5 Civic conversations

'Publick matters and in hearing and telling news'

On 7 July 1684 John Farrington, 'a citizen and haberdasher of London', deposed to the court of Chancery how, fourteen years earlier, he had 'become partners' with three other citizens 'in the borrowing and taking of money at interest . . . which was to be employed in a common or joint bank'.[1] He was already familiar with the merchant Edmond Page, the two having dealt 'together in partnership in the trade of wholesale mercer in London and also as Merchants in diverse particular wares and merchandise in parts beyond the sea'. The new, 'unhappy acquaintance' was with merchant Edward Nelthorpe and confectioner Richard Thompson – two citizens who 'did also before that time deal together in partnership in wines and other commodities and merchandise'. According to Farrington, it was Thompson and Nelthorpe who claimed 'upon long and mature consideration' to have concocted a 'way of dealing in the world which would unquestionably turn to a great account of profit'. Based in Thompson's 'dwelling house' in Woollchurch Market, at the commercial heart of the City of London, 'in a short time the said joint bank and dealing grew into a very great credit and esteem'. Success was, however, short-lived. According to Farrington, Nelthorpe and Thompson were too ambitious, unskilled, and untrustworthy for commerce, committing themselves to designs that were 'expensive and fruitless' in the mistaken belief that 'by the ruin of others' they would be 'suddenly rich'. Worst of all, it quickly became apparent that Thompson was 'very negligent and altogether unfit and incapable of managing the joint affair', forcing Nelthorpe and Farrington to 'employ their whole time' in the bank's business to 'the neglect of the their own joint and particular trades and dealings'. This was primarily because instead of regarding 'his duty and engagement to mind the said office', Thompson 'was daily at the coffee houses and other publick places' where he 'spent his time in publick matters and in hearing and telling news'.[2]

[1] TNA, C7/581/73, petition of John Farrington. [2] Ibid.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

Farrington's travails nicely encapsulate a narrative central to urban, economic, and political historiography of the period: the emergence of a new generation of 'educated classes' and 'capitalists' who came to social, urban, and public prominence in the later seventeenth or 'long eighteenth century'. It is a story of new forms of commerce, association, sociability, civility, and politics that has been told from a variety of perspectives.[3] However, the most synthetic account remains Jürgen Habermas' description of the 'emerging public sphere of civil society'.[4] Engendered by 'structural transformations' within society, this 'public sphere' was dominated not by 'the genuine burghers, the old occupational orders of craftsmen and shopkeepers', so much as a new 'stratum of bourgeoisie'. While freemen and citizens 'suffered downward social mobility', losing 'their importance along with the very towns upon whose citizens' rights their status was based', the 'real carrier of the public' was an alliance of 'professionals', 'urbane' gentry, and a new class of 'entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and factory owners'.[5] They participated not in archaic entities like city commonwealths but in the 'town': a symbolic and physical space in which private individuals could socialise and discuss rationally and reasonably the public concerns of the day.[6] This 'town'-based (as opposed to 'civic') 'bourgeois public' was at once literary and associational: both the written word and new urban institutions like coffeehouses and clubs were loci for public discussion.[7] It was also a sphere qualitatively unprecedented in terms of the communication it structured, its private participants self-consciously acting as a critical and public check on the claims and policies of the state. According to this narrative, this bourgeois 'town' and 'public' effectively supplanted the pre-modern hegemony of crown and court over political and economic culture, contributing to a new kind of urbanity far removed from the older and decayed traditions of medieval *communitas*. As such, it was also part and parcel of what Peter Borsay has called the 'English urban renaissance', the 'town' providing a focus not only for public discourse but also new patterns of consumption, fashion, and status. It was, in effect, 'part of a wider movement, an English enlightenment, whose underlying mission was to rescue the nation from barbarity and ignorance; in a word, to civilise it'.[8]

With his entrepreneurial and public interests, Richard Thompson would seem to personify the 'town' and the new generation of men that made it – a link that is

[3] J. H. Plumb, *The growth of political stability in England 1675–1725* (London, 1967), ch. 1; Borsay, *English urban renaissance*, chs. 10, 11; Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture and imperialism, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 3–26; Peter Clark, *British clubs and societies 1580–1800: the origins of an associational world* (Oxford, 2000), chs. 2, 3.

[4] Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawson (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 23, 57.

[5] Ibid., p. 24. [6] Ibid., p. 23. [7] Ibid., chs. 2, 3.

[8] Borsay, *English urban renaissance*, p. 257.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

all the stronger given his 'friends'. In December 1675 none other than Andrew Marvell wrote to Sir Henry Thompson in York with news in London. Assuring his correspondent that 'the daily contrary rumours concerning Parliament are not worth taking notice of', he also noted that despite the general crisis of credit in the metropolis 'our friends in Woollchurch Market ... proved cocksure'.[9] Moreover, it was to Marvell's house on Great Russell Street that Richard and Dorothy Thompson, along with Nelthorpe, absconded in 1677 to escape their creditors.[10] This was one year after Marvell had published the pamphlet that helped crystallise 'public' opposition to the policies of the Restoration court. He was also, as observed by Habermas, an early frequenter of the kind of public forum in which autonomous public opinion developed.[11] *An account of the growth of popery* was 'a naked Narrative of some of the most considerable passages in the meeting of *Parliament*' – a series of anonymous revelations meant to enable 'some stronger Pen and to such have more leisure and further opportunity to discover and communicate to the Public'.[12] If, however, both Thompson and Marvell can be regarded as harbingers of a self-consciously critical public domain, they were hardly detached from city commonwealth. Thompson was a freeman of the London Clothmakers, the same guild to which Lilburne apprenticed. Moreover, as London common councillors, both he and Nelthorpe were extremely active in civic politics throughout the 1670s.[13] Likewise, Marvell was a citizen and parliamentary representative of Hull, the town of his birth. From his election in 1658 he remained in constant communication with the citizens he represented until his unexpected death in 1678.[14] Marvell, Nelthorpe, and Thompson were connected through ties of kin and friendship to a wider community of merchants and citizens that, while certainly conscious of its public efficacy and role, was also firmly embedded in the corporate system.[15]

The corporate system poses significant problems for Habermas' distinction between 'the state' on the one hand and an emergent 'public' on the other. Previous chapters have shown that, far from experiencing terminal decline, the traditional urban *communitas* increased in size, number, and public confidence after 1540, marking a 'structural transformation' that diversified public authority, ideology, and civility outwith the monarchical state while retaining the legitimacy of sovereign authority. As importantly, the kind of reflexivity, civility, and discursive skill ideally expected of the bourgeois public sphere were more than reminiscent of the values already associated with city

[9] BJL, DDMM/28/1. [10] TNA, C6/242/13, answer of Mary Marvell.
[11] Habermas, *Structural transformation*, p. 33.
[12] Andrew Marvell, *An account of the growth of popery* (1676), p. 17.
[13] TNA, C6/283/87, petition of Richard Thompson. See below, ch. 6.
[14] They form the bulk of correspondence in Margoliouth, *Poems and letters*, vol. II.
[15] Ibid., pp. 299–309, 313–21; TNA, SP29/401/232; SP29/402/166; SP29/402/232; SP29/404/215 and 228; BJL, DDMM/28/1.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

commonwealths. Indeed, the corporate system was crucial in propagating certain kinds of conversational and associational practice: an important qualification to a narrative that pays so much attention to how and where people talked to each other. The prescriptive basis of civic conversation was the classical concept of *honestas*: that template of civility that, in its vernacular forms, was denoted by qualities of honesty, discretion, wisdom, and fitness. Such qualities were as requisite for public deliberations of common councils as they were for public correspondence in the form of letters and petitions. That the formation of the corporate system was in part a response to the perceived crisis in counsel that characterised the mid-sixteenth century only confirms the imperatives of communication that informed urbanisation: imperatives that were revealed once again by the struggle for counsel in 1641. All of which is to suggest that important sections of the English commons were well acquainted with, skilled in, and protective of forms of civil and public discourse long before the introduction of coffee to England in 1656.[16]

This is not to deny that change took place. Just as the revolutionary era saw the conceptual and institutional hardening of the 'state', so a 'public' that was independent of *res*publica and *civitas* consolidated itself as a vibrant dimension of national political culture. Likewise commerce and industry expanded apace, the possibilities of empire matched only by the emergence of new urban centres like Manchester and Birmingham.[17] At the very least, however, the freedom and citizenship embodied in city commonwealths formed a tangible presence in the changing dynamics of English society, providing a template for new political and economic practices and remaining an active element within changed and changing circumstances. This was never more so than for civil discourse and sociability – those aspects of early modern urbanity with which this chapter is concerned. It suggests that, given the precocity of England's civil society and public sphere 'is a problem not yet resolved', there is every possibility that the enlightenment 'town' occurred because of rather than despite the corporate system.[18] As a forum for conversation the coffeehouse was not so much a disjunction with the alehouse, as Steve Pincus has claimed, as contiguous with the council chamber.[19]

The politics of company

The ideal of community lay at the heart of city commonwealth; likewise, the ideal of communication lay at the heart of community. Community entailed

[16] Steve Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create": coffeehouses and Restoration political culture', *Journal of Modern History*, 67, 1995, pp. 807–34.
[17] Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change', pp. 78–82.
[18] Habermas, *Structural transformation*, p. 57.
[19] Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create"', pp. 823–5.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

'participation, fellowship, or society: good correspondency, near familiarity one with another; a corporation or company incorporate'.[20] City commonwealths were a particular means of achieving what John Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, described as 'common, or mutual participation': a body of 'fellowship' and 'brotherhood' that was particular to place and delineated by its civic powers.[21] As late as the eighteenth century community and incorporation were conflated, community representing 'a body of men united in civil society for their mutual advantage – as a corporation, the inhabitants of a Town, the companies of Tradesmen'.[22] However, it encapsulated more general principles of association and commerce that were central to humanism. Thomas Hobbes was merely repeating an early modern commonplace when he noted that, without speech, 'there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor contract, nor Peace, no more than Lions, Bears, and Wolves'.[23] Roger Williams noted that 'there is a savour of civility and courtesy even among these wild *Americans*, both amongst themselves and towards *strangers*', that smacked of a more general humanity.[24] When Timon of Athens removed himself from the attachments of civil society it reflected a 'nature but infected,/ A poor unmanly melancholy' and 'slave-like habit' (4.3.205). The communicative ideal was as true for civic bodies – such as corporations, parishes, and guilds – as the households and neighbourhoods they represented and governed. It structured 'the sociability of the nature of man' and the essential humanity of those who 'love society: families, cohabitation, and consociation of houses and towns together'.[25] Colonisation and new markets did not mitigate these principles so much as extend them, citizens becoming the custodians of commerce on a world scale. Newcastle burgess William Grey eulogised how 'Our most Provident and Glorious Creator hath so furnished all Countries with several commodities, that amongst all Nations there might be a sociable conversation and mutual commerce.' Traffic and exchange in turn bred reciprocity, 'one People standing in need of another' so that 'all might be combined in a common league, and exhibit mutual succours'.[26]

Even the most idealistic of commentators did not claim that 'mutual commerce' was accessible to all. If city commonwealths were communicative, they were also exclusionary, depriving strangers of precisely those liberties that encapsulated freedom. They also divided internally, into places and roles that necessarily influenced who communicated what with whom. In this

[20] Thomas Blount, *Glossographia, or, a dictionary interpreting all such hard words* (1656). See also above, p. 11.
[21] Edward Phillips, *New world of words* (1658), 'community'.
[22] Edward Phillips, *New world of words* (1706), 'community'.
[23] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 24.
[24] Roger Williams, *A key into the language of America* (1643), pp. 9–10.
[25] Williams, *A key into the language*, p. 47.
[26] William Grey, *Chorographia, or a survey of Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (1649), p. 26.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

sense, communality of whatever kind was always inflected by relationships of power: topographies within which the person was placed, and which inevitably informed their experience of and participation in community. Social historians have done much to reveal these topographies, excavating the patriarchal, economic, and residential distinctions upon which community rested.[27] It has also been shown that communication was not simply reflective but also constitutive of distinctions. As Farrington and Thompson well knew, their economic efficacy was in large part dependent on the social construction and performance of 'credit': the circulation of reputation and knowledge by which a person's probity, trust, and honesty were constantly monitored and evaluated. It was by the sword of credit that their bank first lived and then died: a particularly dramatic example of what Craig Muldrew has shown to be a general feature of early modern economic practice.[28] Likewise, discursive constructions like 'reputation' and 'fame' were at the heart of patriarchal practice, the communal status of both men and women depending on what they did and said or, more tellingly, what was subsequently reported about them.[29] In this sense, conversations at once demarcated communal boundaries and determined communal distinctions. The credit of Thompson, Farrington, Nelthorpe, and Page extended far and wide, mapping their mercantile connections or what Philip Massinger in *The city madam* called 'the money men' (1.3.117). It also transformed over time, becoming so degraded that they were eventually forced to withdraw altogether from that community's penetrating scrutiny. However, the principles by which it functioned were no different to any other kind of community: whether in neighbourhood, parish, or common council, persons were constantly conscious of the credit and reputation of both themselves and others. All of which is to suggest the communal and, indeed, political significance of communicative practice.

Establishing the sociology of civic sociability – and the conversations that constituted it – is no easy business. Just as the records of organised association – such as the minutes of common council, guild, or indeed commercial partnerships – rarely record the minutiae of talk, so the vast majority of civic conversations were ephemeral, transitory, and unrecorded. Those that do survive, for example in depositions from the church courts, tend to emphasise exchanges that, in one way or another, subverted normal practice. That said, one term that described for freemen and women the nuts and bolts of social interaction was 'company'. The word had qualitative implications, in that

[27] Robert Scribner, 'Communities and the nature of power', in Robert Scribner, ed., *Germany: a new social and economic history* (London, 1996), p. 293; Withington and Shepard, 'Introduction', in Shepard and Withington, *Communities in early modern England*, p. 6.

[28] Muldrew, *Economy of obligation*, ch. 6.

[29] Laura Gowing, *Domestic dangers: women, words, and sex in early modern London* (Oxford, 1996), ch. 4.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

company could imply an affective relationship between companions: for example, as friends, brethren, neighbours, kin, and soldiers. However, it was also a more general form of social description that captured the many and varied forms of urban sociability – from the most institutionalised of gatherings to the most fleeting and perfunctory of exchanges. Examples of company in seventeenth-century Cambridge were a case in point. In 1624, attempts to curb factionalism on the common council (the 'Twenty Four') led to an order 'about the electing of their own company.' This specified 'that upon every such election there shall be the number of twelve and if they shall put any out of their company there shall be the number of thirteen present'.[30] When all the free burgesses of the borough assembled for the common day in 1648, they did so as a company intent on feasts and oaths as well as civic business.[31] In 1643, the musician John Browne 'was chosen to be the Town Waits with his company'.[32] And in 1615 it was ordered that 'the several tradesmen of this town shall have authority under the town seal for the making up of them into several companies ... according to the laws of the realm of England and the customs and privileges of this town'.[33] However, company was equally ubiquitous beyond the civic realm. Gabriel Harvey, the son of a Saffron Walden ropemaker, noted that his university career at Cambridge was severely hindered by issues of company. He reported an occasion when Thomas Neville, a Fellow at Pembroke Hall, 'laid against me common behaviour, that I was not familiar like a fellow, and that I did disdain every man's company'. The accusation troubled Harvey, who regarded himself 'as fellowy [sic] as the best' and expostulated 'What they call sociable I know not: this I am sure, I never avoided company: I have been merry in company: I have been full hardly drawn out of company.'[34] Cambridge offered more than civic or scholarly fellowship, company forming and dissipating according to somewhat different expectations and rituals than those expected by Harvey. Young men were accustomed to 'drinking of wine in the company of divers young maids' or, as was the case of John Binns, regularly lying out of college with 'twenty one young men ... with whom he kept company.' One concerned father wrote that he hoped his son would 'avoid the company of Tobacco takers, Drinkers and Swaggerers ... as the young gentleman is by nature of a modest sober and civil conversation and no doubt will so continue if evil company draw him not from it'.[35]

It was in and through company that freemen and women conversed: just as city commonwealths were composites of places, so they were characterised by the recurring formation and dissipation of company. Robert Horne, the Jacobean

[30] CCRO, City Shelf C, Book 7, f. 126.
[31] CCRO, City Shelf C, Book 8, f. 9.
[32] CCRO, City Shelf C, Book 7, f. 368.
[33] Ibid., f. 50.
[34] Cited in Richards, *Rhetoric and courtliness*, p. 18.
[35] Shepard, 'Meanings of manhood', pp. 179, 181, 183.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

minister of Ludlow, clearly identified himself with the aristocratic company of the borough, participating in a set of friendships that encompassed the common council of the borough; members of the county community; and lawyers and parliamentary representatives in London.[36] John Crowther, the leading democratic burgess from the 1590s, was less successful in sustaining this kind of sociability. The common council recorded in January 1599 that 'this company have thought it good considering the said abuses and bad mind [of Crowther] to sequester him from this company until the suit be ended and until he submit himself to this company'.[37] This was in part because Crowther had joined the company of John Bradford and others in opposing the town's common councillors. He was responsible for the fact that 'many met together in your company' or 'went in company ... within the said town [and] the fields, pastures [and meadows] near unto the said town' in order 'to consult together touching the alteration of the government of this town'.[38] Company in this instance structured civic politics. What the term also offers is a comprehensive and historicised concept of early modern sociability that is also attentive to the social politics implicit in different kinds of interaction that characterise 'everyday social life'.[39] It does so for those relatively well-defined and institutionalised forms of company that filled the urban landscapes of early modern England: public civic bodies; the licensed companies of soldiers, merchants, and actors; congregations, clubs, and societies. It also encompasses the mostly unrecorded moments of face-to-face interaction that have proved so conceptually and empirically elusive to historians: doorstead gossip, alehouse tippling, and market banter.

Approached schematically, there was a threefold politics of company that related to participation, function, and interaction, each of which can be illuminated with examples of company recorded in depositions to the Consistory and Dean and Chapter Courts in York in the later seventeenth century. These include the aftermath of a civic dinner in York 'for congratulating the happy nuptials' of William of Nassau (subsequently Prince of Orange) and Mary Stuart in 1677; the neighbourly company of midwife Bridget Hodgson of York in 1663; and alehouse company in the Yorkshire village of Wistow in 1690.[40] The politics of participation concerned who was included or excluded from company; the criteria upon which participation was based; and the means by which access was secured and boundaries maintained. The city's celebration of the royal marriage was a ceremonial occasion that involved the civic companies

[36] David Colclough, '"The muses recreation": John Hoskyns and the manuscript culture of the seventeenth century', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 61, 3 & 4, pp. 386–7.
[37] SA, LB2/1/1, f. 28v. [38] SA, LB7/759; LB7/736.
[39] Ann Branaman, 'Goffman's social theory', in Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman, eds., *The Goffman reader* (Oxford, 1997), p. xlv.
[40] BIHR, CPH, 3314, Office c. John Warter; CPH 2560, 1662, Hester Browne c. Bridget Hodgson; D/C 1691/11, Ann Wintringham c. Robert Shaw.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

of the corporation: the lord mayor and thirteen aldermen; the 'Twenty Four'; the two sheriffs; the common council of seventy-two; and the eight chamberlains.[41] Participation was based, therefore, on the usual rules of office-holding. It was limited to male and enfranchised heads of household who were deemed to be of enough substance and *honestas* to hold office. Civic duty was extended in this instance to a public gesture of support for the Prince of Orange and the Protestant line of the Stuart dynasty. While like-minded friends of the citizens, such as the North Yorkshire cleric John Warter, were also invited, it was noted by the town clerk that 'the Military Officers to attend if they please': a grudging concession reflecting tensions between citizens and soldiers within the city.[42] The company experienced by the midwife Bridget Hodgson over Christmas 1663 involved some of the same citizens who feasted William and Mary fourteen years later. Hodgson was the wealthiest midwife in the city, and hers was the select company of friends, kin, and clients rather than civic affiliation. She joined the mercantile household of Leonard and Frances Thompson in their parlour to exchange news, where, along with Leonard and Frances she 'discoursed' with their daughter (and Hodgson's goddaughter) Mary; Mary's maidservant, Sapphire Stratford; and the merchant Henry Brearey, Leonard's neighbour, friend, and political ally.[43] Hodgson also attended the churching of Anne, the wife of another York merchant, where other guests included invited neighbours (including the daughter-in-law of the deceased James Wright) and the parish minister.[44] In both instances, the communality of neighbourliness was mixed with a degree of exclusivity that limited participation to 'better' neighbours. Different again was the company convened by Robert Shaw on his removal from the nearby village of Wistow in 1690. It consisted of male neighbours of his own status – all of whom went by the title of 'Mr' in the court records – and labourers he had hired to move his goods.[45] Access for the men of the village was based on neighbourliness and paternalism, and the resultant company was ring-fenced by patriarchy. This boundary was dramatically revealed when the wife of one of the labourers, Anne Wintringham, 'came into their company' at about midnight to 'desire her husband to go home'. Shaw told Alex Wintringham to 'turn his wife out of doors otherwise he would'. Anne replied that 'if there was room for her husband there was room for her'. The row escalated from verbal taunts to physical violence, Shaw eventually breaking Anne's head with a candlestick.[46]

[41] YCA B38, f. 133. [42] Ibid.; BIHR, CPH 3314.
[43] BIHR, CPH 2560, depositions of Leonard Thomson, Frances Thomson, Mary Thompson, Henry Brearey, Sapphire Stratford.
[44] Ibid., depositions of Henry Proctor, Ann Ellecker, Ann Ramsden, Elizabeth Wright.
[45] BIHR, D/C 1691/11, depositions of John Cooper, Robert Bond, William Moore.
[46] Ibid., statement of Robert Shaw, deposition of Dorothy Wright.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

A second set of politics related to the function, meaning, and appropriation of company. The ostensible reason for the procession and dinner in York was a royal celebration sanctioned by civic authority. However, the reciprocity between royal and civic interests that this implies is misleading. While assuming the paraphernalia of civic ceremony, the event was also a precocious display of civic support for the Protestant succession. Organised on the eve of the so-called 'Popish Plot', it was an implicit affront to the Catholic Duke of York who was unpopular with the citizens for a number of reasons.[47] It was a company that anticipated, therefore, the support for the exclusion of James from the crown by the citizens of York two years later, constituting a partisan as well as civic act. This appropriation of civic ceremonial was all the more significant because it was the only celebration of its kind to be inscribed in the city minutes during the period: the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the coronations of Charles II and James II, their respective marriages – all went unrecorded. The company of Hodgson in turn demonstrated different practices of neighbourliness: the 'telling of the news of the city' among friends, and the churching of a female parishioner after labour. However, on both occasions Hodgson used her authority and knowledge as a midwife to gossip about a local serving maid and, by extension, the serving maid's household. In the house of Leonard Thomson, 'being in company with divers credible persons', she announced that 'your neighbours waiting maid lies in at Micklegate Bar', and when pushed to be more specific said 'as if you know not (or if you've heard not) that Hester Browne lies in'.[48] At the churching of Anne Ramsden, another guest recalled that 'some of the company being talking of a woman that then lay in within that street said it was foolishly carried'. This prompted Bridget Hodgson to observe 'that there was a business without Micklegate Bar as sadly carried if it be true; and some of the company asking who it was but the said Mrs Hodgson refused to tell'. Such reticence did not last long, as Hodgson proceeded to tour the room telling each of the guests the name of the culprit 'privately'.[49] In both instances, the company of neighbours transmuted into a kind of committee of public morals standing in judgement of Hester Browne and the household for which she worked. This could not be said of the company of Robert Shaw, which intended the men of Wistow to 'make merry' before his departure. Making merry was, however, hardly an undifferentiated experience: as an association of freeholders and labourers, it conjoined neighbourliness, paternalism, and ultimately conflict in a heady and volatile mix that exploded with the arrival of Anne Wintringham. Significantly enough, while Shaw's social equals – the 'Mr's in the company – supported Shaw's version of events, describing how Anne 'came into their company in a rude domineering

[47] Withington, 'Citizens', pp. 146–7. [48] BIHR, CPH 2560, deposition of Mary Thompson.
[49] Ibid., depositions of Henry Proctor, Ann Ellecker, Ann Ramsden, Elizabeth Wright.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

and huffing manner', the labourers described her behaviour as 'civil' and 'orderly' and Shaw's violence unprovoked.[50]

The interaction of participants was, in turn, political. It was a politics mediated on the one hand by the rituals and conventions associated with particular kinds of company: of behaviour, language, artefacts, and place. And, on the other, it was informed by the will, disposition, and ability that a person brought to the company in which they were involved. Unsurprisingly, civic celebrations were ostentatiously ritualised and symbolic. The company of citizens assembled 'at the council chamber on Ouse Bridge' and, attended by trumpets and music, went 'from thence to the High Cross on the Pavement', where they drank the 'Prince of Orange and his Princess' health in the golden bowl. The civic company then adjourned to the Guildhall, where toasts were repeated behind closed doors. In the meantime, it was ordered that 'the bells ring all day and bonfires made at night'. The structure of company was, in this instance, extremely precise. The hierarchy and material texture of the occasion were provided by civic office; the predominant rhetoric was oaths, toasts, and fellowship; and the day's topography traced the three primary sites of civic power: council chamber, market cross, and guildhall.[51] The experience of participants was less controlled. John Warter recalled that 'he went after dinner with other company along with the lord mayor to the Guildhall . . . and there did amongst other company drink several sorts of wine in so much that when [he] came from the hall he found that the wine had got into his head'. He claimed that, although 'he staggered in the streets', he immediately made his lodging 'on purpose to prevent the exposing of himself to public view'. Unfortunately for Warter, the church authorities had received complaints from witnesses 'that the streets would scarce hold you' and that, on leaving the company, you 'exposed yourself to the view and censure of many good and grave gentlemen and citizens'. Even worse, 'at the coffee house in the Minster Yard . . . in the public room there, with your arms and face upon the Table [you] fell asleep in the sight and presence of several gentlemen'. As a result, 'some whereof put tobacco pipes in your periwig, and another set the candlestick with the candle burning in it on your head, and thus you became the laughing stock to the whole company.' As such, the fraternity that characterised one company transformed into drunkenness and incivility in another. While clearly disposed to the toasting and partisan company of the guildhall, the disposition of a cleric who was, as he confessed, 'addicted to the drinking of strong beer and wine', was inappropriate for subsequently walking the 'public' streets of the city. That same disposition was disastrous among coffeehouse company situated in a quarter of the town that was at once outwith

[50] BIHR, D/C 1691/11. The reply of Robert Shaw tells a very different story to that of Anne Wintringham's deponents.
[51] YCA B38, f. 133.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

the control of the corporation, an urbane haunt for the gentry and military, and firmly associated with support for the Duke of York. The result was not a mutuality of interest. It was ridicule.[52]

The company of Hodgson was no less ritualised than the public adventures of Warter, the midwife proving adept at using appropriate conversational techniques to spread her news about Hester Browne. In the parlour of Leonard Thomson, she instigated a series of questions and answers that involved both the two merchants talking by the fire and the three women sewing at the table. In this way, her prized nugget of information was slowly and effectively revealed. This talk was accompanied by gossipy and sly gestures: Henry Brearey remembered her 'waving her fan to her face [saying] "Do you not hear that one Hester Browne lies-in without Micklegate Bar"'?[53] At the churching of Anne Ramsden, Hodgson embarked on an exemplary performance of gossip. Having titillated the company in public she then informed the parish minister, Henry Proctor, that the culprit was Hester Browne 'privately so nobody else could hear' and 'whispered [Elizabeth Wright] in the ear that no body [would] hear them'. Through this chain of whispers the name of Hester Browne became publicly known, Wright 'afterwards [telling] the same to divers in the company'.[54] In this way, the strictures of civility were subtly undermined. Indeed, when Hester Browne brought a defamation suit against Hodgson, the midwife's defence was that she had never spoken maliciously or uncivilly. The experience of Anne Wintringham brought the politics of interaction into sharp relief. In defending his company, Shaw resorted to the usual tactic of sexual insult, bidding 'her be gone and guide her tongue and her tail'. Anne replied that if she 'had done that as well as him otherwise there would not have been such reports on him as there were'. It was in response to this affront of his own probity that Shaw then threw a candlestick at her and 'broke her head with it'.[55] As described by the labouring witnesses, the only response of a bloodied Anne was to grab his cravat. Shaw told a very different story in which Anne attacked not only him but also the artefacts of company and, indeed, the company itself, which he depicted as a kind of homogeneous presence. She took 'the flagon from the Table before them, and threw it into the chimney [and] abused Robert Shaw with very scandalous words'. She tore his cravat and got 'her hands into [his] hair and thereby pulled his head to the table till her hands were loosed by some in the company'. And she threw 'tobacco pipes and other things amongst the company without the least provocation or ill words given by any then in company'. The

[52] BIHR, CPH, 3314; *The memoirs of Sir John Reresby. The complete text and a selection from his letters*, ed. Andrew Browning, 2nd edition, preface and notes by Mary M. Geiter and W. A. Speck (London, 1991), pp. 579–80.
[53] BIHR, CPH 2560, deposition of Henry Brearey.
[54] Ibid., depositions of Henry Proctor and Elizabeth Wright.
[55] BIHR, D/C 1691/11, deposition of Simon Wright.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

attack on patriarchal and paternal authority that Shaw so resented illuminated, in effect, the very politics upon which his alehouse company uneasily rested.[56]

Company and its politics provide, then, a comparative framework for understanding early modern sociability: a kind of historicised ethnography of social practice. It is a framework that extends synchronically, in that very different kinds of association were nevertheless regarded as types of company at a given moment in time. It also extends diachronically, in that the politics of company remained as much a determining feature of early modern sociability after 1650 as before. The nature of its politics varied, of course, from company to company. The explicit politics of patriarchy and paternalism that led to the conflagration between Shaw and Wintringham were different from the nuances of neighbourly civility exploited by Hodgson. Neither did they much resemble the ideological boundaries traversed by Warter on his epic journey from the Guildhall on Coney Street to the coffeehouse in Minster Yard. For all their differences, however, each instance of company displayed the same politics of participation, function, and interaction. Although early modern people did not conceptualise the term in precisely this fashion, they were certainly aware of its social implications. The company kept by John Crowther, Bridget Hodgson, John Warter, Robert Shaw, or Richard Thompson clearly communicated the sort of person they were. Likewise both the young Cromwell and Charles I were damned by hostile writers for the company they kept. This in turn reflected a more pressing concern of early modern writers: namely the relationship between company and the intellectual and moral qualities of the person. For example, when the London citizen and draper William Scott sketched his 'complete citizen' in the 1630s, he urged that he should 'not haunt Taverns too much which is the Epidemical fault of the City'. He elaborated that 'it is not company, but want of discretion in the choice and use of it, which overthrows a man; but besides needless expenses; how can a man be fit for business, who makes his body a continual quagmire?'[57] The Calvinist minister Robert Horne told the burgesses of Jacobean Ludlow that 'all the fault is not in the heart, when it becomes wicked and vicious': 'the heart is a spring that hath not only spouts to send out, as a Conduit, but pipes of sense wherewith it is fed'. As a result, corruption was a consequence of experience: the heart was inevitably moulded 'through seeing, hearing, talking, taste and handling'. However, 'they reason not sufficiently [who claim] If I had never known such company, I had never known such sin'. On the one hand, 'if their hearts had been good, the company could not have been evil'; on the other hand, 'ill company is not the whole, or principal cause of our error, but the heart'.[58] In these humanist and Protestant frameworks, company shaped the person, but

[56] Ibid., reply of Robert Shaw. [57] Scott, *An essay on drapery*, p. 122.
[58] Horne, *The Christian governor*, p. 129.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

it did not fully explain or define them: there was reciprocity but also distance between the two.

This points to a crucial difference between modern and early modern theories of sociability. Historians of early modern society have, by and large, focused on the structural differences and relationships of power that distinguished one person from another. In contrast, commentators at the time were as, if not more, concerned with the implications of discourse and association for the person: just as places required appropriate persons, so conversation was an activity imbued with moral significance. This was the more so because, like places, language and speech were known to be repositories of power, and so crucial to the person's agency, standing, and 'profit' in the world. Having suggested company as an idiom for approaching the ethnography of sociability, we can now turn to contemporary theories about its ideal nature: in particular, the kinds of conversation expected of civil citizens.

Conversations, civil and uncivil

A key into the language of America, written by Roger Williams in 1643, took as its starting point both the communicative basis of community and the instrumental power of language. The son of a London citizen, Williams was an archetypal 'subaltern' of the English Renaissance and fully inured in the linguistic theory that characterised it. Educated at Charterhouse Grammar School and Pembroke College, Cambridge, he was also a legal apprentice to Sir Edward Coke before becoming chaplain to the puritan household of Sir William Masham, in Essex, in 1629, and travelling with John Winthrop to Massachusetts in 1631.[59] His book was an ethnographic dictionary of the Narragansett that presented conversation as a cultural 'key' in at least three respects: as a tool of cultural dissemination; as a kind of discursive genre; and as a repository of the customs that constituted a culture. As he put it, talk was 'a *little Leaven* to season the *mighty Lump* of those *People* and *Territories*'. It enabled Europeans to 'converse with *thousands* of *Natives* over the *Country*: and by such converse it may please the *Father* of *Mercies* to spread *civility* (and in his own most holy season) *Christianity*'.[60] His book was, in turn, structured around two genres often used in the didactic literature of the period. These were the 'dialogue', by which the reader was enlightened through the scripted exchanges of others (in this case, between Williams and the Amerindians); and the sermon, by which the reader was connected, via the author, to the word of God. Through mastery of

[59] Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Michegan, 1991), pp. 5, 18, 23. For Williams' piety, see W. Clark Gilpin, *The millenarian piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago, 1979).

[60] Williams, *A key into the language*, A3.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

these discursive strategies, Williams hoped to reveal not only the way to talk to the Narragansett, but also the fact that their ostensibly barbarous customs were more civil, natural, and godly than English equivalents. Finally, his book was *A key* that 'happily may unlock some Rarities concerning the *Natives* themselves'.[61] Only by learning and speaking the language could a stranger hope to fathom the customs that gave each culture its distinctiveness, as it was through language and communication that the customs and manners of a locale were reproduced, shared, and indeed altered by inhabitants.

Although developed in the context of the 'New World', these suppositions were wholly consistent with Williams' humanist and civic background. Since the sixteenth century a recurring concern of English reformers was that the ability to communicate persuasively and authoritatively was the key to any programme of cultural transformation. It was also well appreciated that any conversation – whether written or spoken – had its form, rules, and rhetoric. This was as true for treatises, ballads, and theatre as it was for gossip, counsel, or a petition. And, as the dictionaries, alphabets, and literacy campaigns of the period suggest, much time and energy were spent listing, reforming, and regulating the English vernacular and its dialects, as it was here that customs were enshrined and potentially adapted.[62] Texts directed at citizens shared this sense of the power of language. However, they also highlighted the relationship between conversation, personality, and social action in a way that Williams, with slightly different concerns, did not. Language was the God-given medium for expressing or disguising the self. It was also, as the primary resource of social exchange, an instrument for persuading or manipulating others. As Robert Horne put it: 'speech . . . should be the key to the mind to open it. For, the use of speech is to express the meaning of the heart, or to be the heart's interpreter.'[63] William Scott, citizen and draper of London, exclaimed 'O how excellent a thing is freedom! There is no better life than to live according to a man's nature, resolving always . . . to dip the pen of the Tongue in the Ink of the heart, speaking but what he thinks.'[64] However, Scott immediately qualified this by warning his 'complete citizen' that 'to utter all he thinks is eminent folly'. Indeed, 'because men are most taken with pleasing words, let them be discreetly chosen, and properly applied: For as speech makes a man more excellent than a Beast, so eloquence will make him more excellent than other men.'[65] Horne was even more circumspect, arguing that, 'As the tongue is governed well or ill, so wickedness breaks out, or is restrained in the body': 'the tongue well ordered, will comfort us, but set at large, shame us: who then will give such a member

[61] Williams, *A key into the language*, A2.
[62] Mulcaster, *The first part of the elementarie*, pp. 226–7, 154. Shrank, 'Rhetorical constructions of a national community', pp. 180–98.
[63] Horne, *The Christian governor*, p. 238.
[64] Scott, *An essay on drapery*, p. 29.
[65] Ibid., p. 90.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

liberty?' Control of speech was, therefore, personally and socially essential, as 'a good tongue is the means by which our actions are well managed': it was with good reason that 'St James calls it the rudder of the man'.[66] It was a rudder both powerful and dangerous. Scott observed that 'my Citizen may deal pleasingly with all men; I would have him be a good Linguist, getting so many Languages, and those so well, that if it were possible, every man he deals with, should think him his countryman. These observations are necessary to his profit; for he shall hardly get by that man, whom he cannot please.'[67] There was, however, a thin line between pleasing and dissembling. The more godly Horne was quick to reiterate that 'the dissembler corrupts this use of speech and end of talk by a deceitful tongue; nay, overturns all humane society and dealings between man and man, by uttering with the tongue what was never conceived by the heart'.[68]

This awareness of both the social necessity and dangerous instrumentality of conversation clearly echoed the bittersweet conceptions of place and person outlined in the previous chapter. This was unsurprising given that the basic intellectual framework was derived from the same Ciceronian notion of *honestas* and the civility it structured. Within this framework, the personal characteristics that ideally accompanied the occupation and execution of place were equally relevant to communication between persons. One such attribute was honesty: the persons' ongoing and exacting quest for integrity in their relationships with others, with themselves, and with God. As Scott explained, the complete citizen was 'a good man … opening his conscience, living as if he were always in public, rather fearing himself than others'.[69] Without honesty, society was vulnerable to the 'will' of men: as Scott put it, 'that deceit which is against justice towards others … stands more in the wills, than wits of men'. The pursuit of will through lying was abhorrent for at least five reasons. It was 'cruel' and 'against nature'; it was against 'civil society; for the preservation whereof, it is necessary that men converse safely together, without fear one of another'; it jeopardised 'the common benefit'; and it was against Christianity'.[70] It was also, finally, against reason. 'The tongue is connected by veins to the brain and heart; by which nature teaches us, that it is to be governed by the intellect, whose feat is in the head, so that it may agree with the heart.' In 'a lie', in contrast, 'the speech always differs from the mind'.[71] Honesty was, however, only one dimension of *honestas*, or at least a quality the meaning of which was modified in the light of other, equally important virtues. These included wisdom, discretion, and decorum or fitness: qualities that, in terms of conversation, amounted to the ability of knowing what to say and how to say it according to time, place, and audience.

[66] Horne, *The Christian governor*, p. 249.
[67] Scott, *An essay on drapery*, p. 94.
[68] Horne, *The Christian governor*, p. 239.
[69] Scott, *An essay on drapery*, p. 3.
[70] Ibid., p. 18.
[71] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

Likewise intended to exclude the force of 'will' from social relationships, *honestas* provided a set of prescriptions that made heavy demands on a freeman or woman's 'disposition' and social 'abilities'. Its principles were directed at citizens through a variety of ideological agendas and through a range of literary genres. Robert Horne considered civil conversation an attribute of godliness. He took the Bible as the basis of his authority; preached and printed his views in the format of the sermon; and talked especially about conversation among neighbours. William Scott, who wrote his treatise for the Company of Drapers in London, drew on predominantly classical sources. He wrote in a tradition of civic aristocracy; chose the conduct book as his medium of expression; and focused primarily on conversation in relation to commerce and profit. Henry Manship, the town clerk of Great Yarmouth, used similar sources to develop the same notion of aristocratic civility as Scott; however, he did so in the form of a town history and with civic rather than commercial discourse in mind. William Fulwood was a Merchant Tailor and balladeer, Angel Daye a lawyer and secretary. Each used their literary and legal training to pen educational tracts on how to write effective and profitable letters and petitions for 'our equals, as to merchants, burgesses, citizens, &c'. Such letters were meant to enhance the civic, commercial, and neighbourly lives of freemen. Roger Williams was unusual in that ethnography was his primary source of intellectual authority. However, in his upbringing, education, and friendships with other civil-minded Londoners like John Milton – whom he taught Dutch in return for lessons in Latin – he was a veritable kaleidoscope of an English commonwealth tradition. It was more than symbolic, for example, that his primary reason for returning to London in 1643 was to purchase, on the advice of John Winthrop and with the help of his metropolitan friends, a 'Free Charter of Civil Incorporation' for the Providence plantations.[72]

The precise construction of *honestas* differed across these ideological traditions. For Horne, for example, 'wisdom' belonged to those that 'walk prudently in God's ways, following his word: for there is no sound direction for matter of religion, or manner of conversation, but from it'. 'People that know not God, that is, that know him not in his word, are called a foolish people' and 'have no wisdom in them'.[73] Indeed, 'to be wise, is not to have a politic head, but a sanctified heart; to be learned, is not to be able to discourse; but being able to discourse of points and matters in Religion … and for a good conscience to perform obedience as we have believed'.[74] Scott was perfectly willing to concede that 'cunning is a crooked wisdom: let him shun that, and take that wisdom which is direct, which is not without honesty, nor ability'. However, his wisdom was classical rather than biblical and profitable rather than godly.

[72] Gaustad, *Liberty of conscience*, pp. 61–2.
[73] Horne, *The Christian governor*, pp. 70–1.
[74] Ibid., p. 73.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

Scott noted that 'honesty without wisdom is unprofitable' because wisdom, as a combination of judgement and skill, allowed the citizen to express himself eloquently and effectively in social situations: it was 'the beautiful and noble composition of him in his words, his actions, and all his motions'.[75] In a similar fashion, discretion stood 'above Learning' as the key to civility because it 'does sufficiently enable a man to improve in all his affairs, whatever he is or hath, to the best advantage'. Discretion was 'neither Wit, Wisdom, Learning, Art, liberal or illiberal; but that which shows how to govern them all conveniently, and every other thing with them … one who could rule and use all these'.[76] This was as true for personal governance, and the cultivation of the honest self, as it was for civic governance and the honest conduct of public affairs.

As this suggests, the communality that ideally characterised civic deliberations was neither unconditional nor opposed, in any simplistic fashion, to the interests of the person. While encouraging honest friendship and reciprocity, *honestas* nevertheless depended on persons who were self-reflective and socially astute. Scott warned that insofar as his 'speaking' was concerned, the citizen 'must take counsel with himself first and then speak'. He insisted that 'even the least circumstances be weighed; as you would choose what to eat, so choose what to speak: thou examines the meat that goes into thy mouth, so examine the word that comes out of it'. This was especially the case for citizens, who had constantly to 'deal with men of divers conditions'. In each instance, 'to speak according to the nature of him with whom he commerce is the best Rhetoric'.[77] As an instinctive rhetorician, the mind of a citizen 'must be stuffed with sufficiency to produce pleasing discourse' but also 'not … so lavish as to hinder his observation, and become tedious to him he deals with'. The citizen required eloquence: 'his words should flow from the mouth [so that] it might be said of them, they are not so much words as Honey'.[78] As importantly, he must 'know how to be silent' as silence was 'more becoming, and instructing'. It also guarded against the very real difficulties in achieving meaningful commerce. As Scott explained, 'did all men think alike, secrecy were [sic] not necessary'. However, 'since the speaker and expositor utter and receive with different minds; speech cannot carry her meaning always just as a man would have her; therefore a man must defend her impotency by keeping her in'. Just as the 'tongue of a Wiseman is hidden in his heart', so 'my citizen may mingle profit with honesty, and enter into a composition with both'.[79] While 'he must never turn his back to honesty; yet sometimes go about and coast it, using an extraordinary skill, which may be better practised than expressed'.[80]

This 'extraordinary skill' was the essence of discretion and demanded psychological and social acuity on the part of the speaker. The wise citizen had 'a

[75] Scott, *An essay on drapery*, pp. 3–4. [76] Ibid., p. 65. [77] Ibid., p. 91.
[78] Ibid., p. 89. [79] Ibid., p. 129. [80] Ibid., p. 136.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

true knowledge of the parties with whom a man deals'. Just as he 'must understand their nature, humour, inclination, designs, and proceedings' – their 'will' – 'so the nature of business in hand must be known too'. 'A superficial knowledge of it is not enough.' Instead, 'a man must penetrate into the inside, and see things in themselves, with the accidents and consequences that belong thereunto': 'knowing every man's nature and fashions, he may lead him; knowing his ends, he may persuade him; knowing his weakness or disadvantage, he may awe him'. Sensitive to 'the divers natures of the persons and affairs, he changes his style, and manner of proceeding'.[81] This required a clear sense of social distinctions. 'To his superior', the words of a citizen 'must carry much humility in them; to his equals, familiarity, which because he shall be sure of from them, must be mingled with a little state. To his inferiors familiarity too, but not too much of it, lest he breed contempt.'[82] It also demanded precise attention to self: the talk of a citizen 'must be assisted by behaviour: without this, his other qualities will not help him'.[83] As Scott noted, 'it cannot but be distasteful to any man, coming into a shop, when he sees a man stand as he were drowned in phlegm and puddle ... It is expected that the outward carriage should promise what's within a man.'[84] For citizens as for courtiers, it was the 'small ceremonious matters [that] win great commendations, because they are continually in use and note; whereas the occasion of great virtue comes but seldom ... they have in them a certain well-becoming majesty, if they be used without pride and affectation'.[85] Courtesy had to be balanced with 'a commendable close commodious carriage, which in matters of less importance must for a man's credit sake sometimes be laid aside; so with applause he may deal closely in matters of weight'.[86] In this way, 'it will be easy for him to profit'.[87]

The same principles extended to written communication. As William Fulwood observed in 1593, an epistle or 'letter is nothing else, but a declaration by writing of the minds of such as be absent, one of them to another, even as though they were present'.[88] Formed in part to connect province and metropolis, the corporate system was the institutional embodiment of 'presence in absence'. Handbooks on the art of petitioning and letter writing likewise stressed the value of *honestas*, and the instrumentality of communication, that honest profit within a society of complex gradations and overlapping hierarchies required. Himself a citizen, Fulwood intended written correspondence to provide 'profit' and 'pleasure' for a broad middle band of English society, observing that there were three 'principal sorts' of letters. As he put it, 'some are addressed to our Superiors as to Emperors, Kings, Princes, &c. Some to our equals, as

[81] Ibid., pp. 127–8. [82] Ibid., p. 94. [83] Ibid., p. 85. [84] Ibid., p. 87.
[85] Ibid., p. 86. [86] Ibid., p. 139. [87] Ibid., p. 127.
[88] William Fulwood, *The enemie of idlenesse. Teaching a perfect platforme how to indite epistles and letters of divers sorts* (1593), p. 9.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

to merchants, burgesses, citizens, &c. Some to our inferiors, as to servants, labourers, &c'.[89] Drawing heavily on Thomas Wilson and other rhetoricians, he outlined for his 'equals' both general principles of communication as well as ideal templates taken from the classical past that could be used for particular situations. Cicero exemplified different letters of friendship (to convey praise, lamentation, comfort, and dispraise) while Plato illustrated how citizens used the art of correspondence to negotiate their position with 'tyrants'.[90] Angel Daye, a lawyer and contemporary of Fulwood, acknowledged that 'every man naturally can speak and set down his own meaning'. However, 'Art prevailing in the cause, and by cunning skill marshalling every thing in his due order, proportion, and place, how much more the same is then beautified, adorned, and as it were in a new shape transmuted.' By learning conversational arts, 'learned' and 'unlearned' alike could 'advance the efficacy' of their conversation, be it 'to require, counsel, exhort, command, inform, commend, entreat, confirm, or whatsoever other intent, determination or purpose'.[91] Social distinctions were not to be negated through conversation, written or otherwise, so much as used in the process of persuasion. The emphasis was on enabling readers 'artificially or cunningly [to] handle an epistle' in a way appropriate to audience. Anticipating Scott, Fulwood advised readers to consider a recipient's estate, dignity, and quality; 'whether he be a public person, or a private'; 'whether he be rich or poor', a 'friend or enemy', a 'familiar acquaintance or a stranger', and even 'whether he likes reading letters or not'.[92] Daye likewise compared an unreflective correspondent to 'a foolish shoemaker, that making his shoes after one fashion, quantity and proportion, supposes the same forthwith of ability fit to serve every man's foot'.[93] Fulwood observed that it 'become not an inferior person, writing or addressing his words to his superior, or speak or write, by the imperative or commanding word, as if one should say this: "Sovereign king, behold such a one, who is a good Clarke, give him a benefice" '. Much more effective was a tone that was 'sufficiently obsequious' and demonstrated 'all humility'.[94] To this end, different modes of address and language were framed in standard rhetorical forms through which the 'benevolence' of a correspondent could be secured. It implied knowledge of distinctions in place and power, but also their negotiation.

The cultivation of benevolence was one tactic available to the discerning citizen. However, commentators were painfully aware that as equally artful and potentially empowering as civil conversation was its deliberate transgression: the strategic and subversive use of uncivil and illicit words. Writing from his place in the fractious borough of Ludlow, it is unsurprising that Robert Horne

[89] Ibid., pp. 11–12. [90] Fulwood, *The enemie of idlenesse*, pp. 40, 70–90.
[91] Daye, *The English secretorie*, p. 2. [92] Fulwood, *The enemie of idlenesse*, p. 15.
[93] Daye, *The English secretorie*, p. 4. [94] Fulwood, *The enemie of idlenesse*, p. 13.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

perceived 'neighbourliness' to be especially vulnerable to a range of conversational delinquents whom he placed under the broad category of 'slanderers'. Generically, 'A slanderer . . . is a malicious informer . . . an unauthorised relater' guilty of 'unmanly dealing with our Neighbour, by a whispering tongue'. As culpable were 'those who drink in with greater thirst of hearing and more eagerly, a false and uncharitable take against his neighbour'. There were inveterate slanderers: the 'walkers, and goers about with tales' who were nothing less than 'petty chapmen, or Peddlers, who carry wares about, selling in one place, and buying in another' within their communities. There were politic slanderers: 'the flatterers and sycophants, who insinuate themselves by the thrusting out of others'. And there were self-righteous slanderers, 'who proclaim their Neighbours secret faults to the wide world: and who, because their speech is true, though their end, in speaking, be evil and wicked, say they are far from slander'.[95] Horne decreed that, in the context of slander, the truth of a report was irrelevant: 'a wise man will be ashamed to speak the truth foolishly, when his words may do so much harm and no good: and, it is sin to speak slanderously (though truly) in a matter. Yea, a man may more sin by speaking some truth with an ill mind, then when (through infirmity) he shall speak an untruth, with a purpose to do good.'[96] It was on the basis of this civil conception of honesty that Horne decreed six rules of neighbourly conversation, each of which called for reflection, discretion, and goodwill on the part of neighbours. Most importantly, 'when we have a good calling, and just cause to speak, let us speak discreetly in time and place, that good may come of our speech, to the amending of him that is faulty, and to the bettering of him that hears'.[97]

In this sense, civility was a double-edged sword. Offering the possibility of structured discussion between unequal parties, it was also a tool of stigmatisation and exclusion. A petition from the corporation of York to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, in his capacity as Lord Treasurer and Privy Councillor, shows how citizens could work its rules to their own advantage.[98] Written in January 1612, it opposed attempts by a local landed interest, headed by the powerful Bellasis family, from purchasing ex-chantry lands in the city. Though currently leased by the corporation from the crown, the aldermen of the city had heard a sale was imminent. As befitted a letter written to a superior, the aldermen laced their prose with the 'honour, humility, and reverence' appropriate for the conversation. Concerned with an issue of what Fulwood styled 'gravity', it emphasised the 'matter as moral and civil', but also with 'respect to honour and profit' of the recipient. It argued the general point 'that this corporation might have habitations and places for the poorer sort of citizens and to keep others from having of them which might become chargeable to this city'. It did so

[95] Horne, *The Christian governor*, pp. 179–80. [96] Ibid., p. 189. [97] Ibid., pp. 190–1.
[98] YCA, B33, f. 281v.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

according to the minor, major, and concluding phases of argument prescribed by the propagators of rhetoric. The minor section established the cause of the orators, or 'what moved us to write'. The major part explained their intent, or 'what our mind is'. The conclusion bore the final brunt of persuasion, offering either 'amplification' (inducing laughter and joy); 'commiseration' (phrased in sweet, pitiful and humble language); or an 'epilogue' (a brief rehearsal).[99] The aldermen at York (and perhaps their legal counsel) skilfully followed the rules, constructing a document that was as self-consciously obsequious as it was politically effective. The petition worked, and negotiation for the purchase of the lands by the citizens had begun by May 1612.[100] In contemporaneous Ludlow, in contrast, similar techniques were used not to repel the encroachments of local gentry so much as represent conflicting aristocratic and democratic positions within the city commonwealth to metropolitan authorities. Although petitioning was the main communicative resource available to democrats, it was the aristocrats who were especially astute in constructing their appeals. A draft letter to the Lord Chancellor, Sir Christopher Hatton, contained calculated slurs against the burgesses. Strategically arranged within the basic rhetorical framework of minor, major, and concluding sections, these emphasised the populist threat that the democrats represented. Two sentences in particular – 'many of them very light and disordered persons by the procurement of some secret enemy to the said poor town' and 'that such troublesome and busy persons may have condign punishment in accordance to their defects' – were emended to the final copy for added impact. It was the 'popularity' of the burgesses, rather than the justness of their grievances, which the authors wanted the Privy Councillors to remember.[101]

It was, however, counsel – the most symbolic and emblematic of civic conversations – which epitomised both the idealism and instrumentality of honest civility. Its ideal was encapsulated by Roger Williams' portrayal of ostensibly 'barbaric' Amerindian talk. He noted of the Narragansett that 'their manner is upon any tidings to sit round double or treble or more, as their numbers be; I have seen near a thousand in a round, where English could not well near half so many have sit'. Democratically assembled, 'Every man hath his pipe of . . . Tobacco, and a deep silence they make, and attention give to him that speaks'. On this basis, 'many of them will deliver themselves, either in a relation of news, or in a consultation with very emphatic speech and great action, commonly an hour, and sometimes two hours together'. For Williams, the broader implications of Amerindian practice were clear. Just as 'the wildest of the sons of Men have ever found a necessity (for preservation of themselves, their Families and Properties) to cast themselves into some Mould or form of Government', so 'The

[99] Fulwood, *The enemie of idlenesse*, pp. 31–6.
[100] YCA, B33, f. 297.
[101] SA, LB7/741.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

whole race of mankind is generally infected with an itching desire of hearing News'. Indeed, the Narragansett's 'desire of, and delight in news, is great, as the *Athenians*, and all men, more or less; a stranger that can relate news in their own language, they will style him "Manittoe", a God'.[102] Williams noted that 'The Sachems [Narragansett Princes], although they have an absolute monarchy over the people; yet they will not conclude of ought that concerns all, either Laws, or Subsidies, or wars, unto which the people are averse, and by gentle persuasion cannot be brought.'[103] The lesson to be learnt in 1643 was that governors should welcome rather than distrust the discursive inclinations and practices over which they governed. However, the 1536 ordinary for a guild of 'Goldsmiths, Plumbers, Pewtherers, Glasiers and Painters' in Newcastle-upon-Tyne suggests that such principles had long been embedded in civic culture. One of its central concerns was the creation of a discursive environment in which members could 'meet together and counsel together, Of, or for, anything concerning the commonwealth and good ordinances of the said crafts'. Such counsel would achieve 'good order and manner for the common weal' as well as 'profit of the association and fellowship of the said five crafts'. Debate was to be 'after a loving manner and everyone to keep others counsel of or for anything that shall be uttered among them for their common weal'. Certainly brethren were expected to talk 'without any grudge or malicious words in the reproof of any of their honesties one to another'.[104]

The humanism of the later sixteenth century invigorated conciliar principles. As Henry Manship explained, 'counsel is, as says Socrates, a sacred thing; and, as Plato calls it, the anchor of the whole city … and hath the same place in the commonwealth that the soul hath in living creatures'. Indeed, 'The commonwealth does chiefly depend on counsel and judgement, according to the disposition of which the affairs of the state are well or ill handled.' It was on 'this counsel [that] all the rest of the public government depends … and it is by Cicero called the soul, reason and understanding of the commonwealth'.[105] As such, it was 'very meet that there should be in every great city and town, a competent number of senators elected (but not too many, for that is very dangerous) who are to have a place convenient appointed, where they may all assemble and meet together'. They did so 'either for service of the state in general, or for the benefit of the town in particular': indeed in Great Yarmouth as in other boroughs and cities 'the aforesaid guild hall was to that end … first built and finished'. It was in this 'company … ordained to some good, and most chiefly to attain the most principal and most excellent good of others' that 'sundry persons … of divers different dispositions of mind inwardly … [and] … sundry professions, trades, and occupations, of body outwardly' are 'brought to union

[102] Williams, *A key into the language*, pp. 54–5. [103] Ibid., p. 134.
[104] TWA, GU/GP/1/2. [105] Manship, *History of Great Yarmouth*, p. 55.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

and agreement'.[106] It was from the collective enterprise of counsel that citizens drew their individual strength. As Scott noted of his 'complete citizen', 'If he deal with superiors, let him make what use he can of them, but not trust in them; among all mortal things, there is nothing more fading then that power which hath not support from itself.' Indeed, 'it is common for that man to be unfortunate, which depends upon another'. Much more important than unequivocal patronage was 'to win speedily the opinion of all honest men, which much imports to the shortening that way, which guides to an eminent esteem'. Just as the rise of a citizen was 'assisted by many', so the '[diligent] quest of riches and credit' should not be 'over violent' or at the expense of virtue.[107] As such, it was the discreet friendship of equals rather than the naked patronage of betters that was the most valuable resource – indeed defining attribute – of citizenship. As Scott put it, 'to counsel is the best office of a friend; but let him be a friend with whom you counsel; deliberate of all things with thy friend; but first of him look that he want neither of his two proper qualities, honesty, sufficiency'.[108]

Conversely, astute citizens recognised that control of discursive practice was essential to political power. A primary concern for the reforming mayor of Jacobean Cambridge, fish merchant Thomas French, was conversational control. In what proved to be an extremely energetic civic career, the first recorded act of his mayoralty in 1608 was to initiate a survey of the borough's ancient customs in order to change debating procedures in the common council. Since 1581 a custom had prohibited the mayor of Cambridge from propounding 'any thing unto the house, unless he do acquaint the aldermen then present in the house with his purpose and that the more part of the aldermen then present do give their assent to the same'. On the grounds that 'many inconveniences have happened and fallen out to the prejudice of the good and quiet government of the said town', French now won 'a free and general assent' to abolish the restriction. Instead it was 'henceforth lawful to and for the new mayor of this town at his free will and pleasure to propound any thing to the said house at any common day or days hereafter … without the assent of the aldermen first had or obtained'. 'An order for Decent speech and behaviour at common days', passed with 'full and absolute assent and consent' of the burgesses, likewise prescribed that after the mayor 'shall propound at any common day any matter … touching the Town or the state thereof', responses were to be in order of office. When it came to the turn of the 'common burgesses', each 'should stand up to answer and speak in the same matter' and 'heard with quietness, and without disturbance of any other'. In the meantime, the mayor would act as a conversational referee, deciding who stood first (if more than one burgess wanted a voice) and whether a burgess should be allowed to reply at his 'discretion'.

[106] Ibid., pp. 55, 190–1. [107] Scott, *An essay on drapery*, p. 143. [108] Ibid., p. 135.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

Any 'unseemly' or 'indecent' speeches out of turn warranted a 2*s*. fine.[109] Nine months later, the common council secured a writ from the Lord Chief Justice against alderman William Archer. French and other burgesses claimed that Archer, in opposing the reforms of French, had burst the bounds of civility. At the common day he had 'in very scornful, reproachful and contemptuous terms upbraided and reproved the said Thomas French most irreverently and unbeseeming to the great impeachment and disgrace of the place of mayoralty, discouragement of successors, and utter dislike of that grand assembly'. Archer was 'admonished' and agreed to publicly 'confess that he had wronged both the said mayor and his place ... and was therefore sorry'.[110]

In Ludlow in the 1590s, democrats countered the enclosure of legitimate counsel by aristocrats with alternative discursive strategies – slander and insult included. It was alleged, for example, that, during his tenure as bailiff, John Crowther had 'suffered base fellows both of life and living daily to abuse his fellow bailiff they calling him knave and other base terms'. Crowther 'himself ... does often call his fellow bailiff knave and likewise some of the ancient aldermen ... base and old companions'.[111] John Bradford was another discursive miscreant. At a 'gaol delivery' he 'most contemptuously ... did there publicly speak that the said Bailiffs were not the lawful bailiffs, and therefore did own no duty to appear before them, and he persuaded divers other burgesses to do the like disobedience'. The decade saw pamphlets, libels, letters, and writings 'cast abroad concerning the government of this town [and] defaming the governors'.[112] It was through his words that Bradford 'nourished a great faction in the town', intent on bringing 'all in common'; and it was likewise astute reportage that enabled the aristocrats to characterise the democratic grievances as 'a derogation of authority'.[113] Democratic opposition transmuted in the seventeenth century into neighbourly scandal and insult, so much so that in 1611 the common council noted 'the little respect and sometimes the contumelious behaviour of lewd and presumptuous persons towards our said governors'. Verbal licentiousness had 'not only greatly abused and disregarded the good credit of the corporation and greatly greened and discouraged many good persons so abused'. It had 'also ... ministered occasion of such savoury boldness and presumption in many inhabitants touching as lewd words and evil behaviour and at their pleasure'. As a result, any burgess 'who shall speak any lewd or savoury words ... or shall in vile scurrilous behaviour demean himself or herself towards any of the XII and XXV [to] the disgrace of their callings and place' would be fined 6*s*. 8*d*. A fine of 20*s*. was reserved for words and gestures against the two bailiffs. 'Lewd words' included 'knave, rascal, beggar,

[109] CCRO, City Box II, 9, f. 23.
[110] CCRO, City Shelf C, Book 7, ff. 1–1v, 8v.
[111] SA, LB7/736.
[112] SA, LB7/759.
[113] SA, LB7/765.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

drunkard, or the like'. They were seen to damage 'the reverence and respect' burgesses should have for 'persons chosen for your government' as well as the 'good reputation and credit of this corporation'. As importantly, they prevented 'offices to undergo and perform with cheerfulness their said places of charge and troubles'.[114]

The problem of disputed counsel provided the context for Horne's plea to curtail slander: in Ludlow as elsewhere, the political uses of slander, rumour, and defamation were a powerful reminder that citizenship and neighbourliness were sides of the same discursive coin.[115] Just as talk between men and women about the personal and private lives of neighbours was a prominent feature of public company, so both forms of discourse had their tactics and arts. Circumstances in Ludlow suggest, in turn, that notions of civility could be deployed politically and strategically to marginalise threatening or dissenting voices. Just as civic democrats were most effectively presented as populists, so political criticism was best deflected or undermined on the grounds of its inappropriate and uncivil nature. Indeed, no one better demonstrated the contingency of civility than did Robert Horne. Even as he was castigating Ludlow's 'slanderers', the minister was collating an extensive set of manuscripts that displayed at once an historical interest in criticism against the crown and an 'intense interest in the most violently debated political issues of the early 1620s'. The collection, which served 'as a space where information was shared', dealt with matters 'ranging from freedom of speech to the impeachment of Bacon to the beginning of proceedings against Buckingham; from the debates on foreign policy to those on church government'. It did so as a 'mixture of learning, satire, obscenity, and wit', and in a manner that combined the personal and political as closely as any libel or slander circulated closer to home.[116] The manuscript was constructed with the help of Herbert Jenks, son of the Francis Jenks who, as town clerk of Ludlow, engineered the infamous incorporation of 1598. By the 1610s Herbert Jenks was one of several metropolitan-based 'friends' who kept Horne informed about national public news and affairs. Discursive gamekeeper in the borough, the clergyman played poacher abroad, engaging in conversations that, judged on his own terms, were nothing if not slanderous of the Jacobean court. In this instance, civility was as company did.

'The public stage and view of the world'

Just as structured conversations were a primary feature of city commonwealth, so freemen and citizens knew about language and its uses. Such reflexivity

[114] SA, LB2/1/16, f. 42.
[115] Hughes, 'Religion and society', pp. 58–84; Adam Fox, 'Religious satire in English towns, 1570–1640', in Collinson and Craig, *Reformation in English towns*, pp. 221–40.
[116] Colclough, '"The muses recreation"', pp. 387, 391.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

inevitably qualifies the notion that the ideal of rational discourse only emerged with the 'transformation of the bourgeois public sphere' during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the contrary, the very notion of civility brought with it rhetorical rules and 'arts' designed to achieve constructive, orderly, profitable, and reflective debate; or, conversely, illicit criticism and dissent. Such skills required, in turn, a sense of the reflective and knowing self that was at once placed in and detached from particular moments of company. Indeed, the very definition of citizenship stemmed from an acquaintance with the personal skills required of rational and effective discourse. Likewise, the topography of public discussion during the early modern period clearly extended beyond the palaces of sixteenth-century monarchs; the correspondence of more socially and intellectually elevated 'circles' or networks of correspondents; or the coffeehouses, newspapers, and clubs of Restoration and Georgian England. Instead we find the much earlier promulgation of civility in the counsels, letters and petitions, and commercial and neighbourly dealings that formed the communicative bread and butter of the corporate system. It was not simply a literary conceit that, when faced with the unwelcome attentions of the eloquent but distinctly uncivil Falstaff, the immediate response of the leading she-citizens of Windsor was to invoke the primary conversational resources at their disposal: 'counsel' and 'parliament' (2.1.26–7, 39–40). Londoners would, in turn, have appreciated the inference of Shakespeare that the dispute between Coriolanus and the Roman citizenry was essentially a breakdown in and about conversation. For all his military qualities, the general could neither comprehend nor exhibit the discretion, wisdom, and decorum demanded by the citizens.[117] Likewise the conceits of gallant sociability were given short shrift in plays like *The city madam*, which described how 'sitting at the table with / The braveries of the kingdom, you shall hear / Occurrents from all corners of the world, / The plots, the counsels, the designs of princes, / And freely censure 'em; the city wits/ Cried up, or decried, as their passions lead 'em, / Judgement having naught to do there' (2.1.86–92). In contrast, civility was essential to an English civic culture that valorised the public role and political potentials of conversation. The astrologer William Lilly recalled that the value of his citizen-master to the London Company of Salters was not his vocation. Rather it was the fact that, although he could neither read nor write, he was 'a Man of excellent Natural Parts, and would speak publicly upon any Occasion very rationally and to the Purpose'.[118]

That is not to say that a sense of 'the public' that was distinct from civic, *res*publican, and monarchical power did not emerge during the sixteenth and

[117] Cathy Shrank, 'Civility and the city in *Coriolanus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54 (2003), pp. 406–23.

[118] *The last of the astrologers. Mr William Lilly's history of his life and times from the year 1662 to 1681*, edited and introduced by Katharine M. Briggs (London, 1974), pp. 7–8.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

seventeenth centuries, nor that its scale, scope, and political significance did not increase exponentially in the revolutionary era. The plethora of plays, pamphlets, newsbooks, treatises, sermons, and petitions clearly point to a printed public sphere that had enormous implications for the organisation of 'opinion', the dynamics of political participation, and the nature and location of public debate. The extent of printed public debate with the development of new or invigorated institutions like the coffeehouse and postal service during the 1650s consolidated its impact in the Restoration era.[119] Even then, though, the continuities and complexities of its 'emergence' are striking. Indeed, the concept of a printed public sphere was sketched as early as the mid-sixteenth century by the prefaces and preambles of printed texts to 'the reader' and 'the public'. These demarcated an audience that, no matter distances of place and time, could be appreciative of and communicate with the printed word. Constituted by the many genres of scribal, printed, and oral discourse that this implies – whether letters, printed or scribal 'books', ballads, theatre – this public combined, in theory, the 'openness' and presence of an audience with the sanction of political licence and patronage. Regarded as an important medium of reform and civility, the creation and control of a 'literary public sphere' was as much a priority for humanist reformers like Mulcaster as patrons of the Protestant theatre like Leicester.[120] James VI and I was similarly aware of its political efficacy, his willingness to publish his own 'works' – and publicly patronise those of his playwright, Jonson – standing in marked contrast to the suspicion with which both men viewed the public pretensions of corporations and parliaments. However, by its very nature this was a public of scribal and printed discourse impossible to control. John Donne noted in 1610 'that having observed, how much your Majesty had vouchsafed to descend to a conversation with your subjects, by way of your Books, I also conceived an ambition, of ascending to your presence, by the same way, and of participating, by this means, their happiness'.[121] Moreover, the possibilities of textual appropriation meant that even the most authorised and authoritative of pronouncements, such as John Speed's *Theatre of the empire of Great Britain* could be used in unexpected ways. The *Theatre* was commissioned at court and dedicated to 'so high an Imperial Majesty' and 'most potent monarch James'. It was then 'brought upon the public Stage and view of the world'.[122] Among the audience of this 'public Stage' was Henry Manship, town clerk of Great Yarmouth, who, on 'hearing of the great Theatre published by John Speed in the year 1611 … rode fourteen miles to see and read it'.[123] The *Theatre* in turn inspired Manship to compile a

[119] Mark Knights, *Politics and opinion in crisis, 1678–81* (Cambridge, 1994), chs. 6, 8; Withington, 'Urban political culture', ch. 7.
[120] McMillin and Maclean, *The Queen's Men*, ch. 2.
[121] John Donne, *Pseudo-martyr* (1610), Preface.
[122] Speed, *The theatre and empire*, B2, C2.
[123] Manship, *History of Great Yarmouth*, p. 6.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

history of his own borough that celebrated precisely the *res*publican and civic authority so distrusted by James.

The reign of Charles can be viewed, in turn, as a concerted attempt to put the genie back in the bottle, be it through regulating the influential St Paul's sermon or restrictions on classical translations and other political texts. That in 1641 he was drawn into the conversation to end all conversations is evidence enough that he failed. *An exact collection of all remonstrances, declarations, orders, ordinances, proclamations, petitions, messages, answers, and other remarkable passages between the King's most excellent Majesty and his High Court of Parliament* (1643) is a compendium of the furious talk between parliamentary and royal 'power', all of it observed by 'the public'. Not only were exchanges between the two bodies made 'open'. The very nature and provenance of counsel was left to the discretion of the public. It was transformed, in effect, into a democratic idiom. Richard Overton and William Walwyn remonstrated for 'many thousand citizens' in 1646 that 'In the beginning ye [the parliament] seemed to know what freedom was, whether rich or poor. All were welcome to you and ye would mix yourselves with us in a loving familiar way, void of courtly observance or behaviour. Ye kept your committee doors open. All might hear and judge of your dealings.'[124] Such openness could not survive the war and the subsequent peace. By 1648 it was clear to London's democrats that the 'rackings and tortures the people in general have suffered' for the 'hopes of freedom and a well-settled commonwealth' were being undermined by 'secret, powerful influences, the more securely and unsuspectedly to attain an absolute domination over the commonwealth'. The petitions that had previously represented the diverse interests of commonwealth were now fobbed off with 'empty thanks', ignored, or threatened with burning by the common hangman.[125] Indeed, it was as a last bid to preserve 'the highest notions of freedom' known in the world that 'a company of honest men living in and about London ... rightly appropriate to themselves the title of the contrivers, promoters, presenters, and approvers of the late large London Petition'.[126] Warrants for their arrest meant that they had been unable to 'go our ordinary way to work to get subscriptions to it'. Moreover the Council of State '[reproached] them with such appellations as they know did most distaste the people, such as "Levellers", "Jesuits", "anarchists", "royalists"'. Just as oligarchs in Elizabethan Ludlow had labelled burgesses in ways that played on the Privy Council's fear of populism, so 'the Levellers' charged their opponents with using similar rhetoric to build 'upon the easiness and credulity of the people'. They nevertheless hoped that, 'in the sad apprehension of the dying condition of our liberties and freedoms',

[124] Richard Overton with William Walwyn's collaboration, 'A remonstrance of many thousand citizens' (1646), in Sharp, *The English Levellers*, p. 48.
[125] John Lilburne, 'England's new chains discovered' (1649), in ibid., pp. 146, 148.
[126] Ibid., p. 155.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

their representatives would 'read these our serious apprehensions seriously and debate them deliberately' – as had been done, for example, at Putney.[127]

This enlarged and contested public sphere was firmly rooted in the corporate system both in terms of its participants and its logistics. Of the eight authors and printers that constituted the petitioning, printing, and counselling heart of the Levellers, six had held apprenticeships or were fully enfranchised citizens of London, and two had close connections with the citizenry.[128] Ian Gentles has likewise shown that 47 per cent of the 238 members of the New Model Army Officer Corps hailed from London or other large cities and towns. Their 'strongly urban character' was not only at odds with the subsequent myth of the russet-coated East Anglian farmer; it was recognised at the time. *Vox Militaris* explained that 'There are very few of us, but have most of this world's interest in the City of London, being chiefly and principally raised thence, and very many, especially of our officers, being citizens themselves, having their wives and children therein.'[129] Captain Adam Baines was an attorney from Leeds; based in London; and at the centre of an extensive web of kinship and friendship networks through which news was disseminated. Indeed, Baines' 'special care of the public' stemmed in large part from his position 'at the fountain's head of news' in London: he and the state he served enjoyed enormous discursive power through his accumulation and dissemination of 'intelligence' from and to his correspondents.[130] As one 'friend' in the 'northern parts' put it, 'we wait in expectation of news from your parts, which indeed is the fountain from whence it flows . . . if you pipe it well . . . we be so good artists as to dance'.[131] This merely reflected the prevailing institutional importance of the corporate system to the dissemination and exchange in news. The postal service was an urban institution that the soldiery both monopolised and extended in the 1650s. The book trade, in terms of the Stationers Company in London and the stationers, booksellers, and chapmen in the provinces, was always urban-based. The coffeehouse, like provincial playing companies before it, was also synonymous with the corporate system: in 1681 it could be claimed (somewhat hyperbolically) that 'most of the cities and boroughs of the nation' had one.[132] Their very proximity to and participation in such institutions made for discursively privileged citizens.

The 'coffee houses and other publick places' that Richard Thompson allegedly frequented in the early 1670s marked the extension rather than invention of places designated for civil debate and conversation. As such, they were part of a longer tradition of 'publick matters and in hearing and telling news' that citizens valued and contested both locally, in their city commonwealths,

[127] Ibid., pp. 151, 156. See below, ch. 6. [128] Sharp, *The English Levellers*, pp. 202–13.
[129] Ian Gentles, 'The New Model Officer Corps in 1647: a collective portrait', *Social History*, 22, 1997, p. 133.
[130] BL Add MSS 21417, f. 12. [131] BL Add MSS 21417, ff. 18, 34, 70.
[132] Cited in Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create"', pp. 813–14.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

and nationally, as a culturally defined public. Continuities were synchronic as well as diachronic. Both Thompson and Nelthorpe were central figures in the civic politics of the 1670s, playing a leading role in London's Common Council and its struggle with the Court of Aldermen over the balance of power within the civic polity.[133] In this way, the perennial struggle between London democrats and aristocrats was closely tied to the renewed tensions between Parliament and court; and it is no coincidence that Thompson's fondness for coffee coincided with a number of proclamations attempting to close down the coffeehouses as seminaries of subversion. Within the jurisdiction of civic authority, the coffeehouses survived.[134] However, it was Thompson's reflection on his private and public selves that most illuminates the way in which an earlier tradition of civility informed his participation in public life. Writing to his brother-in-law and old commonwealthsman Major Braman in June 1678, the citizen, confectioner, and erstwhile entrepreneur observed that 'the discipline of living well is the amplest of all other arts'. It was 'not only for an exterior show or ostentation that our soul must play her part but inwardly within ourselves where no eyes shine but ours'. He continued, 'everyone may play ... and represent well upon the stage, but that is not so much our nature as our art'. True virtue lay 'within ... where all things are lawful, because we think them concealed, to keep a due rule and decorum, that is the point'. In true humanist fashion, a well-ordered commonwealth demanded from its participants an 'exquisite life, which in its own privacy keeps itself in such awe and order'.[135]

The baker James Wright – that 'citizen of great respect / As free from vice as from defect' – would surely have concurred. So, too, would Thompson's friend Andrew Marvell. Noted for his virtuosity in a range of literary genres and idioms, Marvell's discursive slipperiness was testimony to his conversational art. In the official and supportive letters he regularly posted to his civic constituency in Hull; his civil correspondence with friends; his ideologically ambiguous poetry; his revelatory pamphlets; or his scathing libels and satires of the Restoration court, Marvell always wrote in a way appropriate to form and context. The diversity of his patrons, clients, and companions likewise demanded contrasting forms of talk. They included the Presbyterian household of Sir Thomas and Lady Fairfax, with whom he lived as tutor to their daughter during the early 1650s; their son-in-law, the libertine courtier Buckingham, whom he had befriended independently on a visit to Italy; and John Milton, his patron in the republican regime.[136] They also included the merchants and citizens with whom he socialised in London and communicated with in Yorkshire

[133] See below, ch. 6. [134] CLRO, Microfilm MCFP/552, f. 189–192v.
[135] TNA SP29 404 215.
[136] David Norbrook, *Writing the English republic: poetry, rhetoric and politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 165–7.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

and the continent. These were communities that required the classic attributes of *honestas* – a discreet and reflective self. John Aubrey observed that, 'in his conversation', Marvell was 'very modest, and of few words'. Though 'he loved wine he would never drink hard in company, and was wont to say that, he would not play the good-fellow in any man's company in whose hands he would not trust his life'. This did not stop him keeping 'bottles of wine in his lodgings' and drinking 'liberally by himself to refresh his spirits, and exalt his muse'.[137] This propensity for discretion has meant that even his marital status has long been doubted: by John Farrington; by his Whig hagiographers; and by literary historians who have taken Farrington's aspersions at face value.[138] Less controversially, it was certainly the case that 'for divers years before his death [Marvell] kept also lodgings in Maiden Lane in Covent Garden where he kept his moneys, bonds, books, writings and other goods and chattels'. It was 'in his study at that lodging' that 'he frequently lodged for his privacy and other conveniences'. It was also there that he kept 'many trunks and hampers wherein were great sums of money in gold and silver beside bonds, bills, books, jewels and other goods of value' that his wife assumed her husband had saved.[139] As Angel Daye explained in a passage written some 100 years earlier, but which might have been written by Marvell himself, 'secrecy, trust and regard' were the special requirements of a 'secretary' and man of public affairs. It was 'by this reason we do call the most secret place in the house appropriate unto our own private studies, and wherein we repose and deliberate by deep consideration of all our weightiest affairs, a closet'. This was 'a place where our readings of importance are shut up, a room proper and peculiar to ourselves'.[140] Just as Thompson valued his interior sense of 'rule and decorum', so Marvell's place of discursive and material production was also the most private of sanctums: the spatial embodiment, in effect, of the civil, civic, and public man.

[137] John Aubrey, *Brief lives: a selection based upon existing contemporary* portraits, ed. Richard Barber (Wallop, 1975), p. 202.
[138] Fred S. Tupper, 'Mary Palmer, alias Mrs Andrew Marvell', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 53, 2, 1938, pp. 367–92. For further discussion of the Marvell household see below, ch. 7.
[139] TNA, C7/587/95, deposition of Mary Marvell. [140] Daye, *The English secretorie*, p. 391.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 17:35:48, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511560903.007