to destroy the houses of the magistracy and elite.¹⁰²

Both the poor and more prosperous townsmen and women of Reading resorted to ridicule and abuse of the mayor and burgesses and their officers as a form of resistance and a vent for their frustrations. In March 1625 Christopher Kenton was committed to the Counter for 'his contempt and misbehaviour towards the Mayor and the Magistrates'.¹⁰³ In 1626 the wife of Thomas Hatton, goldsmith, abused the town constable, William Densill, whilst 'doing his office', calling him 'knave,

scurvey, base and said if he had his right he would [have] his head broken'. She was similarly committed to the Counter.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, John Russell and his wife were sent to the Counter for refusing to send their maid, Francis Headache, a 'char-huswief' placed with them for two years, to the mayor for examination concerning her 'idle leif and night-walking'. Goodwife Russell declared she did not 'care a fart for Mr. Mayour'.¹⁰⁵ Alcohol sometimes aggravated the problem, for example, at the Mayor's Court in 1624, Thomas Fielder confessed 'he was not himself the last night, neither did he knowe what he did, drink was the cause for striking the constable and for striking the officer and abusing them in wordes in his mad humours ...'.¹⁰⁶ Written libels were taken very seriously. In 1636, Charles Clarke, a mercer's apprentice was examined by Sir Francis Knollys '... concerning the openinge and divulginge of a libell in writinge sealed with 2 seales directed to Mr John Dewell, Maiour full of base and scandalous words, tending to the defamacion of the said Maiour ...' which he claimed to have found in Henry Salmon's tavern.¹⁰⁷

Dissatisfaction existed amongst townsmen employed in the workhouse as well as those struggling outside it. Petitions were exhibited by groups of journeymen seeking amendment of their conditions of employment or rates of pay and complaints voiced about the poor workmanship of some journeymen and the quantity of work allocated by some undertakers.¹⁰⁸ A small number of the workers were openly critical of the mayor's and burgesses' handling of the legacy and the supervisory skills of individual undertakers. In April 1632, William Thatcher was dismissed from his position in the workhouse and committed to the Counter for wishing the Kendrick money had been cast into the river.¹⁰⁹ In April 1630, Thomas Smyth, a master weaver, accused Thomas Wheeler, a journeyman of cursing and wishing the pox upon the clothier William Gandy. The following month Smyth was dismissed from the workhouse for various offences, including 'misdemeanours ... against Mr Mayor' but was later reinstated. In July 1632, the master weaver, Willliam Bowles, was reported to have insulted William Gandy boasting that 'he was a better weaver than William Gandy was a clothier'.¹¹⁰

Though the conflict in the workhouse clearly reflects personality clashes and intolerance of the inept management of charitable funds, the trading pressures of the period may also have heightened tension. Criticism and abuse of urban oligarchies and their officers or appointees were common occurrences during periods of sustained economic hardship and growing civic discontent. It seems likely that the levels of criticism and abuse encountered in Reading in the 1620s and the 1630s were higher than in previous decades but the absence of evidence

precludes comparison. The swift punishment inflicted echoed the response recorded in other towns and cities of the period and demonstrates both the danger minor acts of social rebellion were seen to pose to the authority of the mayor and burgesses and their determination to suppress criticism, staunch opposition and defend their own and their officers' and appointees' honour, reputation and dignity.¹¹¹

VII

The mayor and burgesses faced considerable pressure from above as well as below in the 1620s and 1630s as Charles I's Privy Council sought to extend its influence over local government, maximise tax revenue and enforce public order. The Privy Council promoted tried and tested strategies for tackling economic decline and crisis in clothing towns through the issue of royal proclamations and privy council orders, the appointment of commissions, the soliciting of reports from county governors and through correspondence and interviews with the leaders of urban corporations. The tone of direct communication was at times critical and threatening. Although the mayor and burgesses responded rapidly to the subsistence crisis of 1629-31 and implemented the Book of Orders conscientiously as instructed, the Privy Council was quick to castigate them for their perceived failure to tackle hardship and disorder when grain riots occurred in the town. A letter of April 1631 required them 'to have an exact and vigilaunt care that the pore ... bee sett aworke and enabled in these tymes of scarcity to live by their labour' and emphasising that more was expected of them because of the 'extraordinary bequests and donations given unto your Towne ... for setting the poore on worke'.¹¹² In March 1639, again despite swift municipal action, the Privy Council issued a 'sharpe reprehension' to the mayor for failing to prevent the spread of plague in the town the previous year, blaming the 'carelesnes and negligence of yor selfe whoe are the Cheife Magistrate there and ought to have had a watchful eye to prevent the spreading abroad of soe perilous a decease'.¹¹³ On both occasions, the Privy Council was incensed that the mayor and burgesses had not reported the problems themselves.

The Privy Council was assiduous in its investigation of the complaints made by townsmen and others of the misuse of the Kendrick legacies because it could not allow the flagrant abuse of such a well publicised and generous charitable trust to jeopardise future substantial donations to support the poor. At no stage in its enquiries, however, did the Privy Council threaten the removal of individual burgesses or require changes to the town's government or franchise. This would have compromised

political stability as well as urban authority. In their turn, the mayor and burgesses were neither insular nor submissive in their response to the growing power of the state. They defended their actions robustly and actively sought the advice and assistance of the Privy Council on a wide range of matters including the containment and relief of hardship and poverty, the implementation of the Kendrick legacies, the dislocation of trade and the levying of ship money.¹¹⁴ While burgesses drawn from the manufacturing, distributive and victualling trades of a middle-ranking county town did not wield the power and influence of those drawn from the merchant class of a leading provincial centre such as Bristol, they clearly still possessed sufficient knowledge, contacts and clout to operate effectively within the political system.¹¹⁵

The mayor and burgesses of Reading fully appreciated the value of friends in high places and took considerable care to cultivate members of the nobility and gentry with local power and royal connections.¹¹⁶ Although the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire and the county's sheriff and justices of the peace acted as agents of central government, monitoring the performance of the mayor and burgesses and exerting pressure as required, the county elite also advised and supported the corporation and represented and defended its interests to the Privy Council. Throughout the 1620s Reading benefited from the services of William Knollys, Earl of Banbury, a prominent former courtier, privy councillor and Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, as high steward of the town. Despite his advanced age, he was a valuable patron albeit – as Reading found to its cost, when the mayor and three burgesses landed in the Marshalsea prison in a dispute with him over the appointment of its under steward – not one to be crossed or shown disrespect.¹¹⁷ Banbury, with his brother, Sir Francis Knollys and other local gentlemen provided valuable assistance to the mayor and burgesses during 1626-7 in interpreting and implementing Kendrick's will and resisting Steven Langley's 'overture'.¹¹⁸ By 1631, the county elite's enthusiasm for the workhouse project appears to have cooled. In a report to the Privy Council, Sir Francis Knollys identified concerns and recommended changes to the operation of the workhouse and employment of the common stock. In the commission of enquiry conducted 1631-3, Knollys and other Berkshire justices criticised the handling of the legacy.¹¹⁹ The Berkshire justices' *volte-face* did not however, blind them to Reading's growing social and economic plight or dull their willingness to assist the hard-pressed mayor and burgesses. In 1636, Sir Francis Windebanke, Secretary of State, and Sir Richard Harrison, Sheriff of Berkshire, supported the town's campaign to obtain a partial abatement of its ship money contribution and later received gifts of two sugar loaves apiece from the mayor

and burgesses.¹²⁰ Sir Francis Knollys similarly continued to defend the town's interests on ship money and other fronts.¹²¹

Banbury's successor as high steward from 1632, his nephew, Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, seems to have been less active on the town's account and the mayor and burgesses relied increasingly upon the services of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury as a patron in the 1630s. Laud, the son of a Reading clothworker, served as a member of the Privy Council from 1627, and, as his diary reveals, was well disposed towards his native town.¹²² His determination and commitment to Reading's interests not only assisted the achievement of the new charter in 1638 but almost certainly prevented the forfeiture of the Kendrick legacies to Christ's Hospital 1638-9. It is noticeable that both Laud and Holland were granted the privilege of nominating one of Reading's members of parliament in April 1640. When Parliament was recalled in October 1640, Laud declined to make a nomination due to his political difficulties. Holland's nomination of his brother-in-law, Sir James Thin, was rejected.¹²³

VIII

Robert Tittler and Ian Archer argue convincingly that the stability of the early seventeenth century town was heavily dependent upon the cohesion of the elite and that the political domination of the wealthy was both inevitable and desirable in order to ensure effective government.¹²⁴ Both were encouraged by the under-funded and over-stretched Stuart state, particularly during the 1630s. Political cohesion may have been easier to achieve in a town dominated by a single economic interest group but on occasion proved elusive even in Reading due to personality issues, generational clashes and opposing political ideologies. The minutes of corporation meetings record the decisions taken rather than the debates surrounding them and thus exaggerate the degree of political consensus and harmony achieved in the council chamber.¹²⁵ Consensus was certainly sought, and arbitration used to resolve disagreements between individual burgesses, but rippling – and sometimes potentially explosive – tensions remain visible between the lines of the 'public transcript', for example over the ejection of the Earl of Banbury's protegee from the under stewardship, the financial responsibilities of the secondary burgesses, the implementation of the Kendrick bequests (particularly the benefits accorded William Kendrick and his family) and the election of parliamentary representatives in 1640.¹²⁶ The tensions amongst burgesses and between the burgesses and leading freemen may have been exacerbated during the 1620s and early 1630s by

the unusually low turnover of capital burgesses. From 1634 a rapid succession of deaths and reluctantly granted retirements allowed the promotion of new capital burgesses and, in 1638, the town's new charter reduced the exclusivity of the governing group by increasing the number of capital burgesses (now called aldermen).¹²⁷ Despite the injection of new blood, however, the clothing interest retained its dominance, with nine of the 13 capital burgesses promoted 1630-40 being clothiers, drapers or mercers and four clothing families enjoying multiple representation in the corporation at the end of the period.¹²⁸ Religious differences had little impact upon civic relations during the period because few men with pronounced puritan sympathies were admitted to the corporation.¹²⁹

It was widely accepted by contemporaries that only wealthy townsmen possessed the material and leisure resources needed for urban government and the exercise of judicial authority. Indeed in many urban corporations, including Reading, burgesses were periodically required to cover municipal expenditure with loans from their own purses.¹³⁰ Once ensconced in the ruling group, burgesses were well placed to compensate themselves for the burden and expense of civic service, and, traditional civic virtues notwithstanding, most felt little compunction in deriving personal gain from office. The resulting venality and nepotism inevitably created ill feeling and conflict. In Reading, as in other towns and cities from the late sixteenth century onwards, corporation properties were regularly leased to burgesses, and their relations, friends and servants enjoyed preferential treatment in the allocation of charitable funds and award of university scholarships.¹³¹ Evidence from provincial centres such as Coventry, Ludlow and Lincoln and from other Berkshire towns such as Abingdon and Wallingford, suggests that whilst townsmen were willing to tolerate some use of municipal office to personal advantage, the excessive mishandling of common land and corporation leases, or the revenues and profits deriving from them, caused serious eruptions in civic relations.¹³² The misemployment of substantial charitable funds, as the mayor and burgesses of Reading discovered to their cost, proved similarly inflammatory. The defence that the workhouse had stood little chance of success from the outset cut little ice due to their controversial implementation and discredited management of the project.

Events in Reading during the years 1620-40 provide a valuable insight into the relations between urban corporation and community and the interventions of central government and local dignitaries during a period of sustained economic decline, recurrent subsistence crisis and increasing political volatility and social conflict. They demonstrate clearly the complexity of the relational and oppositional forces faced by urban elites as they struggled to maintain political rule and a consensual social order

in the early modern town and city.¹³³ The political and social tensions encountered were particularly severe in overpopulated and declining clothing towns, where the scale of grievance and hardship frequently defied resolution. They were exacerbated further in Reading by the emergence of a long-lived and hard-nosed gerontocracy amongst the ruling elite and by the excessive expectations raised by John Kendrick's generous but unrealistically framed legacies. Whilst Reading's economic dependence upon clothmaking rendered the oligarchic rule of the town's leading clothiers, mercers and drapers acceptable to freemen and other townspeople when manufacture flourished, the collapse of the town's staple industry during the 1620s and 1630s created political as well as social and economic difficulties. The resentment generated by the mayor and burgesses' incompetent, self-interested and, to some degree, corrupt handling of Kendrick's legacies not only overshadowed their strenuous efforts to tackle the causes and palliate the impact of industrial decline, rapid population growth and subsistence crisis, but provided a trigger and focus for social discontent and political activism in the town.

Examination of the scale and scope of the conflict generated in Reading over the two decades highlights the inadequacy of binary models of urban politics.¹³⁴ Conflict in Reading was not restricted merely to exchanges between the ruling elite and poor in times of severe hardship but spread across the social hierarchy and expanded to embrace wider social, economic and political grievances as local economic inequalities polarised and national political standpoints hardened. The composition and motivation of groups resisting or seeking to modify municipal policy, either individually or in partnership, shifted and evolved over the two decades, as priorities and circumstances changed. Assistance was on occasion successfully solicited from members of the county gentry or Privy Council but was never granted at the long-term expense of the political authority and powers wielded in the town by the mayor and burgesses. The complaints recorded and petitions generated during the long-running controversy over the maladministration of the Kendrick legacies offer a rare non-elite perspective on events. There is evidence of embryonic class consciousness amongst the poor and their supporters in the struggle to wrest control of the Kendrick legacies from the ruling elite and change the use of the charitable funds, but it is fleeting and restricted essentially to economic concerns.¹³⁵ The campaign for political representation proved more enduring, partly because of the ideological factionalism unleashed by Charles I's political struggles and the outbreak of civil war, but with the exception of a small number of politically ambitious and assertive freemen, the townsmen and townswomen of Reading were generally less concerned about the

oligarchic composition and structure of urban government in the 1620s and 1630s than whether it served the common good.¹³⁶

- 1 I would like to thank Ian Archer, Adrienne Rosen and *Southern History's* readers for commenting on an earlier version of this article and Kellogg College and the Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford for their support.
- 2 I.A. Archer, 'Politics and Government 1540-1700' in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, II, 1540-1640 (Cambridge, 2000), p. 241.
- 3 C. Fleetwood-Pritchard (ed.), *Reading, Charters, Acts and Orders* (Reading and London, 1913), pp. 14-83; J.M. Guilding (ed.) *Records of the Borough of Reading: Diary of the Corporation* (4 vols, London, 1892-6), passim.
- 4 R. Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c.1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 182-93.
- 5 J.T. Evans, 'The Decline of Oligarchy in Seventeenth-Century Norwich', *Journal of British Studies* 14 (1974-5), 47; D.H. Sacks, 'The Corporate Town and the English State: Bristol's 'Little Businesses' 1625-1641', in J. Barry (ed.), *The Tudor and Stuart Town, A Reader in English Urban History 1530-1688* (Harlow, 1990), p. 315; W.T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter 1540-1640* (London, 1975), pp. 51-3; R. Howell, *Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1967), p. 125.
- 6 Archer, 'Politics and Government 1540-1700', p. 243.
- 7 Six members of the Turner family served as mayor of Reading on 20 occasions 1500-1640. Their survival as a leading urban dynasty and record of political service were unparalleled in this period. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, I, II, III, IV.
- 8 Evans 'Decline of Oligarchy in Seventeenth-Century Norwich', pp. 49-51.
- 9 C.A. Jackson, 'The Berkshire Woollen Industry, 1500-1650' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Reading 1993), pp. 279-83.
- 10 As were those facing other towns such as Salisbury, Winchester, Norwich, Gloucester, Canterbury, Sandwich, Ipswich, Shrewsbury, Leicester and Coventry. P. Clark (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre-industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), p. 10.
- 11 Jackson, 'Berkshire Woollen Industry', pp. 168, 274.
- 12 D.C. Coleman, 'An Innovation and its Diffusion; the "New Draperies"', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, 22 (1969), 424-9; B.E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600-1642* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 32, 138-41.
- 13 Jackson, 'Berkshire Woollen Industry', pp. 174-5; Supple, *Commercial Crisis*, pp. 80-81, 104-16, 121-2; J.D. Gould, 'The Trade Depression of the early 1620s', *Economic History Review*, Second Series, 7 (1954), 81-90.
- 14 The National Archives [hereafter TNA] SPD, 16/222/45, Letter from William Kendrick to the Privy Council, 1632.
- 15 Jackson 'Berkshire Woollen Industry', pp. 190-1. Population estimates derived from a count of baptisms and assuming a baptismal rate of 33 per 1000. For use of decadal count of baptisms see N.R. Goose, 'Decay and Regeneration in Seventeenth-Century Reading: A Study in a Changing

- Economy', *Southern History* 5 (1984), 71. The estimates probably err on the conservative side.
- 16 P. Slack, 'Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666' in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (London, 1972), pp. 166-8, 171-3; A. Rosen, 'Winchester in transition, 1580-1700' in Clark, *Country towns*, p. 157.
 - 17 British Library [hereafter BL], Add MS 72421 (Trumbull Manuscripts), Papers relating to the Privy Council enquiry into the administration of John Kendrick's charity 1631, fo. 83.
 - 18 C.J. Harrison, 'Grain Price Analysis and Harvest Qualities, 1465-1634', *Agricultural History Review* 19 (1971), 139, 154-5.
 - 19 Berkshire Record Office, [hereafter BRO] D/P96/1/1-4 Parish Registers of St. Giles, Reading, 1-4, 1564-1787, D/P97/1/1 Parish Registers of St. Laurence, Reading, 1, 1605-54; G.P. Crawford, (ed.) *Registers of the Parish of St. Mary's, 1538-1812* (Reading, 1913).
 - 20 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 239, 246.
 - 21 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, III, *passim*; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 83.
 - 22 J. Lindsay (ed.), *A Bibliography of the Royal Proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns* (3 vols, Oxford, 1910-13) I, no. 1657; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 180-1.
 - 23 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 159-60, III, p. 44; *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. J.R. Dasent *et al.* (London, 1890-), XLVI, p. 170.
 - 24 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 188; Jackson, 'Berkshire Woollen Industry', pp. 162-3.
 - 25 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 153-4.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, III, pp. 3, 37.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, III, pp. 46-7.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, II, III, *passim*. In 1638 further measures were taken to control urban expansion when the town's new charter prohibited the building of new cottages or the subdivision of large tenements. Fleetwood-Pritchard, *Reading Charters*, pp. 54-83.
 - 29 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 120, 302, III, p. 47.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 209, 301-2, 59. Part of the town's hospital was converted into the house of correction and a supply of flax, hemp and tools provided.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 201, 228-9, 232.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 226-7.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 226, 268.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, III, p. 234; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 83.
 - 35 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 328.
 - 36 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, p. 43. Like other towns of the period, Reading had already developed social zoning. The town's commercial heart lay in the densely populated and wealthy parish of St Laurence but overspilled into St Mary's parish which contained the main industrial zone and some substantial residential properties. The more rural and less densely populated St Giles Parish housed many of the town's poor.
 - 37 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 22-5; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 83; J. Walter and K. Wrightson, 'Dearth and Social Order in Early Modern England' in P. Slack (ed.) *Rebellion, Popular Protest and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 118; Clark and Slack (eds) *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, p. 19.

- 38 BL, Add MS 72421, f. 83.
- 39 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, p. 45; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 83.
- 40 A profiteer was forced to sell four quarters of corn to the poor at 7s a bushel in May 1631. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 20, 22, 66.
- 41 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 241-4, III, pp. 372, 384.
- 42 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, p. 481.
- 43 Details of the charitable funds distributed and the selection of their recipients are recorded in the Corporation Minutes and Accounts. It was noted in 1632 that the tradesmen's loans and funds for binding apprentices were entered in the books in good order for each year. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, *passim*; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 88. The efficacy of Reading's magisterial 'view of the poor' is comparable with that of other towns and cities of the period. See P. Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 182.
- 44 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1 Copy of the Last Will and Testament of Mr John Kendrick, John Kendrick Accounts, Charity 1625-50. The legacies left to Reading represented 45 per cent of the sum Kendrick left to charitable purposes. Kendrick specified that the income of £50 from lands purchased should be paid to support his sister, Anna Newman, but that following her death (she died in 1635) it was to be distributed to the poor according to 'necessity and desert'. He was adamant that the sum should not replace but instead supplement the 'ordinary allowances usually assessed and collected of the wealthier sort of the Inhabitants'. For a detailed account of the implementation of Kendrick's bequest to Newbury see C. Jackson (ed.) *Newbury Kendrick Workhouse Records 1627-41*, (Berkshire Record Society, 8, 2004).
- 45 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, p. 67. Some substantial benefactors of the period, for example, George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, founder of Abbot's Hospital and the neighbouring manufactory in Guildford, secured their endowment with rents from lands purchased for the purpose and left detailed instructions for the establishment and running of their foundations. B. Taylor, *Abbot's Hospital Guildford* (Guildford, 1999), pp. 19-31, 124-46.
- 46 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 225, 278-80; BRO, D/QR/19/2/1 John Kendrick Accounts, Charity 1625-50, ff. 2, 3, 3, 37.
- 47 G.C. Jones, *History of the Law of Charity, 1532-1827* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 73-5.
- 48 The land in North Street was purchased to provide £50 per annum income. The mayor and burgesses were later unable to provide, separate purchase prices for the Minster Street property and the land to the privy council commission of enquiry. BL, Add MS 72421, f. 88.
- 49 Neither William Kendrick nor his family received substantial legacies in his brother's will. Money appears to have been allocated to kin, friends and neighbours according to need. It is tempting to conclude that he used political influence to advance his own financial interests. BRO, D/QR/19/2/1.
- 50 The first instalment of £2,000, paid in January 1626, merely covered the purchase of the site and legal expenses. BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 1-2, 6-7, 10-11.
- 51 C. Jackson, 'Functionality, Commemoration and Civic Competition: A Study of Early Seventeenth-Century Workhouse Design and Building in Reading and Newbury', *Architectural History* 47 (2004), 89-96.

- 52 This decision made the best of a difficult situation because William Kendrick was refusing to vacate the property. BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 11.
- 53 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 299, 333; BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 5.
- 54 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 3, 4; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 339, 348, 353-6. William Knollys was high steward of Reading and had been created earl of Banbury in 1626 (formerly Viscount Wallingford). H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004).
- 55 Although the Newbury workhouse project avoided controversy it enjoyed no greater long-term success than its Reading counterpart. Jackson, *Newbury Kendrick Workhouse Records*, pp. xiii, xxxix.
- 56 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 18-19; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 88.
- 57 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 19, 32; BRO, R/HMC/XLVII Reading Freemen's Records.
- 58 William Horne, for example was selected as one of four clothiers to receive £150 apiece from the stock, but he was unable to raise the sureties required and was replaced by John Harrison. In 1638, William Horne was selected to receive £50 from Kendrick's loan fund, using the lease of his house as surety. BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 19, R.Box 25, John Kendrick's Account Book, p. 16.
- 59 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 20.
- 60 Ibid. ff. 27, 28, 35, 40, 41, 43, 45. Hindle argues that in the early modern period disobedience was considered to be a sign that the poor were undeserving. S. Hindle, 'Extortion and Entitlement: Negotiating Inequality in English Rural Communities, 1550-1650' in M.J. Braddick and J. Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern England: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 114.
- 61 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 22.
- 62 Ibid. ff. 26, 30.
- 63 Ibid. ff. 29-32.
- 64 *Acts of the Privy Council*, XLVI, p. 358.
- 65 Sir Francis Knollys was JP for Berkshire and MP for the county in 1597 and 1625 and for Reading in 1640 (both Parliaments). William Trumbull was a diplomat and government official and was appointed JP for Berkshire in 1629; Sir Francis Windebank was appointed JP for Berkshire by 1624 and became Secretary of State in 1632, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). TNA, SPD 16/202/24 Orders of Commissioners to Mayor and Burgesses of Reading, 1631; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, p. 92.
- 66 TNA, SPD 16/204/37 Petition of poor workfolk of Reading on behalf of Steven Langley, SPD 14/98/52 Humble Petition of Other Clothiers of Reading.
- 67 BL, Add MS 72421, f. 88; TNA, SPD 16/210/95, Francis Windebanke's notes and queries concerning Kendrick Legacies, Reading, SPD 16/210/96 Grounds for concluding Kendrick Legacies misemployed.
- 68 *Privy Council Registers 1631-1637* (London, 1962), PC 2/422, 147; BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 40.
- 69 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 41, 43.
- 70 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, p. 281; BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 47-8.
- 71 BRO, R/2296 John Kendrick Accounts, Charity 1625-50, f. 45.
- 72 The first four recipients of the loan fund were selected by John Kendrick and included extended family members and friends. The recipients selected by

the mayor and burgesses in 1632 and 1635 included men related to current or former burgesses. BRO, R.Box 25, pp. 1-4, 15-16.

73 *Privy Council Registers*, 12 vols, London, 1967-68), I, pp. 218-9. *The Victorian History of the County of Berkshire* [hereafter VCH Berks], ed. P.H. Ditchfield and W. Page (4 vols, s.l., 1906-24), II, p. 392; E.W. Dormer, *John Kendrick of Reading* (Reading, 1927), p. 27.

74 VCH Berks, II, p. 392; Dormer, *John Kendrick*, pp. 28-33; *Privy Council Registers*, I, pp. 275-6; BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 52, 54; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 435, 448, 455; TNA, E125/22 Equity proceedings in the court of Exchequer, Orders and Decrees, f. 423b; E125/24, ff. 21-4, 119-23; Jones, *History of the Law of Charity*, pp. 73-5. See Jackson, *Newbury Workhouse Records*, p. xli.

75 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 52, 54; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 435, 448, 455.

76 See Jackson, *Newbury Workhouse Records*, p. xli.

77 The Freemen's Records list 109 new freemen admitted by apprenticeship and purchase during the period 1604-19 and 242 over the following two decades, 1620-39, but these numbers are clearly incomplete, and do not include for example, freemen admitted by patrimony. BRO, Regulations and Ordinances of the Reading Gilds, c.1570, R/HMC/LVI; Reading Freemen's Records, R/HMC/XLVII; M. Brod, *The Case of Reading: Urban Governance in Troubled Times, 1640-1690* (Peterborough, 2006), pp. 9, 29, 37-8.

78 BRO, R/HMC/LVI. An attempt by the town's master weavers in 1604 to resurrect their ancient guild with a royal charter of incorporation was swiftly overthrown by the mayor and burgesses. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 9.

79 See for example Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 227, III, p.29.

80 F.N.A. and A.G. Garry (eds) *Churchwarden's Accounts of the Parish of St.Mary, Reading* (1983), passim.

81 BL, Add MS 72421, f. 62; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 339.

82 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 446; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 62.

83 BL, Add MS 72421, f. 62.

84 It is interesting to note that six honest men, two from each parish (presumably freeholders) were appointed yearly by the mayor and burgesses to be masters and governors of the House of Correction. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 59.

85 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 5; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, 339, 348, 353; BL, Add MS 72421, f. 88.

86 See Howell, *Newcastle-upon-Tyne* for another interesting example of an alliance between discontented freemen and unprivileged members of the urban community.

87 BL, Add MS 72421, f. 70; A. Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 19, 22.

88 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, p. 99.

89 See for example its use in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene III.

90 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 73; M.J. Braddick, 'Administrative Performance: the Representation of Political Authority in Early Modern England', in Braddick and Walter, *Negotiating Power*, p. 185.

91 TNA, SPD 14/98/52 Humble Petition of Other Clothiers of Reading.

- William Gandy and James Winch were accused of using their share of the common stock to undercut cloth prices and to profiteer in the wool market.
- 92 VCH Berks, II, p. 392; Dormer, *John Kendrick*, p. 27.
 - 93 Hirst, Howell and others report ruling cliques in many towns and cities facing similar political challenges in the 1620s and 1630s. See, for example, D. Hirst, *The Representative of the People? Voters and Voting in England under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 51-61 and. Howell, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, pp. 53-62.
 - 94 E.A. Smith, 'The Stuart and Early Hanoverian Period 1603-1754', in A. Aspinall, B. Dodwell, M.D. Lambert, C.F. Slade and E.A. Smith, *Parliament Through Seven Centuries* (London, 1962), p. 52; Hirst, *Representative of the People*, pp. 58-9; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III pp. 488, 493. As Hirst, Howell and others demonstrate, ruling cliques in many towns and cities faced similar political challenges in the 1620s and 1630s.
 - 95 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 507-8. Manfred Brod is almost certainly correct in suggesting that the commonalty's support for the re-election of Sir Francis Knollys (Sen.) and Sir Francis Knollys (Jun.) was not entirely wholehearted. Some members of both the corporation and commonalty would doubtless preferred to have sent one of the burgesses to Westminster alongside the gentry representative, as in the 1620s. The fact that Sir Francis Knollys (Sen.) lived in Reading may have sweetened the pill. Brod, *The Case of Reading*, pp. 20-21.
 - 96 Smith, 'Stuart and Early Hanoverian Period', pp. 59-60.
 - 97 The number of secondary burgesses was increased to 16 in 1630 and maintained at 15 in 1635. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 25, 277; Fleetwood-Pritchard, *Reading Charters*, pp. 54-83.
 - 98 J. Walter, 'Public transcripts, popular agency and the politics of subsistence in early modern England' in Braddick and Walter, *Negotiating Power*, pp. 128-42.
 - 99 Ibid., pp. 124-5.
 - 100 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 159, III, p. 7.
 - 101 BL, Add MS 72421, f. 83.
 - 102 Clark, *Country towns*, p. 15.
 - 103 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, p. 284.
 - 104 Ibid., II, p. 273.
 - 105 Ibid., II, pp. 315, 317.
 - 106 Ibid., II, p. 193.
 - 107 Ibid., III, p. 312.
 - 108 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, ff. 23, 28, 38, 39; Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 21, 240.
 - 109 BRO, D/QR/19/2/1, f. 28.
 - 110 Ibid., ff. 27-28, 35, 40.
 - 111 M.J. Braddick and J. Walter, 'Grids of power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society' in their *Negotiating Power*, pp. 29-30.
 - 112 *Acts of the Privy Council*, XLVI, p. 304.
 - 113 *Privy Council Registers*, V, pp. 165-6.
 - 114 See, for example, Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 159-60, 162, 178; III, p. 343; BL, Add MS 72421, ff. 76, 83.
 - 115 Sacks, 'The Corporate Town and the English State', pp. 311-12.
 - 116 C.F. Patterson, *Urban Patronage in Early Modern England: Corporate*

- Boroughs, the Landed Elite, and the Crown 1580-1640 (Stanford, 1999), pp. 7, 15, 30.
- 117 When the town persisted in ejecting Banbury's protegee, Sir Edward Clerke, from the under-stewardship of the town in 1623, the privy council imprisoned the mayor and three other burgesses in the Marshalsea prison until they apologised. However, when Banbury wrote to the town in 1630 tendering his resignation on the grounds of age and infirmity, the town replied begging him to remain as their steward for the rest of his natural life. Banbury consented and on his death, the town appointed his nephew and nominee, Lord Holland, in his place. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 106, 108, 115-7, 122, 127, 134; *Acts of the Privy Council*, XXXVIII, pp. 516-17, 39, p. 16; Patterson, *Urban Patronage*, pp. 110-12, 48-9.
- 118 In 1614, Sir Francis Knollys, together with other justices of the peace, had secured the establishment of a house of correction in Reading. Knollys had previously promoted the building of a house of correction in Oxford in 1579. Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 59; P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement* (Oxford, 1999), p. 38.
- 119 TNA, SPD 16/243 Observations made by Sir Francis Knollys.
- 120 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 343, 351.
- 121 Ibid., II, pp. 210, 220, 166, 334.
- 122 Bodleian Library, Douce L subt. 79 Copy of Laud's Diary.
- 123 Smith, 'Stuart and Early Hanoverian Period', p. 51.
- 124 Archer, 'Politics and Government 1540-1700', p. 246; R. Tittler, *Architecture and Power: The Town Hall and the English Urban Community c. 1500-1640* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 98-9.
- 125 P. Zagorin, *The Court and the Country* (London, 1969), p. 147; Brod, *The Case of Reading*, p. 9.
- 126 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, pp. 134, 166, 210, 333; III, pp. 488, 493.
- 127 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, passim; Fleetwood-Pritchard, *Reading Charters*, pp. 54-83.
- 128 Nine of the 17 secondary burgesses co-opted during the same period were similarly clothiers, mercers and drapers. Jackson, *Berkshire Woollen Industry*, pp. 279-83.
- 129 The main exception was the haberdasher, George Wooldridge, co-opted as a secondary burgess in 1635, who was a noted puritan and enthusiastically embraced the parliamentary cause in 1642. Manfred Brod points to Puritan influences in the town's despatch of players in 1631, the gravelling and railing of a popular recreation ground in 1633 and the constables' increased zeal in punishing swearing and Sunday travelling, and suggests that the corporation may have experienced some pressure from Puritan members of the freemanry to institute 'godly government'. The religious situation in Reading, which maintained a close alliance with the high church archbishop Laud, was very different to that found in towns such as Norwich. Brod, *The Case of Reading*, pp. 17-18, 31; J.T. Evans, *17th Century Norwich: Politics, Religion, and Government 1620-1690* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 63-104.
- 130 Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, III, pp. 45, 139.
- 131 For example, Guilding, *Corporation Diary*, II, 12, 38, 186. Rosen finds similar in Winchester. Rosen, 'Winchester in Transition', p. 160.
- 132 Archer, 'Politics and Government 1540-1700', pp. 245-6; Hirst, *Representative of the People*, pp. 51-2; Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns*,

- pp. 204-5.
- 133 M.J. Braddick and J. Walter, 'Grids of power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society', in Braddick and Walter, *Negotiating Power*, p. 1.
- 134 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 135 Wood, *Politics of Social Conflict*, p. 25.
- 136 Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns*, p. 183.