

**Government in an English Provincial Town:  
The Corporation of Ipswich, 1720-95**

**J. David Clemis**

**Submitted for the Degree of Ph. D.**

**University of Leicester**

**1999**

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### ***Abstract***

Despite an increasingly rich historiography detailing the economic, cultural, and political development of eighteenth-century provincial towns, governance and politics under the municipal corporation has received little recent attention. For the most part, a conventional view prevails holding that the corporations were increasingly corrupt, under-resourced and institutionally obsolete. The rise of statutory authorities and other forms of government are seen as evidence of the ineffectiveness of the old corporate regimes. This thesis attempts to understand what sort of role the static, institutionally ossified municipal corporation was able to play in within a community undergoing important social, cultural, and economic changes over the course in the eighteenth century.

In the case of Ipswich, Suffolk, it is argued that while the ancient Corporation did not function in accordance with modern standards of bureaucratic effectiveness and democratic openness, it nonetheless played central role in the life of the community. As an instrument of for the regulation of trade and the maintenance of commercially vital infrastructure, the Corporation operated with great effectiveness until the last decades of the eighteenth century. Moreover, in contending with the problem of poverty, the town's leaders were able to co-ordinate parochial relief with considerable resources they directly controlled.

The community was not subject to the tyranny of an unresponsive oligarchy nor dominated by its wealthiest members. The Ipswich Corporation's particular institutional structure and the town's developing political culture meant that domination of the senior offices by a narrow elite grew increasingly difficult. Moreover, the negotiation of power relations and the place of the Corporation in the life of the community must be understood within the context of the participation of a broad cross-section of the community in various aspects of government and politics.

For most of the eighteenth century the Corporation was able to function effectively and provided various means of participation in its affairs for a wide spectrum of the community. By the 1780s, however, a contentious politics had developed which exploited institutional weaknesses and financially undermined the corporate regime. The Corporation's success depended on its pre-eminence and the cohesiveness of its governing elite. The increasingly profound loss of the later gradually undermined the former. This opened the way for other forms of public authority whose principles, methods, and very existence undermined the ancient Corporation in the early nineteenth century.

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It is a great pleasure to acknowledge the many people whose inspiration, support, and advice have made the completion of this thesis possible. Peter King deserves enormous thanks for his early confidence in my project and unstinting support throughout. He has taught me much about the materials with which historians work, and I owe a great deal to his rigour and good judgement. It is a great privilege to have also been supervised by Penelope Corfield. Her intellectual acuity, imagination, and good-humoured support have made the preparation of this thesis a most stimulating and rewarding enterprise. My thanks are also due to John Beattie, who first engaged my interest in the eighteenth century, and who has since shown interest in my work and been a kind friend. Michael Finlayson has also been a good friend and supporter since the early days of my post-graduate studies. Robert Tittler, Norma Landau, Simon Renton, Phil Knowles, and Barbara Todd have all directed me towards sources and helpfully discussed parts of my research. I have also profited from presenting various parts of my research at: the "Long Eighteenth Century" seminar at the Institute for Historical Research, the Pre-Modern Towns Conference, the European Social Science History Conference, the Nene Centre for Research, and the history seminar at the University of Southampton.

No historian undertaking a local study can proceed far without the help of those who really know the ground. I am much indebted to David Jones and his staff at the Suffolk Record Office Ipswich not only for making a wonderful collection of documents so readily available, but also for their countless tips and bits of advice which did much to ease my way and enrich my research. I am also indebted to Val Norrington and Peter Northeast, two very knowledgeable Suffolk historians, for their friendly encouragement and advice, and most of all, for their willingness to share precious SRO/I table space with me and my sometimes noisy laptop computer! I am particularly grateful to Dr. John Blatchley for his advice on sources and for having provided me with copies of several useful documents. I have also profited from the comments and encouragement of Frank Grace, who was kind enough to read several chapters. Giles Colchester deserves special thanks for permitting me to examine family documents in his possession.

In 1726 Thomas Madox remarked: "whoso desireth to discourse in a proper manner concerning the Corporated Towns and communitie must take in a great variety of matter, and should be allowed a great deal of time and preparation." Mindful of this, I am very grateful to the Nene Centre for Research at University College Northampton for generous financial and institutional support during the research and writing of this thesis.

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## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	2
Table of Contents	3
Abbreviations	4
Tables and Figures	5
Chapter One: Introduction	7
<u>Part One: Municipal Structure and Functions</u>	
Chapter Two: The Borough Courts	39
Chapter Three: The Offices of Government	75
Chapter Four: The Personnel of the Corporation	108
<u>Part Two: Governance, Politics, and Participation</u>	
Chapter Five: Finances, Economic Regulation, and Poor Relief	149
Chapter Six: Patterns of Politics	210
Chapter Seven: Participation and Diversification	251
Conclusions	291
Bibliography	304

### **Abbreviations Used in the Text and Notes**

av. -average

BL - British Library

CJ - *Journals of the House of Commons*

IHR - Institute of Historical Research

I.J. - *Ipswich Journal*

GCB - Great Court Book of the Corporation of Ipswich

Ms. - manuscript

P.P. - *Parliamentary Papers*

PRO - Public Record Office

RCMC -- *Reports from Commissioners: vol. xxvi, 1835. The First Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales*

SIAH - Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History

SRO/B - Suffolk Record Office, Bury St. Edmunds

SRO/I - Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich

TRHS -*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

VCH - *Victoria County History*

## Tables and Figures

	page number
1.1: <i>Two Measures of Ipswich's Relative Wealth</i>	34
(a) <i>Number of Silver Plate Duty Paying Households for Selected Ports, 1757</i>	
(b) <i>Tonnage of Merchant Shipping Registered at Selected Provincial Ports, 1751</i>	
2.1: <i>The Activity of the Great Court</i>	53
2.2: <i>Meetings of the Great Court and the Assembly</i>	61
2.3: <i>The Activity of the General Sessions</i>	64
2.4: <i>Justices of the Peace Court Attendance and Recognizances Signing</i>	65
2.5: <i>The Activity of the Petty Court/Court of Small Pleas</i>	70
3.1: <i>Number of Persons Appointed to Various Offices, 1700-1799</i>	89
3.2: <i>Attendance of Justices at the Borough Sessions</i>	89
3.3: <i>The Activity of the Justices of the Peace</i>	90
3.4: <i>Average Attendance of the Assemblymen at Meetings of the Great Court</i>	94
4.1: <i>Distribution of Rate Payers and Corporation Officers by Poor Rate Assessments, 1755-1760</i>	113
4.2: <i>Town Clerks as Bailiffs</i>	118
4.3: <i>The Retention of Petty Constables</i>	143
5.1: <i>Charities Income, Poor Rates, and Other Corporation Revenue</i>	154
5.2: <i>Borough Rates 1755-62 and 1791-5</i>	155
5.3: <i>Parish Rates, Charities, and Corporation Income, c. 1800</i>	156
5.4: <i>Sources of Non-rate Corporation Revenue, 1721 and 1791</i>	157
5.5: <i>Chamberlains' Revenues by Source</i>	159
5.6: <i>Treasurers' Revenues by Source</i>	160
5.7: <i>Treasurers' and Chamberlains' Accounts: Summary of Revenue and Expenditure</i>	165
5.8: <i>Poor Rate Spending by Parish</i>	176
5.9: <i>Proportion of the Total Population In Receipt of Parish Aid, 1803</i>	178
5.10: <i>Average Quarterly Poor Rate Set Per Year</i>	179
5.11: <i>Increase in Numbers of Ratepayers, St. Mary's Tower and St. Clement's</i>	180
5.12: <i>Total and Per Capita Poor Rate Expenditure, 1803</i>	181
5.13: <i>Parochial Charities as a Percentage of Poor Rate Funded Expenditure, 1780s</i>	186
5.14: <i>Annual Revenue of Corporation Charities, 1814</i>	187
6.1: <i>Distribution of Electoral Support, 1741</i>	233

## Tables and Figures (cont'd)

7.1: <i>Female Rate Payers, 1755-60</i>	252
7.2: <i>Frequency of Jury Service</i>	262
7.3: <i>Attendance of Ordinary Freemen at Meetings of the Great Court</i>	266
7.4: <i>Freeman Admissions by Year</i>	269
7.5: <i>The Founding of Benevolent Societies at Ipswich</i>	279
Figure 1: <i>Eighteenth-Century Ipswich (with principal places mentioned in the text).</i>	27
Figure 2: <i>The Structure of the Corporation of Ipswich in the Eighteenth Century</i>	41

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1. Historiography of the Eighteenth-Century Municipal Corporation

Antiquarians and local historians have long provided accounts of the government of particular towns. As valuable as many of those works are, they seldom employ the methods or engage themes which are central to modern historical research.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the municipal corporation has been a curiously neglected subject in the modern historiography of eighteenth-century England. Over the last twenty-five years, despite innovatively re-conceptualising and deepening their subjects, historians concerned with politics, urban life and state institutions have not taken up the municipal corporation as a subject of sustained study. While historians have recast and profoundly broadened our understandings of the social, economic and cultural dimensions of urban society, long-held conventional perceptions of the municipal corporation have not been substantially revised. Despite the corporation's role as the principal institution of local government in many towns, these new accounts of urban society generally do not see it as an important feature of what makes eighteenth-century towns interesting subjects of research.

The past three decades have also seen the character of eighteenth-century politics dramatically revised by studies which have conceptually widened the field of politics and stressed the importance of popular participation. The politics of provincial towns have been the subjects of several such studies. Both Nicholas Rogers and Kathleen Wilson have attempted to understand the forms and impact of popular participation in town politics through general works which have included case studies of Bristol, Norwich and Newcastle, while Perry Gauci has examined the politics of Yarmouth.<sup>2</sup> All

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<sup>1</sup> See R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997). Amongst more recent useful studies of this type are: F. Hill, *Georgian Lincoln* (Cambridge, 1966); E. Gillet and K.A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (Oxford, 1980); A.F.J. Brown, "Colchester in the Eighteenth Century" in L. Munby (ed.), *East Anglian Studies* (Cambridge, 1968); P. McGrath (ed.), *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1972); R. Newton, *Eighteenth-Century Exeter* (Exeter, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> N. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989); K. Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-85* (Cambridge, 1995); P. Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660-1722* (Oxford, 1996).

of these studies reveal much about how the constitutional form of the respective corporations helped to condition politics. Both Rogers' and Wilson's studies are particularly illuminating for what they reveal about urban political culture and the forms of popular engagement in the process of politics. Gauci's account of the structure of the corporation, the social distribution of its offices, and the history of its political relations with landed society and the central government provides important insights into a corporation's external political relations from the Restoration to 1722. However, these important studies understand local politics principally in terms of engagement with national issues and themes. Thus, the character of local politics is revealed through studies of electoral contests for borough parliamentary seats and responses to national issues such as the American Crisis or the anti-government protest built-up around Admiral Edward Vernon in the 1740s. Yet it is important to recognise that between 1720 and 1800 there were only thirteen parliamentary elections (plus five by-elections at Ipswich) , while the business of the municipal corporations embraced a range of matters bearing on the daily social, cultural and economic lives of the inhabitants of their communities. Such matters as the annual selection of men holding local offices or decisions about the disposition of corporation assets were the more common stuff of local politics.

Studies of the administration of the criminal and poor laws have done much to reveal the character of governance in the eighteenth century. Crime historians, in particular, have provided important insights into the activities of the justices of the peace and the workings of the quarter sessions and assizes. In doing so they have illuminated the activities of several of the most significant institutions of local governance. Moreover, through the study of crime, many historians have been able to explore the forms and dynamics of power relations amongst various elements of the community.<sup>3</sup> All of this work suggests the importance of the borough sessions and the

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<sup>3</sup> See D. Hay, P. Linebaugh and E.P. Thompson (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-century England* (London, 1975), pp 17-63; P. King, "Decision-Makers and Decision-Making in the English Criminal Law, 1750-1800" in *Historical Journal*, 27, i (1984), pp. 25-58; and N. Landau, *The Justices of the Peace, 1696-1760* (Berkeley, 1984), which is the only study to date to pay particular

urban JPs in their roles as judicial officers, administrators and agents of the central government. The key role of JPs and their courts in the exercise of local authority reinforces the importance of understanding their place within the wider constitutional, political and administrative structure of the Corporation.

Recent work on the professions, public associations and the “middling sort” in early modern society have variously indicated new approaches which might be taken to eighteenth-century institutions like the municipal corporation.<sup>4</sup> Studies of the “middling sort” in the early modern period suggest that such bodies as the municipal corporations and urban-based statutory authorities need to be considered in terms of their social and cultural roles in urban society as well as in their more obvious political and administrative functions. While interesting work has been done on the culture and sociology of some eighteenth-century institutions and professions, the form and practices of the municipal corporation need to be more fully explored both as embodiments of the urban culture of governance, and as central elements of the framework in which the negotiation of power occurs.

Various factors account for this historiographic neglect of the corporation. In many instances the corporation has been peripheral to the principal object of these studies. A comprehensive understanding of the corporation as a system, or as the leading component of town governance has not been necessary for many historians concerned primarily with administration of the criminal law or the significance of national issues in the election of borough members of parliament. Moreover, many of the studies referred to here have been concerned with towns in general, rather than being

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attention to the urban justices. See also T.H. Green, *Verdict According to Conscience: Perspectives on the English Criminal Trial Jury, 1200-1800* (Chicago, 1985); J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1986); J.S. Cockburn and T.H. Green (eds), *Twelve Good Men and True: The Criminal Trial Jury in England 1200-1800* (Princeton, 1988); For a full account of this literature see: J. Innes and J. Styles, “The Crime Wave: Recent Writing on Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century England” in A. Wilson, (ed), *Rethinking Social History: English History and its Interpretation* (Manchester, 1993), 201-65.

<sup>4</sup> P. J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (London, 1995); J. Barry, “Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and Middling Sort”; C. Brooks, “Professions, Ideology and the Middling Sort in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries”; S. D’Cruz, “The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker”, all in J. Barry and C. Brooks, (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (London, 1994).

case studies of particular towns.<sup>5</sup> In such studies, an engagement with the various idiosyncratic constitutions of corporations was neither convenient nor apparently necessary. Yet, as a few studies of urban politics and economic improvement suggest, the peculiarities of corporate constitutions can be matters of great importance. This thesis seeks to show how the particular features of the Ipswich Corporation's constitution influenced the character of the town's government and the course of its politics. In doing so, it seeks to make clear the importance of municipal institutional structure as a variable in the larger equation of urban social and political development.

That the municipal corporation has not been an appealing subject for historians is partly attributable to the magisterial study of English local government by Sidney and Beatrice Webb published between 1907 and 1922.<sup>6</sup> The Webbs' account of the eighteenth-century municipal corporation, although subject to some criticism and qualification, has remained the conventionally accepted model of the nature of town government. While recognising the diversity of types of corporations and the varying character of their regimes, the Webbs' general conclusion was that eighteenth-century municipal corporations lacked sufficient material resources and suffered from institutional obsolescence. Thus, unable to contend with the commercial and demographic expansion of the eighteenth-century town, the ancient corporations grew increasingly remote from their communities. In these circumstances corrupt, narrow oligarchies came to dominate most towns; and where the corporations had once been constructive social institutions they had become, with only a few exceptions, parasitic obstructions to progress.

The Webbs' analysis was very much a structural and constitutionally oriented one. They believed that the fault of the eighteenth-century corporation was its foundation on principles which beget institutional arrangements for the distribution of

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<sup>5</sup> P. Borsay, "Introduction" in P. Borsay ed. *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688 - 1820* (Harlow, Essex, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act*, vol. ii: *The Manor and the Borough* (London, 1908; reprinted 1963); S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act*, vol. iv: *Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes* (London, 1922; reprinted 1963), especially pp. 350-486.



power and the duties of government that were inappropriate for the social and economic conditions of its time. In the Webbs' view, the general constitutional structure of the municipal corporation reflected its pre-modern origins as the instrument of a "community of producers." The corporation was seen as the means by which common economic interests were managed and the essential infrastructure and regulation of trade was provided for the benefit of all. But, it was claimed that by the eighteenth century the institutional arrangements of such a system had become variously inadequate or unnecessary to the tasks of government in the expanding capitalist economies of most provincial towns. The obligation to serve in local office, the co-option of urban elites holding the senior offices of the corporation, the restriction of corporation membership to a small proportion of the inhabitants in most towns, and the freehold tenure which attached to profitable offices, were all seen by the Webbs as the roots of corruption. Obligatory service was, by the eighteenth century, unworkable in most towns: there were more people to serve in office than were needed but, in practice, profitable offices were lionised by powerful men while burdensome posts were accepted reluctantly and executed poorly. Important offices, which brought profits to their holders, were held as "virtual freeholds" prompting corruption and resentment. As urban populations grew the proportion of inhabitants enfranchised diminished, so that in some towns narrow elites held absolute political power. In other towns with larger corporation memberships, elections became occasions for the corrupting dispensation of patronage to the cost of the corporation's finances and quality of town governance. The co-option of corporate elites perpetuated stale regimes and made them unaccountable to those whom they governed. While the Webbs recognised that co-option allowed some regimes under the domination of virtuous men to recruit others of similar character, the trend was for men inclined to abuse office to seek like-minded confederates.

For the Webbs, the decline of the municipal corporation was only one, albeit pre-eminently important, aspect of town governance in the eighteenth century. Various other features, most significantly the rise of statutory bodies which exercised public authority in a variety of areas, reflected the inclination of local elites to reform the

practices of town government. In the Webbs' view, eighteenth-century town government was a decayed relic outmoded by socio-economic change. Yet it also increasingly displayed inchoate elements of the modern, bureaucratic regimes required by nineteenth-century capitalism. The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were seen as a period in which the principles of local government were in flux. The ancient institutions of the "community of producers" were seen to be giving way to notions of state institutions in the service of a wider public interest wherein townsmen in general became the consumers of government services. Still, the eighteenth-century corporation did not yet resemble a modern state institution characterised by a professional bureaucracy, with a separation of political and administrative office, functioning as an agency for the provision of services to the community. The plurality of institutions possessing distinct jurisdictions brought forth by this process was described by the Webbs as "the anarchy of local autonomy".<sup>7</sup>

The Webbs' assessment of the corporation has exerted a powerful influence over the historiography of the eighteenth century. Its reiteration in various specialist and general studies has made it something of an orthodox view.<sup>8</sup> Still, the Webbs' model has not gone unchallenged. Several doctoral dissertations have argued that various towns were important counter-examples to the Webbs' model.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, recent general studies have suggested that the Webbs' model is in need of qualification. Penelope Corfield has observed that the variety of corporation types and the substantive changes in the practice of governance beneath a veneer of constitutional stability meant

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>8</sup> F. H. Spencer, *Municipal Origins: An Account of English Private Bill Legislation Relating to Local Government, 1740-1835* (London, 1911); S.J. Watson, *Oxford History of England*, vol. 12, *The Reign of George III, 1760-1815* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 48-55; R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 140-42; J. Walvin, *English Urban Life 1776-1851* (London, 1984), pp. 68-69; B. Keith-Lucas, *The Unreformed Local Government System* (London, 1980); R.W. Greaves, *The Corporation of Leicester, 1689-1836* (Oxford, 1939); D. Underdown, *Fire From Heaven. Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992), pp. 263-64.

<sup>9</sup> For a critique of the Webbs on central-local government relations see J. Innes, "Parliament and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century Social Policy" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., (40), 64-8; important dissertations include: "E.J. Dawson, "Finance and the Unreformed Borough: A Critical Appraisal of Corporate Finance, 1660-1835, with Special Reference to the Boroughs of Nottingham, York and Boston" (University of Hull, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1978); John M. Triffitt, "Politics and the Urban Community: Parliamentary Boroughs in the South West of England" (Univ. of Oxford, unpublished D. Phil. thesis, 1985).

that the character of town regimes varied considerably in terms of the levels of their corruption and the effectiveness of their administration.<sup>10</sup> Peter Clark has suggested that the improving bureaucracy of the corporations and the rise of statutory bodies were indicative that town government was more effective than might at first seem to be the case, and that over the course of the century it substantially improved.<sup>11</sup> Paul Langford, while noting the significant contemporary criticism of the eighteenth-century municipal corporation, admits that it is uncertain that such reputations had been earned by every corporation.<sup>12</sup> David Eastwood has similarly held that town government was effective and, indeed, improved over the course of the eighteenth century as statutory bodies undertook much of the business of urban improvement.<sup>13</sup> Corporations are usefully located within an extensive typography of various forms of urban government in Rosemary Sweet's survey of government, society, and culture in provincial towns. Moreover, she asserts that local issues and interests were vital determinates of town politics.<sup>14</sup> While these general studies suggest that some corporations were not as ossified and ineffective as the Webbs maintain, they also imply the need for detailed work which takes cognisance of corporations' particular constitutional arrangements together with their social and economic circumstances. Such studies can more fully reveal the character of town governance and the interplay of various factors affecting its development during the eighteenth century.

Despite the doubts which more recent research casts on the Webbs' general account of the eighteenth-century corporation, their study remains an impressive and useful work. The hostile characterisation of the corporation found in *The History of English Local Government* owes much to the particular sources and period most closely studied by the Webbs. Although the *History of English Local Government* purports to be a study of the period 1689 to 1835, much of its evidence and the weight of its

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<sup>10</sup> P. J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700 - 1800* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 146-9, 154-6.

<sup>11</sup> P. Clark, "Introduction" in P. Clark (ed.), *The Transformation of the English Provincial Towns, 1600-1800* (London, 1984), pp. 35-41.

<sup>12</sup> P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689 - 1798*, (Oxford, 1991), pp. 218-20.

<sup>13</sup> D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700-1879* (London, 1997), pp. 80-3.

<sup>14</sup> R. Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999).

analysis falls on the last few decades of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century up to the reforming acts of the early 1830s. This is consistent with the Webbs' aim of trying to understand how the Victorian system of local government (which they sought to reform) came into existence; but it does not make for an adequate characterisation of the local government throughout the eighteenth century. The immediate circumstances of the 1830s reforms may not have been the conditions prevailing throughout the eighteenth century. Certainly the Webbs' general view does not apply in the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century towns studied by David Underdown, Perry Gauci and John Triffitt.<sup>15</sup>

The Webbs' emphasis on the early nineteenth century is understandable not least because it was the period of the first great systematic study of the municipal corporations: the Report of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations, which was begun in 1833 and published in 1835.<sup>16</sup> Although critical of many aspects of the Municipal Commissioners' Report and cognisant of its partisan political bias, the Webbs accepted much of the picture painted by the commissioners. Moreover, the last decades of the eighteenth century and the years 1800-35 are rich in other types of accessible sources such as newspapers and pamphlet literature which expounded the arguments of both radicals and supporters of the establishment.<sup>17</sup> Such polemical material can do as much to obscure as illuminate the real character and workings of the municipal corporations in earlier eras. It seems likely that the factors which precipitated reform would be most evident in the immediate period prior to its achievement; yet it is valid to ask whether that period was characteristic of the entire eighteenth century. If the Webbs' portrait of decayed, dysfunctional corporations was not representative of the entire century, then the argument that the corporations owed their decay to the obsolescence of their ancient principles and institutions in the face of changing social

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<sup>15</sup> D. Underdown *Fire From Heaven*; Perry Gauci, *Yarmouth*; Triffitt, "Parliamentary Boroughs".

<sup>16</sup> *Parliamentary Papers, Reports from Commissioners*: vol. xxvi, 1835. *First Report Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales*.

<sup>17</sup> For examples see T. Oldfield, *An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal of the Boroughs of Great Britain*, 3 vols, (London, 1792), pp. 103-22; idem., *The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland*, 6 vols., (London, 1816), vol. 1, p.vii; Ereunetes, "Reflections on the Constitution of Incorporated Boroughs....", *Gentleman's Magazine*, 57 (London, 1787), pp. 9-10, 105-7, 953-4.

and economic circumstances cannot be sustained. As the Webbs' themselves acknowledged, the town as a community of producers and the corporation as their instrument for the regulation of trade and management of commonly held assets, had long passed by 1689. Historians are therefore faced with the question of what was the character of corporation governance and politics over the course of the eighteenth century? Prior to that question is the problem of identifying the factors and processes which determined that character.

## **2. Themes and Arguments**

The study of a single corporation provides a useful approach to these matters because it shows how the specific institutional forms and modes of practice of a corporation conditioned its impact on the community's social and political relations, and how those relations, in turn, influenced the character of the corporation. Such a study facilitates the identification of the sorts of institutional features and other particular circumstances which bore on the effectiveness and durability of a corporate regime. Such a study also makes it possible to understand the ways in which the character of the corporation developed over the course of the eighteenth century. While some notice will be taken of studies of other towns, the Corporation of Ipswich has been the subject of the new research undertaken for this thesis. Although the focus on a particular corporation inherently limits the possibilities for generalisation about all eighteenth-century municipal corporations, it does permit a closer, more detailed study of the social, cultural, economic, and political dynamics of a particular set of institutional arrangements within a given community. While remaining mindful of the ways in which particular institutional arrangements and specific social circumstances produced the unique politics and government of a given community, this case study can usefully identify and assess the potential importance of the variables which characterised the government of other towns in the eighteenth century.

In addition to the quality of its records, there are a number of reasons why Ipswich is a worthwhile subject for a study of this type. The Corporation's constitution embodies many features which interestingly engage important themes and issues in the historiography of the eighteenth-century state and especially of town government. Membership in the Corporation and the right to vote in its elections were possessed by approximately 500 in the 1720s and about 800 men by the 1790s. Thus, while there were important formal restrictions on membership, it was held by a relatively large number of people.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, all of the senior offices of the Corporation were directly elected by the freemen at large. The Corporation therefore affords an opportunity to examine the ways through which politics and the process of governance were mutually conditioned in a community where there was political participation by a comparatively wide spectrum of the population. Furthermore, during the eighteenth century the Corporation of Ipswich was not subject to pressures resulting from sudden, spectacular economic growth or social change. While there was some adjustment to the nature of the local economy, it did not experience anything like the upheaval endured by towns in other parts of the country after the middle of the century. The town's population grew at a rate which was little more than half of that for England as whole. Thus, the Corporation developed in social and economic conditions of comparative stability. In these circumstances historians might expect to find diverse forces driving changes in the politics and the practice of government, and it may be easier to assess the effects of a specific set of institutional arrangements in shaping the character of governance.

Ipswich also makes for an interesting study of this type because it was one of the towns featured in the Webbs' work. Thus, as this thesis seeks to reassess the Webbs' general model of the eighteenth-century municipal corporation, it can do so by

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<sup>18</sup> Phillips has found that in the eighteenth century there were 33 towns with electorates of 1,000 or more voters, while 72 towns had between 200-999 voters, and 98 towns had electorates of less than 200. Ipswich, then, was amongst the upper half of "the intermediate" sized electorates. Along side the electorates of Westminster or Norwich, respectively about 12,000 and 2,500 voters, Ipswich was small; but when compared to Bath, with 33 electors, or Leeds, 36, it is clear that dynamics of Ipswich politics would be very different from that of some towns with more than twice its population. J. A. Phillips, *Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England: Plumpers, Splitters, and Straights* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 60, 69, 323-4; Corfield, *Impact*, p. 151.

considering one of their more detailed studies.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, beyond being purely a case study, this thesis will recast the history of eighteenth-century Ipswich. Other than the Webbs, few historians have investigated eighteenth-century Ipswich and its Corporation. More recent popular histories of Ipswich have devoted only brief sections to the government of the town in the eighteenth century, and these have essentially echoed the judgements of the Webbs and the 1835 parliamentary commissioners' investigation of municipal corporations.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, there are two published nineteenth-century histories and several important manuscripts which consist of notes, documents and clippings which were collected for works that were never finished. The most important of these was by William Batley who, between the 1780s and 1810s intermittently served as town clerk and bailiff.<sup>21</sup> As useful as these early histories and manuscript collections are to the researcher, none of them have explicitly taken-up the Corporation and, of course, they do not engage important themes in the current historiography of the eighteenth century.

This study embraces the years 1720 to 1795, although some reference is occasionally made to the decades immediately adjacent to this period. These dates have been selected partly because of the availability of surviving records, but primarily because this span constitutes a discrete period in the history of the town, and because it broadly corresponds to important moments in the conventional periodisation of the eighteenth century. Prior to 1720 the politics of Ipswich were charged by what J.H. Plumb has called "the rage of party".<sup>22</sup> As Chapter Six will show, the highly divisive politics of 1700-20 rapidly ebbed. From the middle 1790s radicalism and the effects of the long wars with revolutionary France imposed new conditions on the local

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<sup>19</sup> Webb, *Manor and the Borough*, vol.ii, pp. 558-68.

<sup>20</sup> L.J. Redstone, *Ipswich Through the Ages* (Ipswich, 1948); R.L. Cross, *Ipswich Markets and Fairs* (Ipswich, 1965); R.L. Cross, *Justice at Ipswich* (Ipswich, 1968); P. Bishop, *The History of Ipswich. 1500 Years of Triumph and Disaster* (London, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History and Description of the Town and Borough of Ipswich, including the Villages and County Seats in its Vicinity...* (Ipswich, 1830); J. Wodderspoon, *Memorials of the Ancient Town and Ipswich, in the County of Suffolk* (Ipswich, 1850); BL Add. MS 25334, f. 308: William Batley, "Collections for the History of Ipswich"; also see SRO/I, qS IPS 352, J. Glyde, "Materials for a Municipal History of Ipswich" (unpublished collection of cuttings and manuscripts).

<sup>22</sup> J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675-1725* (London, 1967).

governance of the municipal corporations. This is not to suggest that in the seventy-five years from 1720 the politics and governance of Ipswich were static. On the contrary, it will be shown that there was substantial change in the character of the Corporation, its activities and the manner in which it handled its affairs. Indeed, it will be argued that the image of the gently decaying municipal corporation snugly settling into "old corruption" is simply not sustainable.<sup>23</sup> Further, the years 1720 and 1795 provide convenient boundaries for this study because the intervening period is not one in which wider national issues had a sustained and transforming effect on the character of Corporation governance and politics. Moreover, these dates roughly demark important events in the history of the Corporation of Ipswich. In 1722, after two decades at the centre of the town's turbulent politics, the controversial faction leader Cooper Gravenor was finally driven from power. This event initiated a re-structuring of the governing elite and a long period of relative electoral peace. Seventy years later, a statute was obtained in 1793 for the establishment of a paving and improvement commission. The advent of this body marked the beginning of the dilution of the Corporation's authority. Indeed, the loss of the papers of the improvement commission impose a considerable obstacle to understanding the government and politics of Ipswich after 1795.

Part One of this thesis consists of three chapters which examine various aspects of the institutional structure of the Corporation. It shows how governance was formally conducted through the courts and offices of the Corporation. Chapters Two and Three consider the formal structure of government under the Corporation, including the constitutional basis of the authority of its courts and officers together with the distribution of power and official duties amongst them. Here it is argued that the corporation's constitution, derived variously from royal charters, prescription, common and statute law, was sufficiently flexible both to enable the corporation to raise the funds it needed and to provide it with sufficient legal authority for any of the business its leaders chose. Thus, conventional notions of limitations on corporation power are, in

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<sup>23</sup> For the concept of "old corruption", primarily in the central government, see: W. D. Rubinstein, "The End of the Old Corruption in England" *Past and Present*, 101 (1983), pp. 55-86; P. Harling, "Rethinking Old Corruption" *Past and Present* 147 (1995), pp. 27-58.



the case of Ipswich at least, challenged. It is significant that it was not until 1793 that an improvement commission was established, and its foundation was attributable to the turbulent politics of that decade rather than the legal or financial insufficiency of the Corporation. Chapter Three presents the structure of officeholding and the distribution of power amongst the senior corporation officers. It will be seen that these arrangements facilitated political stability amongst a relatively cohesive ruling elite of forty or fewer men. However, as the character of town politics changed, the charter-mandated distribution of power and authority inclined the Corporation to fierce factional contention for office.

The social and economic identities of the corporation's officeholders are the subject of Chapter Four. Here it is shown that the upper strata of the socio-economic elite of the community seldom held the senior offices of the Corporation. Instead, those posts were dominated by a group of men who constituted a distinct governing elite. The social character of this group was important in terms of the interests which animated their pursuit of office and the management of the Corporation's affairs. Changes in the wealth and occupational structure of this governing elite are noted, and the implications of this are considered in terms of the changing character of politics and government.

Having considered the institutional structure of the Corporation and the socio-economic identities of its personnel, Part Two of the thesis moves on to consider the activities of the corporation as an instrument of government and a site for political interaction. Chapter Five examines the resources, methods and activities of the Corporation in three important areas: the collection and management of corporation revenue; the regulation of the local economy; and the provision of poor relief. In the course of exploring these matters it will be shown that the Corporation was an active institution throughout the eighteenth century and possessed considerable resources to deal with these problems. Nevertheless, in the later decades of the eighteenth century the Corporation's activity in each of these areas changed in ways which reflected the developing patterns of politics in the town.

Chapter Six explores the patterns of politics emphasising different social groups' particular forms of engagement in the politics of the Corporation. Rather than providing a narrative account of the course of Ipswich politics in the eighteenth century, the Chapter considers the character of four distinct periods of the Corporation's political history between 1720 and 1795. For each period changes in the nature of the elite and the engagement of the wider population can be seen. It is argued that after three decades of cohesive elite domination, wider popular participation and contention amongst the elite (which took the form of a factional conflict between the corporation's two deliberative bodies) established a pattern of contentious politics by the 1780s which, given the constitutional structure of the corporation, was very destabilising. Thus, although the Corporation continued to function effectively in most spheres, by the later decades of the eighteenth century it began to assume the character ascribed to it by the 1835 report of the royal commissioners on municipal corporations who described it as "an ill-regulated republic".<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Chapter Seven considers the forms and changing patterns of various social groups' participation in the processes of politics and government. The social, cultural and institutional dimensions of political interaction and the assertion of public authority are considered in order to understand the Corporation's changing place within the community. It will be seen that as the forms of political participation diversified and the institutional sites of public authority increased, the system of governance under the Corporation was undermined. The concluding chapter of the thesis will consider the extent to which the findings for Ipswich can be generalised with respect to urban governance in eighteenth-century England.

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<sup>24</sup> *RCMC*, p. 2340.

### 3. Sources and Research Methods

This thesis is based on an extensive study of the records generated over the course of the eighteenth century by the courts and officers of the municipal corporation of Ipswich. Much of the character of the Corporation's government can be gleaned from the minute books of its two deliberative bodies: the Great Court and the Assembly. As is characteristic of similar types of common council or aldermanic records in other towns, the Great Court Book and the Assembly Book are more in the manner of entry books than modern minute books.<sup>25</sup> Thus, although it is not normally possible to trace the course of the deliberations for every meeting of these two bodies, much insight can be gained into their business and practices from entries relating to meeting attendance, matters considered, and orders issued. Occasionally, reports of sub-committees, correspondence and addresses or speeches are also included. The Great Court was the forum for the election of all the Corporation's senior officers and many other officials; and no official action was legally defensible without its sanction. Accordingly, its papers are amongst the most important surviving evidence of the character of governance in eighteenth-century Ipswich.

The criminal jurisdiction and administrative authority of the borough sessions produced records of a different nature yet no less significant than those of the Great Court. Throughout the period studied, the sessions typically met twice per year. Each of these meetings produced a series of entries in the Sessions Book and a collection of documents known as the Sessions Roll. For more than twenty years historians have made excellent use of these types of records in their studies of crime and the administration of the criminal law.<sup>26</sup> In this study these records have been used to

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<sup>25</sup> M. Bateson, (ed.), *Records of the Borough of Leicester, 1103-1835*, 5 vols. (1899); M.G. Hobson, (ed.), *Oxford Council Acts, 1752-1801*, Oxford Hist. Soc., new series, vol. 10 and vol. 15, (Oxford, 1954, 1962); *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, vols. 6 and 7, (Nottingham, 1914, 1948); also see: E.M. Halcrow, "Borough Records: Common Council Minutes" in *Amateur Historian*, 2 (1954-6).

<sup>26</sup> Amongst the important published works exhibiting this use of sessions records are: Hay, Linebaugh, and Thompson, *Albion's Fatal Tree*; J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Crime in England, 1550-1800* (Princeton, 1977); King, "Decision-Makers and Decision-Making"; J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-*

examine the place of the Sessions and the justices of the peace in the wider system of the town's governance. The types and volumes of business dealt with by the justices have also been considered in order to better understand changes in the character of government. For historians, an important but frustrating trend in the activities of the justices of the peace was their increasing authority out of the borough sessions. JPs, acting either alone or with one or two others in petty sessions, rarely kept records which have survived. As result much evidence of the administrative and judicial business of local government has been lost.<sup>27</sup> Although no petty sessions notebooks or other records survive for eighteenth-century Ipswich, there is the note book of Devereaux Edgar, a Suffolk County justice who lived in Ipswich. Edgar exercised little authority in Ipswich, but he did have dealings with the Corporation magistrates which are interestingly revealed in his notes.<sup>28</sup>

Other Corporation bodies also produced sets of records which reflect changes in the town's public institutions. The business of the Headboroughs' Court or Court Leet, which assessed fines and issued orders in relation to a wide range of nuisances, can be studied through two documents: the Verdict Book in which the orders and fines of the court were recorded principally for the years 1715 to 1765; and the Dirt Books which consist of similar types of entries, although at more frequent intervals. The Petty Court, principally a court for debt settlement, also produced a set of records in the form of an entry book. These records reveal not only the types and volumes of business which the Corporation's various subsidiary bodies handled, they also help in identifying officeholders and give some indication of their career patterns.<sup>29</sup>

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1800 (Oxford, 1986); and R.B. Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1725* (Cambridge, 1991). A useful guide to these records is: F.G. Emmison, *County Records: Quarter Sessions, Petty Sessions, Clerk of the Peace and Lieutenancy Records* (London, 1961).

<sup>27</sup> For an important surviving set of petty session records is: R. Paley, ed., *Justice in Hackney: The Justicing Notebook of Henry Norris and the Hackney Petty Sessions Book* (London, 1991). The character of the petty sessions are usefully discussed in: C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900* (London, 1987), pp. 18-19; J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (London, 1984), pp. 25, 89-90.

<sup>28</sup> SRO/I, HA247/5/4, The Entry Book of Devereux Edgar, J.P., 1700-1716; and SRO/I, q S 347.9, a partial transcription by S.R. Schofield.

<sup>29</sup> SRO/I, C7/2/9, Headboroughs' Verdict Book; SRO/I, C7/2/3&4, Headboroughs' Dirt Books, "A" and "B"; SRO/I, C5/13/19-22, Petty Court Book.

Several of the Corporation's officers and servants kept their own records. The treasurers, chamberlains and clavingers, all having some responsibility for a particular element of the Corporation's finances, kept accounts for each year in which they served. These records were, in theory at least, to be preserved by the clavingers with the rest of the corporate papers.<sup>30</sup> The chamberlains' and treasurers' accounts survive for much of the period of this study and have been used to assess the financial resources of the Corporation and to get some sense of its spending priorities. The records for some lesser officers have also survived. Thus, the account book of a coal meter in years 1718 to 1719 give us some insight into the activities of that office.<sup>31</sup> Career patterns and patronage connections, in the form of master and servant relationships, can be traced for much of the period of this study through lists of freemen.<sup>32</sup>

A variety of other irregularly produced Corporation papers have also been of use in trying to understand the governance and politics of the town. Depositions and recognisance documents in the Sessions Rolls have been used to understand the relative volumes of activity of the Corporation's justices. Various legal briefs and letters from the Corporation's legal counsel, as well as various other occasional notes, letters and accounts have provided insights into both the routine operation of the Corporation and the extraordinary events in its history.

In this thesis the Sessions Books, Great Court Book, and various officers' accounts have been subject to comparative quantitative study in order to assess the relative significance of various kinds of Corporation activity and for some indication of changes in patterns of Corporation spending, attendance at meetings and officeholding.

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<sup>30</sup> SRO/I, C9/11/137-202, Ipswich Chamberlains' Accounts, SRO/I, C9/20/117-121, Ipswich Treasurers' Accounts, SRO/I, C9/21/62, Ipswich Treasurers' Vouchers. For a good account of corporation financial officers and their records see: E.J. Dawson, "Finance", and E. M. Halcrow, "Borough Records: Chamberlain's or Treasurer's Accounts" both in *Amateur Historian* ii (1954-56), pp. 293-6. The published records of the other corporations often contain useful introductions and make for good comparison, see: "The Accounts of the Chamberlains of the City of Bath" in *Somerset Record Society*, XXXVIII, (1923), and *The Chamberlain's Accounts, 1688-1835, Records of the Borough of Leicester*, vi, (1967). For early records at Ipswich see: J. Webb, ed., *The Town Finances of Elizabethan Ipswich. Select Treasurers' and Chamberlains' Accounts*, Suffolk Records Society, XXXVIII, (1996).

<sup>31</sup> SRO/I, C1/2/24, Coal Meter's Book.

<sup>32</sup> SRO/I, C2/11, Alphabetical list of Freemen admitted 1722-1822; SRO/I, C2/12, Freemen's Admission Book, 1764-1772.

The extent of these records has made sampling necessary. In most cases, three main periods have been used to ensure the comparability of different types of data. These samples were made at regular intervals at the beginning, middle and end of the period of this study: 1721-1725, 1755-1759, and 1791-1795. In some instances the poor condition or absence of the necessary records has necessitated the use of different periods or samples of less than five years and, occasionally, a period may be missing a particular year from a continuous sequence. In other cases, meaningful samples have required longer periods. Caveats on the difficulties of this sort of sampling are given in the footnotes of the chapters where such evidence is presented.

In addition to the Corporation's records, those of Ipswich's twelve parishes have also been consulted. Vestry minute books, overseers' accounts and rate books have been used to explore the relationship between the Corporation's officers and the parish authorities. The parish rate books have been of further value in establishing a rough indication of the relative wealth of the Corporation and parish officers. Rate books for the years 1755 to 1760 were used to establish the rateable value of the property of every rate payer in the town.<sup>33</sup> The rate assessments of various Corporation and parish officers were then compared to a scale of all ratepayers. The absence of adequate data for the earlier sample period of 1721-25, and the very large quantity of data which would have required processing for the sample years 1791-1795, has prohibited a similar analysis for those periods. Nonetheless, the availability of a rate scale and the analysis of officeholders by this measure of wealth does provide some interesting insights which are presented in Chapter Four.

Beyond the sources generated by the Corporation and parishes, this thesis has made use of a range of printed manuscript material. While surviving correspondence of Corporation officers at Ipswich is rare, the few remaining letters and papers provide

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<sup>33</sup> Surviving parish rate books and land tax records are held at the Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich. For the years 1755-60 the following records were used: FB98/G12/7-9, St. Clement's; FB101/G9/2, St. Peter's; FB95/E1/1, St. Matthew's; FB107/G2/1, St. Stephen's; FB91/F1/1-2,6, St. Mary, Tower; FB104/G1/2, St. Mary, Elms; FB106/G1/2, St. Lawrence; FB92/G1/2, St. Mary, Stoke; FB93/94/4, St. Margaret's; FB96/E2/4, St. Helen's; C10/1/73, St. Nicholas; C10/1/73, St. Mary Key. Also see below p.112, n. 10.

fascinating insights into the processes of politics and governance. Something of the social identities and economic interests of the town's more prominent leaders have been revealed in their wills and other personal documents. A wider picture of the affairs of the Corporation emerges from various publications. The weekly newspaper, the *Ipswich Journal* was published throughout the period of this study, however, its editors normally assumed a neutral posture in the town's affairs, and the paper's political commentary was accordingly quite sparse.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, occasional editorial comments, letters and advertisements have been important in augmenting the picture which emerges from the Corporation documents. A substantial collection of political handbills, notices and pamphlets have also been used to shed light on the character of politics in eighteenth-century Ipswich.<sup>35</sup> Legal treatises and law reports have been helpful in several ways: firstly, they have helped to sketch-out the legal framework within which the Corporation and its officers operated; secondly, reports of particular cases have shed light on the course of political conflicts in the town; and finally, the reflections of law writers have helped to suggest something of the ethos of governance under the corporate regimes. Although uncommon, some published writings critical of the general principle of the municipal corporation have also been considered in relation to its particular manifestation at Ipswich.<sup>36</sup> Finally, some central government records, principally Treasury and State papers, as well as the correspondence of important government figures, have been used to help illuminate various aspects of local politics and government, including the extent and importance of the connections of Ipswich's leaders.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 214-7; G.A. Cranfield, *The Development of the English Provincial Newspaper, 1700-1760*, (Cambridge, 1962), p. 81; R.M. Wiles, *Freshest Advices: Early Provincial Newspapers in England* (Columbus, 1965), p. 262 n.4; S.F. Watson, "Some Materials for a History of Printing and Publishing in Ipswich", *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History*, 24 (1949), pp. 182-227.

<sup>35</sup> SRO/I, fS 324, A Collection of Printed Political Squibs and Papers Relating the County of Suffolk and the Borough of Ipswich from 1736 to 1840. (Collected by Thomas Baldock Ross).

<sup>36</sup> See below pp. 149-250.

<sup>37</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Treasury Books*, vols. 28, 30, (1716); Cambridge University Library, Cholmondeley (Houghton) Mss.; BL Add. MS 32735, Newcastle Mss., Hardwicke to Newcastle, 24 April 1754, ff. 178-9.

#### 4. Ipswich in the Eighteenth Century

The upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century left two legacies which threatened difficulties for the eighteenth-century Corporation: the religious passions which had inflamed local politics and economic decline. Ipswich was famous for its active puritans in the seventeenth century, but a latitudinarian Bishop of Norwich following the Restoration, and perhaps fatigue over zealously fought religious divisions, meant that conflicts between dissenters and churchmen were not particularly pronounced in eighteenth-century Ipswich.<sup>38</sup> In the absence of complete membership lists, it is difficult to establish accurately the impact of dissenting congregations on town politics and governance. It is thought that in the 1680s there were about 300 Congregationalists in the town, but this community split in 1686. The larger part of it made up the Presbyterian congregation, which built a chapel in Friar Street in 1700. By the end of the eighteenth century this congregation had become Unitarian. After 1686, the Independent congregation flourished. Its membership rose to about 200 when they opened a substantial new chapel in Tacket Street. The Quakers also participated in the religious building boom of the early eighteenth century with the erection of their small meeting house on College Street near the quay in 1700. Although not numerous - there were only about 100 regular attendees of the meeting house in 1851 -- some Quakers were very influential. The Alexander family established the first enduring bank, and Robert Ransome established the first modern industrial business with the establishment of his agricultural implements foundry in 1789. Other nonconforming sects were rather late arrivals to Ipswich. A Baptist meeting house was founded in 1773, although it was a branch of an older congregation which had met in the nearby village of Woolverstone. The first Methodist mission was established in 1808.<sup>39</sup>

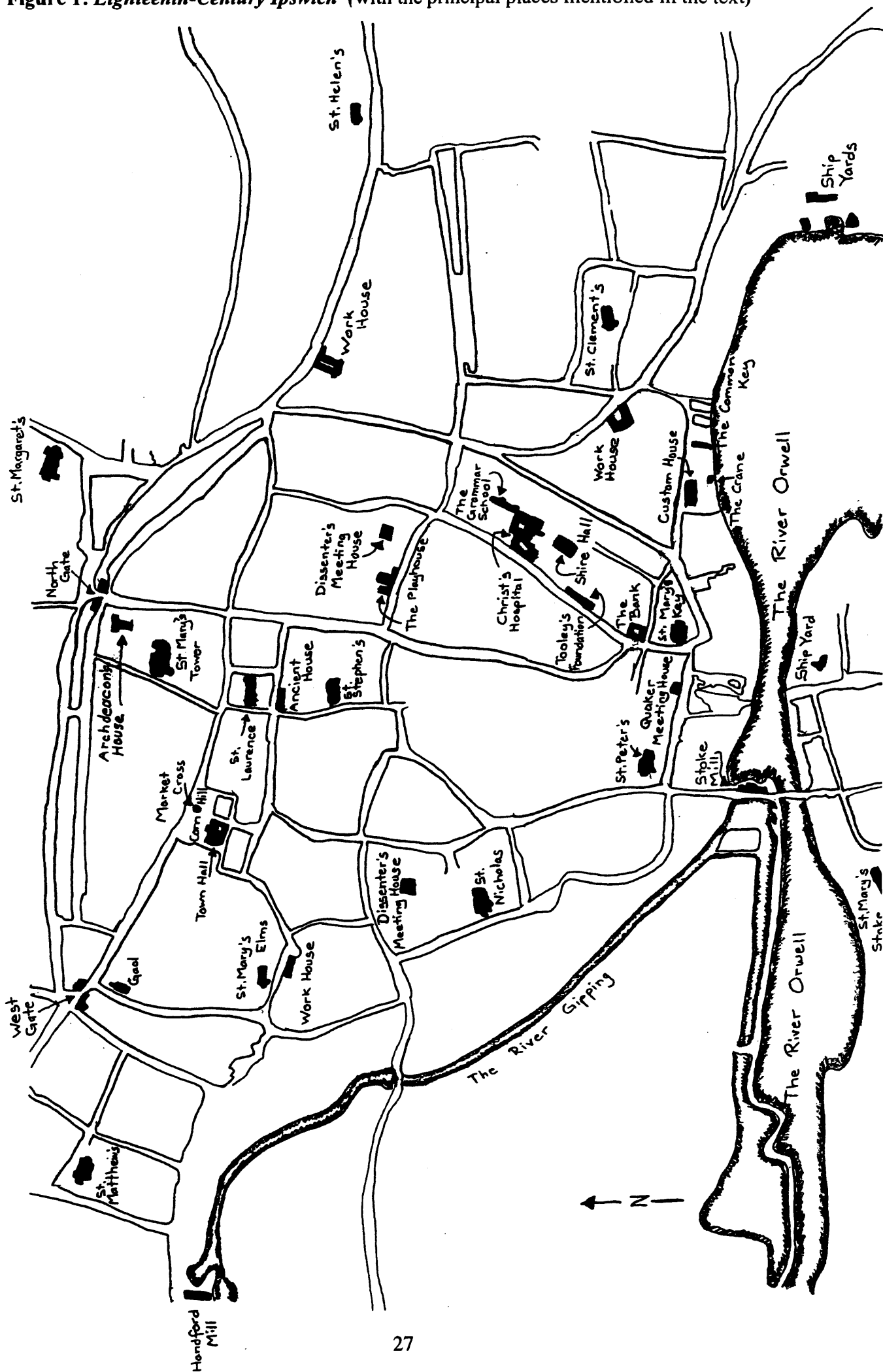
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<sup>38</sup> *VCH, Suffolk*, vol. ii, pp. 47. Also see below pp. 242-3. 254-6.

<sup>39</sup> T.C.B Timmins, *Suffolk Returns from the Census of Religious Worship, 1851*, *Suffolk Records Society*, vol. 39 (1996-7), (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 107; T.J. Hosken, *History of Congregationalism and Memorials of the Church of Our Order in Suffolk* (Ipswich, 1920), pp. 91-9; G. Sydenham, "Glimpses of Congregational Church Life in Suffolk During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" in *Suffolk Review* 3 (1968), pp. 207-12; Redstone, *Ipswich*, pp. 93-6; Bishop, ...*Ipswich*, pp. 104-10.



Figure 1: *Eighteenth-Century Ipswich* (with the principal places mentioned in the text)



Joseph Pennington's Map of Ipswich, 1778 (detail)



It is difficult to assess the social and political impact of these nonconforming communities. The strength of the dissenting congregations fluctuated. The Independents meeting at the Tacket Street chapel, for example, saw their membership jump from 47 in 1686 to around 200 in 1718; but it was down to 125 in 1725, and as low as 53 in 1754.<sup>40</sup> The 1851 census of religious worship suggests that perhaps about only about two-thirds of those attending religious services did so with the Church of England. But this census was taken sixty years after the period of this study, in which time the “new dissent” had emerged. As argued below, while the dissenters’ presence within the community was noted in political rhetoric throughout the eighteenth century, the fact of religious dissent provided no real issues of substance in town politics, nor was it a consistently reliable indicator of factional adherence.<sup>41</sup>

Of much greater significance to the evolution of politics and government under eighteenth-century Ipswich’s corporate regime was the development of other aspects of the community’s social, economic, and cultural conditions. Ipswich does not readily fit into any one of the categories by which urban historians commonly distinguish eighteenth-century towns.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, because of the particular circumstances of Suffolk and the changing nature of Ipswich’s economy, the town did not exclusively embody any one of these types, rather it displayed some of the characteristics of a county town, a port town, and something of a marketing and manufacturing centre. Ipswich was one of the earliest, and certainly most populous, chartered boroughs in Suffolk. Though often described as the county town, in some measure Ipswich shared this role with Bury St. Edmunds. In the eighteenth century, the assize sessions were normally held at Bury even though the county gaol was at Ipswich. Ipswich’s leaders sought to have the assize moved to their town for at least one of the twice yearly meetings, but they were incapable of overcoming the powerful Bury lobby which enjoyed the support of the

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<sup>40</sup> Hosken, *Congregationalism*, p. 99; Bishop, ...*Ipswich*, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> See below pp. 242-4.

<sup>42</sup> Corfield, *Impact*, passim, esp. pp. 15-1; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 3-10.

Grafton and Bristol families. It would take a smallpox epidemic at Bury to force the assize to Ipswich in 1740 -- and then only temporarily.<sup>43</sup> Although county polls and some meetings of the county quarter sessions were held at Ipswich, much county business was transacted at Bury, in part because the landed gentry found that town's central location more convenient than Ipswich, which lay in the south-east corner of Suffolk. Some of the justices' divisional petty sessions were, however, held at Ipswich. Moreover, with about nine percent of the county's electorate, and as the site of polls for the Suffolk MPs, Ipswich remained important in county affairs.<sup>44</sup>

The changing structure and fortunes of eighteenth-century Ipswich's economy meant that the town was not clearly distinguished as a port town, manufacturing centre, service centre, or resort of the gentry; yet elements of all these activities contributed to the town's economy. Located nine miles from the open sea at the point where the tidal, salt-water River Orwell, becomes the fresh-water River Gipping, Ipswich had long been the entrepôt for the agricultural and cloth producing communities of Suffolk. By the early eighteenth century, however, Ipswich's historic role as a centre of production and distribution in the region's textile industry had vastly diminished. The inability of local producers to adapt to the advent of the New Draperies and the disruption of northern European commerce by war in the seventeenth century had undermined Ipswich's role as an overseas trade port. Moreover, after the Restoration, Ipswich captains' share of the lucrative Newcastle-London coal trade was increasingly being lost to ships from Whitby, Sunderland and Great Yarmouth.<sup>45</sup>

Travellers to Ipswich in the early eighteenth century provided portraits of a town in decay. In 1698 Celia Fiennes believed that there were "... but 3 or 4 good houses in the town, the rest is much like the Colchester buildings but it seems more shatter'd, and

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<sup>43</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 71-2; Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, pp. 7-10; SRO/I, HD 490/1, Undated petition of the High Sheriff and Grand Jury of the County of Suffolk in a collection of ms. documents in a book entitled "Private and Proof Portraits".

<sup>44</sup> Suffolk Poll for the Knights of the Shire (Ipswich, 1790).

<sup>45</sup> M. Reed, "Economic Structure and Change in Seventeenth-century Ipswich" in P. Clark (ed.), *County Towns in Pre-industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 102, 104, 107; D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain, 1724-26*, P. Rogers, (ed.), (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 66-67; *VCH Suffolk*, vol. 2, pp. 271-2, 253, 264-6.

indeed the town looks a little disregarded...". In 1711, noting the effects of the silting-up of the Orwell and decline of trade, Sir James Thornhill grimly recalled an observation made to Charles II that "Ipswich had a river without water, streets without names, and a town without people." In addition to the loss of the coal hauling trade and some of the shipbuilding it supported, Defoe, in the 1720s ascribed the Ipswich's economic decline, like that of other smaller ports, to the growth of London which "sucks the vitals of trade in this Island to itself."<sup>46</sup> But Defoe's ultimate assessment was more balanced. He noted that Ipswich's shipbuilding still remained important and the town was well poised to exploit the Greenland fishery. Defoe also perceived Ipswich's potential as an attractive place for the gentry to settle: it was "an airy, clean, and well governed town" with "very agreeable and improving company almost of every kind"; its rents and provisions were of quality yet very cheap; and London lay within a day's coach journey.<sup>47</sup>

Defoe was a subtle observer of local economies and, writing fifteen years after Fiennes and Thornhill's visits, he may have seen the Ipswich economy at the end of a difficult period of transition as its textile and overseas trades ebbed and the town found a new role as a regional service centre and coastal trading port. The expansion of London, which Defoe held partly responsible for the decline of Ipswich's fortunes, was more likely a boon to the East Anglian port. The capital's demand for Suffolk's timber and agricultural produce supplanted broad cloth as the products which were to be processed and shipped out of Ipswich. As the rural Suffolk's cloth industry declined and the county became an important producer of the agricultural products much in demand in London and the expanding commercial and industrial centres of the North, Ipswich adapted its role as a regional entrepôt. Increases in agricultural productivity

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<sup>46</sup> C. Fiennes, *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, C. Morris (ed.), (London, 1947), p. 143; J. Thornhill, "Extracts from the Diary of Sir James Thornhill, 1711", J.S Corder, (ed.), *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute Archaeology* 13 (1907-09), p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> D. Defoe, *Great Britain*, p. 71-72; similar observations were made at the end of the eighteenth century, see the remarks of Francois de La Rochefoucauld in: Norman Scarfe, (ed. and trans.), *A Frenchman's Year in Suffolk. French Impressions of Suffolk Life in 1784*, Suffolk Records Society, vol. 30, (1988), p. 128; and, *The Universal British Directory for Trade, Commerce and Manufacture...*, (London, 1790-1798), iii, p. 424.

and strong demand for Suffolk's produce assured Ipswich a more steady, if less spectacular, period of economic expansion than it had experienced in the years 1400-1700. Cheese-making, brewing and malting were all important local activities. By the early nineteenth century the agricultural basis of the town's economy was understood by the townsmen.<sup>48</sup> It was claimed that in 1814 more than two thousand people came to the town hall to sign a petition demanding a postponement of any changes to the Corn Laws. Ipswich's early nineteenth century historian, G.R. Clarke, maintained that the civic peace in the 1740s, when other places endured bread riots, was due to the county's plenty and the prudence of its market regulators.<sup>49</sup>

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the relative significance of East Anglia's ports slipped compared with other regions when measured by tonnage of merchant shipping owned. The effects of shifting patterns of trade were compounded by the silting of the River Orwell, which restricted the access of large ships to the Ipswich quay.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, Ipswich's function as a port remained important to the town's economy throughout the eighteenth century with the tonnage of merchant shipping owned there increasing three fold between 1709 and 1792. By the end of the century Ipswich-owned tonnage exceeded that of Colchester, making Ipswich East Anglia's fourth most important base for merchant shipping.<sup>51</sup>

Shipbuilding remained an important activity in Ipswich throughout the eighteenth century. The loss of the overseas trade and coal haulage which had prompted demand for ships in the preceding centuries was supplanted by the coastal trade in

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<sup>48</sup> *VCH*, vol. 1, pp. 670-1 and vol. 2, pp.249-51. The extensive and sometimes contentious literature on agricultural productivity in this period is summarised in: J.V. Beckett, *The Agricultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1990); and M.J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 36-52. For brewing in Ipswich see: M. Jacobson, *The Cliff Brewery, 1723-1973* (Ipswich, 1971); Redstone, *Ipswich*, p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 100, 137.

<sup>50</sup> Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on the Records of the Ipswich Port Authority. Eighteenth - Twentieth Century* (London, 1984), i; Treasury Warrant, 1st March 1743/4, in *Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, 1742-45, Customs Book XV*, pp. 401-02, 645. Although the silting of the port was a persistently engaged the attention of the Corporation, a late eighteenth-century observer indicated that most eastern ports also suffered this problem. See: *Memoirs, Containing Some Particulars of the Life, Family, and Ancestors of John Savage, Miller of St. Mary Stoke, Ipswich* [1793-96], (privately printed, Ipswich, 1900), p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> Corfield, *Impact*, pp. 36-7.

agricultural products and increased demand for military vessels and merchantmen operating out of other ports. Suffolk's oak forests, the long tradition of shipbuilding at Ipswich, and its pool of skilled workers ensured that the industry would remain active within the boundaries of the borough throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup>

While war had disrupted the overseas trading economy of seventeenth-century Ipswich, the wars of the eighteenth century brought wealth to the town. From at least the 1740s, Ipswich's shipbuilders began supplying frigates to the Royal Navy.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps of greater importance later in the century was the boon to the economy produced by the quartering of troops near the town. Proximity to Harwich (an important military embarkation point), Ipswich's own port, the comparatively cheap prices of provisions in the area, and the vulnerability of the Essex and Suffolk coasts, together prompted the posting of large numbers of troops near Ipswich. It was reported that during the French Revolutionary wars barracks capable of accommodating between 7,000 and 8,000 men were built a mile to the east of the Ipswich at a cost of £200,000.<sup>54</sup> The prosperity which the military brought at this time was fondly recalled by a townsman who wrote:

At this period Ipswich was in the zenith of its glory. Every building, cottage, or apartment, that could be hired at almost any price, was occupied by persons belonging or attached to the garrison. Martial fetes and exhibitions were the order of the day. The agriculturists vied with the military in the liberality of their expenditure. Trade and commerce flourished in an extraordinary degree, and handsome fortunes were realised by many of the inhabitants.<sup>55</sup>

The service economy which profited by the presence of the army had been steadily growing throughout the century. By 1714, twenty per cent of employment at Ipswich was accounted for by various services including the provision of food and drink, and professional and salaried posts. In the 1790s, *The Universal British*

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<sup>52</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 370, 407-9; J.E. Barnard, "John Barnard the Younger, Shipbuilder of Ipswich and Harwich, 1705-1784" *Mariner's Mirror*, 78, (1992), pp. 156-62.

<sup>53</sup> A.G.E. Jones, "Shipbuilding at Ipswich, 1700-1750" *Mariner's Mirror*, 43, (1957), pp. 294-305; A.G.E. Jones, "Shipbuilding at Ipswich, 1750-1800" *Mariner's Mirror*, 58, (1972), pp.183-94; J.E. Barnard, "John Barnard", p. 156.

<sup>54</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 132, 407, 409.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

*Directory* listed 118 of Ipswich's residents as "gentry".<sup>56</sup> A French nobleman touring the county in 1784 observed: Ipswich is very well populated: many gentlefolk reside there as well as the traders. Every evening they assemble in a cafe, which is very convenient for strangers."<sup>57</sup> These town notables, along with the rural gentry of eastern Suffolk and northern Essex, provided a lucrative market for Ipswich's professionals and other service providers.<sup>58</sup> As in other towns, economic expansion and diversification increased the opportunities for professional men such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, and bankers. Such men were well positioned to assume leading roles among urban elites.<sup>59</sup>

While Ipswich never experienced an economic "take-off" in the manner of other, more industrialised towns, its economy did not stagnate. After the first two decades of the eighteenth century, there were no more reports of declining trade, and there was much evidence of new economic activity. Yet it is clear that Ipswich did experience relative decline. Over the course of the eighteenth century the town's population grew by about one third, from approximately 8,000 to 11,000. During the same period eight established ports taken together (including Ipswich) have been estimated as increasing by 130%, while urban populations generally increased by nearly three fold.<sup>60</sup> Given estimates of national population trends in the eighteenth century, and the weakness of Ipswich's economy in the early decades of the eighteenth century, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the town's economic and demographic growth occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. In any case, growth was comparatively moderate at Ipswich. The town's governors were not therefore faced with the task of trying to revitalise a community in commercial decay; nor did they confront the political and

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<sup>56</sup> Reed, "Economic Structure", p.102; *Universal British Directory*, iii, pp. 425-6.

<sup>57</sup> François de la Rochefoucauld, *A Frenchman in England: Being a Mélanges sur l'Angleterre of François de la Rochefoucauld*, Jean Marchand (ed.), S.C. Roberts (trans.), (Cambridge, 1933), p. 176.

<sup>58</sup> For the growing significance of the urban gentry, see P.J. Corfield, "The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentlemen" in N. Harte and R. Quinault (eds.), *Land and Society in Britain, 1700-1914* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 1-33.

<sup>59</sup> Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 204-7; Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850* (London, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> Reed, "Economic Structure", p. 92; R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 383; E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London, 1981), pp. 333, 335 and appendix 3; E.A. Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period" in E.A. Wrigley, *People Cities and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford, 1987), pp.160, 170.



administrative problems of rapid population growth and the advent of sudden wealth or poverty which destabilised the social relations in other towns. Because the problem of governance at Ipswich was not deeply informed by the sorts of dramatic social and economic changes which pressured corporations elsewhere, it is easier to more readily isolate the other significant factors that influenced the character of the community's government.

Although not recognised as an especially wealthy town, Ipswich, by the 1750s had certainly shaken-off the image of decay that had featured in travel writings of the early eighteenth century. The town ranked twenty-second among 132 English towns with respect to the number of households paying silver plate duty in 1757. As Table 1.1(a) indicates, by this measure of the presence of “genteel and middle-class” residents, Ipswich was well ahead of all East Anglia's other port towns except Great Yarmouth. At the same date, Bury St. Edmunds, Ipswich's inland rival for the status of county town and the trade of the landed gentry, had only sixty-seven plate duty payers and ranked five places behind Ipswich.<sup>61</sup> Tables 1.1(a) and (b) together suggest that, while shipping was of relatively less significance at Ipswich compared with other East Anglian ports, the town's economy was more strongly oriented to the provision of services to the resident gentry and professional families, whose relatively large presence is suggested by the plate duty rankings.

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<sup>61</sup> Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, Table 5b, pp. 402-3.

**Table 1.1: Two Measures of Ipswich's Relative Wealth**

**(a) Number of Silver Plate Duty Paying Households for Selected Ports, 1757**

**(b) Tonnage of Merchant Shipping Registered at Selected Provincial Ports, 1751**

	Plate Duty Payers	National Rank (all towns)		Tons Burden ( <sup>000</sup> )	National Rank
Bristol	790	1	Scarborough	33.1	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	192	7	Sunderland	24.2	2
Liverpool	178	8	Newcastle upon Tyne	21.6	3
Great Yarmouth	101	18	Liverpool	21.3	4
<b>Ipswich</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>22</b>	Bristol	19.0	5
Colchester	51	37	Whitehaven	18.4	6
Scarborough	42	46	Great Yarmouth	14.7	9
Sunderland	38	56	King's Lynn	9.1	11
Whitehaven	34	62	Harwich	2.9	13*
Harwich	21	91	<b>Ipswich</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>14*</b>
King's Lynn	not known		Colchester	2.4	16*

\* These rankings are approximate as Corfield's table identifies only the five towns with the greatest merchant tonnage in each of five regions. It is possible that as many as three additional towns in the north-east may have had greater tonnage than these East Anglian towns and so would have pushed them further down in the national rankings.

Sources: Langford, *"Polite and Commercial People"*, Table 5b, 402-03; Corfield, *Impact*, Table V, 36-37.

Although the town's economy also prospered through the provision of services and entertainment to the county's landed gentry, such men did not play a dominant role in the affairs of the town. Local landed gentlemen were often elected as the borough's Members of Parliament, but they seldom intervened in the government of the Corporation.<sup>62</sup> The resident or urban gentry were, however, much more active, as were the growing band of professional men and bankers.

The cultural life of such men is likely to have had an important bearing on the politics and governance of the community. As the local economy diversified and commercial relationships diminished as a factor promoting elite cohesion, the well-to-do of Ipswich had other opportunities to meet, assert their status and establish political networks. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Ipswich had two coffee houses,

<sup>62</sup> This continued to be the case well into the nineteenth century. See: K. Atton, "Municipal and Parliamentary Politics in Ipswich, 1818-1847", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1980), p. 8.

two theatres hosted touring players and, from the 1730s, a local music society which held fortnightly concert. The bailiff John Sparowe's mid-century Musical Society included the town clerk, and several other eminent townsmen whose portraits were painted by another member of the group, Thomas Gainsborough, who worked in Ipswich before moving to Bath and greater fame. Assemblies and Ipswich's annual horse races provided further occasions for association amongst the Corporation's officers, other members of the town elite, and the country gentry.<sup>63</sup>

An active local press and the delivery of London newspapers within twenty-four hours of printing assured that Ipswich's government and politics were conducted in the presence of a strong print media.<sup>64</sup> From 1720 a weekly or twice-weekly newspaper appeared under various names; although for most of the eighteenth century it was known as the *Ipswich Journal*.<sup>65</sup> From the 1740s the *Journal* ran more than 2,000 advertisements per year, making it one of leading provincial newspapers in England. The *Journal* was not a particularly partisan paper until the late 1750s when it began to reflect popular dissatisfaction with those dominating the Corporation and their alignment with the central government. But the *Journal* was even then not a fiercely partisan paper and its coverage of local politics was very limited. It seems to exemplify G.A. Cranfield's observation that the publishers of provincial papers were generally not keen to print local political news since it was already known to the community or could invite the resentment of important advertisers or other influential parties.<sup>66</sup> But while the publishers of the *Journal* generally avoided taking political positions, they did publish the letters and advertisements of candidates and others making political

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<sup>63</sup> Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 145, 329, 333; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp.107, 351; Redstone, *Ipswich*, pp. 106, 117-18. *East Anglian Magazine*, (June 1978), pp. 37, 8, 414; also see frequent advertisements in: *Ipswich Gazette or Bagnall's News* and *Ipswich Journal* from the 1730s.

<sup>64</sup> Dauntton, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 308.

<sup>65</sup> *Ipswich Journal, or, the Weekly Mercury*, 13 Aug. 1720 to 12 Oct. 1734; the *Ipswich Gazette or Bagnall's News*, 19 Oct. 1734 to 10 Feb.1738/9; the *Original Ipswich Journal*, 17 Feb. 1738/9 to 1774; the *Ipswich Journal*, 1774 - 29 June 1786. See: Wiles, *Freshest Advices*; G.A. Cranfield, *A Handlist of English Provincial Newspapers and Periodicals, 1700-60* (Cambridge, 1952); *The Times Tercentenary Handlist of English and Welsh Newspapers*.(London, 1920).

<sup>66</sup> Cranfield, *English Provincial Newspaper*, p. 81. The scrupulousness of William Crighton, the *Journal's* publisher from 1739 to the early nineteenth century, has been observed by R.M. Wiles, *Freshest Advices*, p. 262 n 4.

comment. Moreover, they also published pamphlets by local partisans or reproduced political news coverage from the London papers.<sup>67</sup> Political opinion also emanated from another source: the town's clergymen, although not corporate officeholders, could be active, influential commentators upon Corporation business. Whatever messages about town affairs may have been conveyed from the pulpit, clergymen's sermons and secular pamphlets on the community's politics and government were occasionally printed locally. The Reverend Richard Canning was particularly important having published various sermons, a report on the state of the Corporation charities, a pamphlet reproducing the oaths required of Corporation officers, and an edition of the Corporation charters.<sup>68</sup>

The town's print media, theatre, music, and other recreations, together with its various clubs and associations suggest that the cultural life of Ipswich displayed elements of what Peter Borsay has described as the "English urban renaissance".<sup>69</sup> This phenomenon has important implications for the character of town government under the Corporation since it is through these forums that the town's propertied middling sort affirmed social and political connections.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, these forms of association constituted an important part of the political culture of the Corporation. Other aspects of the urban renaissance phenomenon are, however, less readily apparent at Ipswich. It

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<sup>67</sup> See below pp. 233-4, 237.

<sup>68</sup> T. Green, *Euphrasy or Political Eyebright. Written in the Year 1768* (Ipswich?, 1768); R. Canning, *Account of the Gifts and Legacies that have been Given and Bequeathed to Charitable Uses in the Town of Ipswich with some Account of the Present State and Management, and some Proposals for the Future Regulation of these...* (Ipswich, 1747, 1819); R. Canning (ed.), *The Oaths of Office of the Chief Magistrates, Subordinate Officers and Free Burgesses of the Corporation of Ipswich* (Ipswich, 1794); R. Canning, (ed.), *The Principal Charters which have been granted to the Corporation of Ipswich in Suffolk* (London, 1754); R. Canning, *Remarks on a Pamphlet...Dissenters* (London, 1749).

<sup>69</sup> Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*. For further discussion of this idea see P. Borsay, "The English Urban Renaissance: The Development of Provincial Urban Culture c.1680-c.1760" in *Social History*, no.5 (1977); A. McInnes, "The Emergence of a Leisure Town: Shrewsbury, 1660-1760" *Past and Present*, no.120 (1988), pp. 53-87; "Debate: The Emergence of a Leisure Town: or an Urban Renaissance", P. Borsay, "Comment", A. McInnes, "Reply" *Past and Present*, 126, (1990), pp. 189-202; J.J. Looney, "Cultural Life in the Provinces: Leeds and York, 1720-1820" in A.L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J.M. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society. Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 483-510.

<sup>70</sup> P. Clark, *Sociability and Urbanity: Clubs and Societies in the Eighteenth-Century City* (Leicester, 1986); K. Wilson, "Urban Culture and Political Activism in Hanoverian England: The Example of Voluntary Hospitals" in Eckhart Hellmuth, (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture in England and Germany in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990); J. Barry, "Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and Middling Sort" in Barry and Brooks, *The Middling Sort*, pp. 84-112.

was only in the last few years of the eighteenth century that much new, large-scale building was undertaken, and an improvement commission was not established by statute until 1793. There are various reasons for the late arrival of the urban renaissance at Ipswich. The town did not suffer any significant fire damage in the late seventeenth or eighteenth centuries which might have prompted the sort of rebuilding and planning which was characteristic of many other Georgian towns. Moreover, as both maps from the period and the observations of contemporaries suggest, Ipswich was a spacious town with comparatively wide streets and large gardens or other green spaces behind most of the town's buildings.<sup>71</sup> The poor state of the economy in the early decades of century, which made building stock plentiful and cheap, was a further factor against much early Georgian rebuilding. This aspect of Ipswich's eighteenth-century development has important implications for the character of its government. Clearly, the pressure to mobilise resources, plan and regulate a substantial re-building of the town or provide new public works was absent at Ipswich. Accordingly, the demand to recast the institutions and practices of government lessened on this account.

Nonetheless, it will be seen that other changes in eighteenth-century Ipswich's economy, society, and culture had important implications for the town's politics and government. Such changes did not provoke a substantial reformation of the institutional structure of the Corporation. Instead, they are significant as the shifting environment to which the corporate regime responded, and thereby reflected both its continuing effectiveness as well as the particular factors which would rapidly undermine its place in the community in the early nineteenth century.

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<sup>71</sup> Defoe, *Tour*, p. 71; Fiennes, *Journeys*, p.143; S. and N. Buck, *The South-West Prospect of Ipswich in the County of Suffolk* (1741); J. Pennington, *A Map of the Town of Ipswich....* (1778).

## **PART ONE**

### **MUNICIPAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS**

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE BOROUGH COURTS**

Part One of this thesis begins with an examination of the institutional structure of the Corporation, its practices and personnel. The study of these matters is essential to understanding the capabilities of the Corporation and its role in the community. The distribution of power, the structure of authority, and the economic and social identities of those who held office, are all crucial determinants of the character of the corporate regime. Moreover, an appreciation of these features of the Corporation are vital prerequisites to understanding the nature of corporation politics and participation in the process of government which is the subject of Part Two of the thesis.

This chapter is concerned with the legal foundations of the Corporation, and how authority was exercised through various types of judicial, administrative and deliberative courts. The discussion focuses upon central questions in the distribution of power. It will be seen that the distinct jurisdictions of the various courts afforded an important dispersal of authority. Both the internal structures of these different courts, and the relationships between them, had an important bearing on the nature of the governing elite's control of the Corporation. Although a powerful inhibitor of oligarchic rule, the courts system functioned most effectively when the Corporation's governing elite was able to avoid prolonged political contention.

This examination of the legal basis of the Corporation, together with its institutional forms and practices, is revealing of the attitudes, expectations and behaviours which constituted the community's culture of governance. The character of the Corporation is further highlighted through a consideration of the structure of the courts and their modes of operation in relation to other paradigms of institutional development. By assessing Ipswich's eighteenth-century corporate regime in the light of the sorts of institutional forms developed after the 1830s, and of Weber's bureaucratic-organisational model, the character of the town's government is identified. In so doing, the changes and adaptations of the eighteenth-century Corporation, and the timing and meaning of reform can be better understood.

## 1. The General Institutional Structure of the Corporation

In terms of its institutional composition, the Corporation of Ipswich was essentially a collection of courts, the most important of which derived their particular authority from distinct charters, statutes, royal proclamations or time-honoured customs. Formally, at least, the government of the town was conducted through these various courts. From the bailiffs to the beadles, all the officers of the Corporation were, in some sense, officers of a court. As such they did not, in theory, make judgements or act as independent officials, but rather as the agents of the courts which selected them and to which they would have to answer. This government by courts embodied the principles of collective rule which was at the heart of the corporate idea. Certainly, the realities of influence, corruption, faction and the presence of a ruling elite undermined the realisation of this idea. Nonetheless, the courts retained importance as political forums and the only bodies through which local authorities could legally act.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates the complex interlocking of authorities and individual offices in Ipswich. At the legal heart of the Corporation was the Great Court. All freemen of the Corporation were also its members and were thus entitled to attend meetings. Indeed, by law they were obliged to be present, although in practice, rarely more than a small portion of the freemen usually attended. The Great Court was the main deliberative body of the Corporation. It elected the town's two members of parliament and the two bailiffs who served as joint senior officers of the Corporation. Many of the Corporation's other officers were also elected by the Great Court, and its approval was needed to ensure the legal validity of any bylaw or order. There were two further deliberative bodies: the Portmen and the Twentyfour, which were respectively comparable to the aldermen and the common councils of other towns. Both bodies were self-electing, choosing their members for life from the freemanry.<sup>1</sup> Aside from general

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, upper case spellings of "the Portmen" or "the Twentyfour" refers to these bodies. Lower case spellings of "the portmen" and "the twentyfour" refer to the plural of members of these bodies.





injunctions to provide good counsel to the bailiffs and act in the Corporation's interests, neither body was assigned specific roles in the Corporation's legislative or administrative processes. The portmen and twentyfourmen, meeting together, constituted a body called the Assembly. Although it had no formal, charter-sanctioned function, in the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries it acted as a kind of executive body.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the greatest significance of the Portmen and the Twentyfour was that they provided pools of men from which various corporation officers were customarily drawn. The Borough Sessions bench consisted of the two bailiffs, a recorder elected by the Great Court, and four other assistant magistrates who were drawn from the portmen. Twentyfourmen might be selected for a variety of posts, including the administratively important office of headborough. Twelve men were chosen from the Twentyfour to make up the Headborough's Court which had jurisdiction over various nuisance, land use and policing matters.

Another important judicial and administrative body was the Admirals' Court which exercised jurisdiction over maritime and revenue matters from the port of Ipswich down the River Orwell to the open sea. The bailiffs presided over the Admirals' Court, as they did the Borough Sessions and the Petty Court. The Petty Court handled much of the routine administrative business delegated to it by the Great Court, but its most important function was as a court for debt settlement. Various other Corporation officers and servants, together with the committees of the Great Court, conducted much of the routine business of the Corporation. These will be discussed in more detail below and in Chapters Three and Five. Finally, it should be noted that, while not formally elements of the Corporation, Ipswich's twelve parishes were nonetheless integral parts of its government, both because of the supervisory powers of the Corporation justices of the peace and because of the overlapping jurisdictions of the parishes and various corporate officers with respect to poor relief, road maintenance and nuisance regulation.

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<sup>2</sup> Reed, "Economic Structure...", p. 90; *RCMC*, pp. 2298; see below pp. 93-4.

## II. The Formal Foundations of the Town's Government

As in other municipal corporations, the legal foundations of Ipswich's town government derived variously from royal charters, prescription, statute, and the corporation's own bylaws. The long accretion of such diverse entitlements to exercise public authority did not make for a well integrated, entirely consistent constitution. Various disputes over Corporate jurisdiction or the right to offices were fuelled by the obscure or conflicting provisions of charters, custom and statute law. Nonetheless, contrary to the observations historians have made with respect to other corporations, Ipswich's constitution endowed the Corporation with enough authority and was sufficiently flexible to meet the requirements of the town's governors.

As a royal grant authorising the formation of a corporation and setting out its jurisdiction, a charter was rightly regarded as the first and essential element of a municipal corporation's constitution. Yet the various charters must be understood within a web of legal relations between the numerous statutes, common law rules and matters of custom which also provided elements of the municipal constitution. Moreover, the question of the relative authority of the many charters issued to a given town, as well as the susceptibility of their provisions to divergent interpretations, has vexed both litigious civic leaders and their historians for centuries.<sup>3</sup> In the case of eighteenth-century Ipswich, the priority and harmonisation of the various charters was less of a problem than it was elsewhere. After October 1688, when James II reversed the corporation re-modelling of the previous three years, Charles II's first charter (1665), together with those of John (1200), Edward IV (1464) and Henry VIII (1518), were taken to be the governing charters until the dissolution of the ancient Corporation in 1835.<sup>4</sup> When litigation did arise and appeals were made to the charters, the legal points at issue tended to turn on the interpretation of the provisions and intentions of the charters rather than the primacy of one royal grant over another.

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<sup>3</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 267-70, 367-68.

<sup>4</sup> *RMC*, p. 2295. To these other governing charters, that of Henry VI (1446) might be added, see J. Kirby, *The Suffolk Traveller* (Ipswich, 1735; reprinted, Woodbridge, 1829), p. 29.

These controversies over the meaning of charter provisions helped make pre-reform corporations notoriously profligate litigators.<sup>5</sup> Civic leaders sought judicial endorsement for favourable readings of imprecise or now obscure medieval charter provisions. Disputes over the forms of elections and entitlement to the franchise brought the officers of many corporations before the courts to defend their claims to office against the charges of disappointed rivals. In Ipswich the entitlement of various men to hold office and the legality of freeman admissions produced litigation which was invariably costly and, in a few cases, quite significant for the political and constitutional development of the Corporation.<sup>6</sup> The imprecise language of the charters could also prompt contention of other kinds. For example, the boundaries of the Corporation's admiralty jurisdiction engendered a long-running dispute with the Corporation of Harwich over the collection of dues in the lower reaches of the River Orwell.<sup>7</sup> On other occasions contention over the prerogatives of an office turned on the meaning of charter provisions. Such conflicts were often engendered by the indefinite language of a charter or its endorsement of unspecified customary practice.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it may be that the charters' general mandates for the provision of good government were too vague in the changing environment of law and governance of the eighteenth century. The ancient injunctions upon town officials "to do the best ye can for all thyngs in the honor of the said Towne"<sup>9</sup> and to adhere to its bylaws and customs, did not always furnish legally the defensible authorisation local authorities needed for the kinds of activities they were inclined to undertake. Many historians have observed that, over the course of the

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<sup>5</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 270; Triffitt has suggested that lawyers among a corporation's leaders were self-interested advocates of litigation. Triffitt, "Parliamentary Boroughs", pp. 167-8.

<sup>6</sup> See below pp. 212-3, 224, 228.

<sup>7</sup> *Ancient and Modern Perambulations; and Extracts from Charters, Trials and Other Records, Relative to the Liberties of Ipswich, By Land and Water* (Ipswich, 1815), pp. 25-8; Batley, "Collections", f. 308; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> BL, Harl. MS 6839, "A Journal of Mr. Gravenor's Proceedings during his First Four Years Bayliwiche of this Town", f. 259; *The Oaths of Office of the Chief Magistrates, Subordinate Officers and Free Burgesses of the Corporation of Ipswich*, ed. Richard Canning (Ipswich, 1794); "Rex v. Richardson" in *Reports of the Cases Argued and Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench, Since the Death of the Lord Raymond...*, 4th ed., vol. i, ed., Sir James Burrow (Dublin, 1785).

<sup>9</sup> The bailiffs' oath in *The Oaths of Office...*, pp. 6, 8.

eighteenth century, towns increasingly sought local acts to supplant or augment the perhaps less certain chartered incorporation as the source of urban authority.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their constitutional limitations and growing criticism of the injustice of their regimes,<sup>11</sup> charters were not without their advocates in the eighteenth century. Of course, the preservation of chartered corporations depended upon influential, self-serving, borough elites. Moreover, the majority of parliamentarians, whose support would be needed to change the principles of municipal government, were likely to be satisfied with the system which had secured their election. Yet while these interests lurked behind claims of the benefits of chartered government, there appears to have been some sincere belief in the utility of chartered incorporation and, in any case, there seemed to be no practical alternative. One writer provided a sort of Hobbesian apology for chartered regimes, arguing that the good order of communities necessitated concentrations of power in the hands of a well-off corporate oligarchy.<sup>12</sup> But arguments stressing the practical value of the chartered corporation for the management of a town's business were likely more compelling. When Colchester was without a charter for twenty-two years (1742-64), the absence of effective market regulation, the neglect of community assets and the loss of the Borough Sessions were all matters of complaint. Eventually, the fierce partisanship that had destroyed the old Corporation was reconciled by interests keen to obtain a new charter for the better management of affairs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> E.L. Jones and M.E. Falkus "Urban Improvement and the English Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" in P.J. Uselding (ed.), *Research in Economic History*, vol. iv, (Greenwich, Conn., 1979) reprinted in P. Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town. A Reader in English Urban History 1688 - 1820* (Harlow, Essex, 1990), pp. 131-44; P. Clark, "Introduction" in P. Clark ed. *County Towns in Pre-Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 20-1; Corfield, *Impact*, pp. 156-8; Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, pp. 222-8.

<sup>11</sup> Ereunetes, "Reflections on the Constitution of Incorporated Boroughs...." *Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1787), pp. 9-10, 105-7 and 953-4.; Corfield, *Impact*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>12</sup> Bradwardin, letter in response to Ereunetes, "Reflections....", pp. 953-94; T. Madox, *Firma Burgi, or an Historical Essay Concerning the Cities Towns and Buroughs of England. Taken From Records*, (London, 1726), pp. 296-97.

<sup>13</sup> S. D'Cruz, "The Middling Sort", pp. 205-6. *VCH, History of the County of Essex*, vol. 9, *The Borough of Colchester* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 159-60. For the value of charter borough sessions see: P.J. King, "Urban Crime Rates and Borough Courts in Eighteenth-Century Essex -- The Impact of Local Court Availability", *Essex Journal. A Review of Archaeology and History*, vol. 22 (1987), pp. 39-41.

The survival of corporate regimes also owed something to the flexibility that charters afforded. Although vague reference to custom and insufficiently specific charter provisions could become the focus of conflict, charters also afforded a malleable constitution capable of substantially adapting the organisation and formal basis of urban public authority. The charters of Ipswich imposed very few limitations on the formulation of Corporation bylaws, and the power of the Corporation to amend its constitution was well acknowledged. From at least the Charter of Henry VIII (1518), the Corporation had the right to amend ordinances and usage which were difficult or defective, thereby acquiring the right to alter much of the practice of local government.<sup>14</sup> In 1725 the Corporation queried its right to create new offices, and although the Recorder's advice on this point is unknown, new offices were subsequently established as required while the terms of others were altered beyond the specifications of the charters.<sup>15</sup> When litigation was heard at King's Bench in 1758 about the right of the Corporation to remove some of its officers, Lord Mansfield ruled making bylaws and removing officers were powers inherent in the very nature of corporations.<sup>16</sup> This opinion had been maintained as early as 1702 when a legal manual, *The Law of Corporations*, asserted that the general provisions of charters permitted corporations to establish bylaws on matters which the charters did not specifically address. Indeed, it was even maintained that every charter permitted the corporation to change its rules for the selection of its senior offices including the restriction of its electorate to a select body.<sup>17</sup> Further, as a general legal principle, corporations' bylaws were generously supported by the courts. In 1757 Justice Denison wrote of bylaws: "[w]e ought not to construe them so strictly, as to take them to be void, if every particular Reason of making them, does not appear."<sup>18</sup>

Charters, then, were subject to generous interpretation, and corporations were able to amend substantially and to augment them through bylaws which the courts were

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<sup>14</sup> *RCMC*, p. 2306; Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Ipswich, GCB, 4 Feb. 1725.

<sup>16</sup> "Rex v. Richardson", p. 539.

<sup>17</sup> *The Law of Corporation: Containing the Laws and Customs of all the Corporations and Inferior Courts of Record in England* (London, 1702), p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> "Master, &c., of the Vintners Company v. Passey" in *Reports of Cases... Lord Raymond*, 239.

normally prepared to sustain. Thus, in the eighteenth century, the charters of Ipswich provided sufficiently flexible constitutional arrangements to serve the purposes of the town's governors. With respect to towns in general, the Webbs have asserted that this flexibility often went too far, and that those in local authority had the means to manipulate the constitution for their own partisan ends. The result was usually destabilising uncertainty about the rules of government. While this was undoubtedly true of the particular cases which the Webbs cite,<sup>19</sup> the undermining of town government was not the inevitable result of boroughs' powers to amend their constitutions. Much depended on the character of a town's politics and the implications of other elements of its constitution.

Although there was no statutory attempt to impose uniform, sweeping changes upon municipal constitutions in the eighteenth century,<sup>20</sup> statute law was an increasingly important factor in the governance of boroughs. The towns' magistrates and other officers were regulated and variously empowered by a number of general acts which applied throughout the country.<sup>21</sup> In general, however, the most important form of statute for towns was the local act. It could substantially change the system of a town's government by establishing entirely new bodies such as improvement commissions or courts of requests which, in some cases, were quite distinct from the corporate authority.<sup>22</sup> The Municipal Commissioners of 1833 found that 178 local acts had been procured by the boroughs they examined.<sup>23</sup> In Ipswich local acts were of less importance than they were elsewhere. After the paving act of 1571, the Town did not

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<sup>19</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 271-73.

<sup>20</sup> Several acts did apply to corporations in general but they were concerned with quite narrow, albeit sometimes quite significant, matters. The Occasional Conformity Act (1711, repealed 1719) was perhaps more important for its place in national politics. See: Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, rev. ed. (London, 1987), pp. 99-100. Other important examples include an act of 1710 (9 Anne, c. 20) which provided that chief returning officers, normally the mayors or bailiffs of corporations, were not permitted to hold those offices in consecutive years; and an act of 1722 (9 Geo.I, c. 7) which authorised justices of towns that were counties of themselves to act in their county at large.

<sup>21</sup> For example: the remuneration of coroners, 25 Geo.II, c.29 (1752).

<sup>22</sup> *Reports from Commissioners: vol. xviii, 1839. Analytical Index to the Reports of Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Municipal Corporations*, pp. 401-407; Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 13-249; Jones and Falkus, "Urban Improvement", pp. 131-44; P. Clark, "Introduction" in P. Clark, *County Towns*, pp. 20-21; Corfield, *Impact*, pp. 156-8; Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, pp. 222-8.

<sup>23</sup> *Analytical Index, RCMC*, p. 401-7.

acquire a local act again until the 1793 establishment of the Improvement Commission. Other than the three subsequent acts to amend that body there were only two other local acts for Ipswich before 1820: one to improve the docks (1805); and one to establish a court of requests (1807). This compares with sixteen acts for Norwich between 1689 and 1820, seven for Northampton, three for Exeter and none for Colchester (excluding the statute re-establishing the corporation in 1764).<sup>24</sup>

It is not entirely clear why Ipswich was comparatively late in acquiring new statutory authorities. The economic development of the town was not characteristic of the sort of urban areas often associated with pressing needs for new courts of request and improvement commissions. Yet, Ipswich was subject to appreciable demographic growth and economic change; and, in any case, other towns with comparable growth acquired statutory authorities much earlier.<sup>25</sup> In some cases the establishment of such bodies may well have depended on the course of partisan politics in a particular community. As will be shown later, it was not until the last decades of the eighteenth century that the dynamics of Ipswich's politics were conducive to the establishment of statutory authorities.<sup>26</sup> In any case, the establishment of an improvement commission at Ipswich in 1793 was not symptomatic of a process of government which was paralysed or confined to a very narrow sphere. Indeed, the constitution based largely on charters, custom and bylaw was flexible enough to provide a sufficient legal foundation for municipal authorities to act with respect to a variety of tasks ranging from public works to the amendment of their own constitutions.<sup>27</sup> Under such a malleable constitution, the legitimisation of local authority and the nature of its organisation must be deduced from the actual operation of the offices and institutions of public authority. The mechanics of government illuminate the culture of governance and the role of specific institutions within the community.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> See below p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> See below pp. 282-5.

<sup>27</sup> See below pp. 174-209.



## 2. The Great Court

From the first charters, the Great Court was recognised as the principal governing body of the Corporation. All persons admitted to the Corporation as freemen were entitled to attend its meetings. At least two meetings of the Great Court were required each year, on the "charters days," when the principal officers of the Corporation were elected. Additional meetings could be held throughout the year at the discretion of the bailiffs.<sup>28</sup> No bylaw, regulation or use of the Corporate seal could be made without the endorsement of the Great Court. Accordingly, the extensive powers of the Corporation were, in theory at least, in the hands of all its members acting through the Great Court. Both the 1833 commissioners and the Webbs maintained that many of the freemen attended the meetings of the Great Court, but this hardly made for an effective, democratic, collective scheme of government. Indeed, it was held that the corruption of the freemen had disabled the Great Court from being an effective part of the Town's government. The Municipal Commissioners asserted that the mean tradesmen who, in 1833, constituted the majority of the freemen (but a minority of the adult male population of the town) were easily controlled by a few Twentyfourmen and a party of influence brokers known as the "Wellington Club." The principal aim of the Club was to deliver a majority of Great Court votes to those candidates who could offer the best price to secure their election. Such candidates would then be expected to spend their term of office distributing favours and patronage to the Club's members. The Webbs maintain that because of this pervasive practice the effective auditing of Corporation accounts was frustrated, the Corporation debt soared and the government of the town was neglected.<sup>29</sup> It is doubtful, however, if the regime of the Wellington Club was characteristic of the entire eighteenth century. The Club itself was of fairly recent foundation when the Municipal Commissioners reported on it in 1835, and it appears to

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<sup>28</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 429; *RCMC*, pp. 2305-6.

<sup>29</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2305-6, 2311; Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 561-4. For a fuller account of Ipswich politics in the years around the visit of the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations see: Atton, "Parliamentary Politics in Ipswich."

have had no antecedent before the 1790s.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, however, the rise and effect of the Club does reveal the political importance of control of the Great Court because of its central place in the governance of the town.

The requirement that every order and application of the corporate seal be approved by the Great Court meant that no claim to office was valid without its endorsement. Moreover, officers and agents preferred to act under the *bona fide* orders of the Court to ensure that the Corporation, rather than they alone, would be liable for their conduct as officers.<sup>31</sup> Many of the orders recorded in the Great Court Book relate to the supervision of the Corporation's officers. Orders were made forcing tardy chamberlains to turn in their accounts, committees were empowered to inspect the Treasurer's records, and headboroughs were ordered to inspect and report on particular nuisances.<sup>32</sup> In addition, as already noted, the removal of officeholders also required the sanction of the Great Court.

The management of Corporation assets, such as the making of loans to freemen, the assignment of leases of real property, licences to operate the common quay and its crane, or the mortgaging of property to ease the strain on the Borough's coffers, were all matters which required the Great Court's assent, and which sometimes provoked contention at its meetings. The governors of the Corporation's endowed charities also needed the permission of the Great Court prior to granting leases or making significant changes to the charities' assets.<sup>33</sup> Other matters such as the regulation of private land use, the imposition of sanctions enforcing the orders of the Court, and some aspects of economic regulation, were all subject to the Great Court's authority.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bately, "Collections", ff. 12-3; Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 561, n.1.

<sup>31</sup> On numerous occasions Corporation officers sought explicit orders that the Corporation would indemnify them against suits brought in connection with their acts as agents of the Corporation; for example, see: GCB, 24 Sept. 1723, 26 April 1726, 29 Sept. 1755, 31 Oct. 1759 and 8 Aug. 1760.

<sup>32</sup> GCB, 10 April 1725, 29 Oct. 1754 and 10 April 1725.

<sup>33</sup> Examples of the Great Court's consideration of leases of the Towne House and Crane can found at GCB, 5 Mar. 1724/25, 15 April 1755 and 8 June 1786. Typical GCB entries relating to attempts to sell, lease and mortgage Hanford Hall can be found for on 16th May 1721, 7th September 1762 and 8th of June 1786. Also see: SRO/I, q S Ips. 9, "To the Freemen of Ipswich" Mss. note in "Memoranda Relating to the History of Ipswich". The terms of leases of charity property were not usually set by the Great Court, but its permission was sought prior to seeking new lessors or renewing existing agreements. For a fuller discussion of the management of Corporation assets see pp. 149-70.

<sup>34</sup> For a fuller account of the activities of the Great Court's offices see pp. 75-86.

Finally, some consideration should be given to the function of Great Court meetings as occasions which might affirm the collective identity of the freemen and create a sense of civic association which helped to reinforce the Corporation regime. The bonds created by a "civic culture" were arguably not as strong in the eighteenth century as they had once been.<sup>35</sup> Yet well attended meetings of Great Court at which patriotic proclamations were read, loyal addresses drafted, and denunciations issued against the predations of the traders and fishermen of Harwich upon the liberties of Ipswich, might have helped draw the resident freemen together.<sup>36</sup> Although factious contention seems an inevitable feature of Corporation life in the eighteenth century, there was persistent desire for corporate unity and, when divisions were perhaps their most severe, measures were taken in hopes of achieving it. Cooper Gravenor won his first election as bailiff in 1702 on the promise to put an end to faction and corruption in the Corporation. Accordingly, one of his first official acts was to hold a Great Court to, as one observer put it, "heale the Divisions amongst us."<sup>37</sup> In fact, Gravenor failed spectacularly as his heart was not in the promotion of harmony; but the expectations for his first Great Court are revealing of the perceived functions of that body. Later, too, the "factious proceedings of the 'Blues' and 'Yellows' of the Great Court," and the costly elections thereby engendered, prompted in 1820 some leaders of the two sides to move towards compromise. However, the Wellington Club thwarted that effort, thus rendering the Great Court and the civic government virtually dysfunctional.<sup>38</sup>

The entries of the Great Court Book suggest that the Court was a much more important body than has been indicated by the Webbs, who viewed it as little more than an occasional feature of government for the election of the Town's "Chief Officers" and the passing of "platonic resolutions for or against the National Government or the

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<sup>35</sup> See: R. Tittler, *The Architecture of Power* (Oxford, 1991), passim; idem, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), passim.

<sup>36</sup> For examples see: GCB, 27 November 1722; 6 April 1756; 20 November 1759; 11 March 1789; 13 November 1795.

<sup>37</sup> BL, Harl. MS 6839, f.259: "A Journal of Mr. Gravenor's Proceedings During His First Four Years Bayliswick of this Town"

<sup>38</sup> RCMC, p. 2310; Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 561.

Corporation Executive."<sup>39</sup> It should be noted, however, that the frequency of Great Court meetings and the volume and nature of its business changed during the eighteenth century. The view which the Webbs and others have derived from the 1835 report of the Municipal Commissioners, and other early nineteenth-century commentators, more closely accords with the pattern of the Great Court's activity after the late 1780s.

A consideration of three five-year sample periods (see Table 2.1) suggests that although its activity had substantially declined by the 1790s, for most of the eighteenth century the Great Court was actively engaged in the town's government. In the five years 1721-5 the Great Court met, on average, ten times per year; it never met less than five times in any given year during that period. By the late 1750s meetings were half as frequent; in 1756-60 there were typically five or six meetings a year, although in 1759 there were only three. For the years 1791-5, however, meetings were much less frequent with the average per year being three, and never exceeding four. During the eighteenth century, meetings tended to be spread throughout the year, although June, July and August were the least likely months for a Court. Since the Corporate year end in Ipswich was 29 September, that month tended to have more meetings than others. That meetings occurred throughout the year and did not normally cluster around particular dates suggests that each session was generally dealing with discrete items of more routine business.

The business of a body like the Great Court is difficult to quantify; however, the numbers of orders made by the Court can be compared for a crude indication of changes in its activities. By this measure, the volume of business in the Great Court declined over the course of the eighteenth century, but the change in the 1790s was most dramatic. The number of orders and entries (excluding routine business)<sup>40</sup> in the Great Court Book for the years 1756-60 is two-thirds of that for 1721-5; and the promulgation of orders at this level is more or less constant until the late 1780s.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 366 n2. It should be noted, however, that elsewhere the Webbs give a slightly different account locating the Great Court more centrally in the scheme of Town government, although still viewing it as dysfunctional on account of corruption. *ibid.* pp. 558-9.

<sup>40</sup> In order to establish the relative activity of the Great Court in the governance of the community, the appointments of officers and the admissions of freemen have been excluded from these calculations since their fluctuations are less indicative of the Court's activities as a public authority.

<b>Table 2.1: <i>The Activity of the Great Court</i></b> (annual averages per sample period)			
<b>Business Items</b>	<b>1721-5</b>	<b>1756-60</b>	<b>1791-5</b>
Official Appointments <sup>1</sup>	27.8	24.2	16.2
Freeman Admissions <sup>2</sup>	35.8	7.6	14.8
Property Management <sup>3</sup>	9.4	6	2.4
Financial Management <sup>4</sup>	5.6	8.6	0.6
Other <sup>5</sup>	31	16.8	9.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>109.6</b>	<b>63.2</b>	<b>43.2</b>
Total Less Appointments and Admissions	46	31.4	12.2
Number of Great Court Meetings	9.6	4.8	3
Notes: 1. "Official Appointments" included all persons named to any Corporation office by the Great Court. Some appointments are annual, others may be for a period of years or indefinite terms. 2. "Freemen Admissions" included admissions which may have been subsequently challenged and disallowed by other courts. 3. "Property Management" included leasing, sale or acquisitions of Corporation property and the regulation of public space. 4. "Financial Management" included orders for audits, payments or other matters relating to Corporation revenue. 5. "Other" included loyal addresses, orders to indemnify officers, admissions to charities, public works, economic and moral regulation, instructions to MPs and other matters. Source: SROI, C5/14/7-10, GCB.			

For the period 1791-5, however, only one-quarter as many orders are made as in the period 1721-5. Thus, although the Great Court met less frequently and issued fewer orders in the 1750s and 1780s than it had earlier in the century, it was not until the 1790s that the decline in this sort of business was so great as to suggest that its role in the process of governance must have substantially changed.

Evidence of this role and its evolution can be found in the detailed pattern of orders the Court made. As Table 2.1 indicates, the selection of officials and the admission of freemen was a substantial portion of the Court's business in all three sample periods. The large numbers of officeholders who were either selected at the Great Court or had their appointments validated there, together with the admissions of freemen -- which in years of contested elections could see the granting of the freedom to dozens of men -- invariably meant that more than half of the Great Court Book's entries related to these matters. But the extensive jurisdiction and activities of the Great Court noted above meant that a meeting might typically issue five or more orders relating to the administration of Corporation or town affairs. Between the 1720s and 1780s such matters would result in the issue of anything from 30 to nearly 70 orders a year. In the 1790s, however, the range had narrowed, with as few as four but no more than 24. Most importantly, while the relative proportions of other types of orders remained broadly the same, those dealing with financial management of the Corporation virtually vanished from the Great Court's agendas in the 1790s, and orders relating to the management of the Corporation's property were also much fewer. The reasons for this development will be considered subsequently in the context of the Borough's political history. For the present, it is important to recognise that only in the last decades of the eighteenth century did the Great Court cease to be an active, central feature of the government of Ipswich.

This view is reinforced by the available evidence of the practices and procedures of the Court. Other than the meetings required to be held on the charter days, the 8 and 29 September, there were no fixed dates for Great Court meetings. It was the prerogative of the Bailiffs to call meetings. They normally did so on their own initiative, but occasionally townsmen petitioned for a meeting.<sup>41</sup> Traditionally, notice of meetings was given by the blowing of a horn at midnight prior to the day of the Court but generally the portmen and twentyfour received written notice via a messenger. Such notices sometimes gave brief agenda. Although nothing like a set of minutes survives

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<sup>41</sup> Bately, "Collections", f. 116.

for the meetings of the Great Court, in 1723 it was declared that the "orders and proceedings of the preceding Great Court should be first openly read in Court... before any other business be done." The Great Court Book does provide a quite full record of the Court's dealings which would have served this purpose.<sup>42</sup> Humphrey Rant, a portman and sometime bailiff in the second half of the eighteenth century, wrote that the general practice of the Great Court was simply that the senior bailiff would put a proposal before the Court, and if there was any objection a poll would be held and a simple majority would carry the matter. As we shall see, there is evidence that things did not always go that smoothly. The *Great Court Book* has a number of entries which indicate that spirited discussion was not uncommon and that it changed the course of some matters.<sup>43</sup> After reciting an order of 1658 which asserted the bailiffs' roles as speakers of the court and provided for the fining of those who spoke out of turn or over others, G.R. Clarke wrote painfully in 1830 that "such judicious orders for the regulation of speech, are not unworthy of attention even in these enlightened times."<sup>44</sup>

### 3. The Committees of the Great Court

With a typical attendance of 40 or more and a crowd of nearly 150 possible, the Great Court's meetings could not have been an effective forum for handling all the business within its purview. Moreover, the reality of Corporation politics inevitably produced means whereby political elites were able to exert influence on certain matters away from the sometimes hostile mass of the freemen. Thus, the Great Court established numerous committees.

The use of committees to deal with various aspects of the Great Court's business was a well established practice by the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Committees were appointed to investigate the charities' accounts, to look into property disputes between town

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<sup>42</sup> SROI, HD490/1, Humphrey Rant to an unspecified person, undated, MS Letters Collection; GCB, 22 October 1723.

<sup>43</sup> For examples see: GCB, 29 Sept. 1721; 18 Oct. 1721 and 7 Sept. 1754.

<sup>44</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> In the sixteenth century committees were at work on various matters. N. Bacon, *Annals of Ipswicke*, p. 382

residents, or to evaluate a piece of property that the Corporation intended either to buy or to sell.<sup>46</sup> Other committees were appointed to manage particular projects such as the erection of a new Shire Hall in 1698 or the reconstruction of Hanford bridge.<sup>47</sup> Some committees were less *ad hoc*. For example, a committee established in 1756 was to provide full-time management of the town water, and throughout the century there was normally a committee variously known as the "standing committee of the Town", the "audit committee," or the "accounts committee."<sup>48</sup> The Great Court Book records the establishment of committees to audit the accounts of various officers or, indeed, of other committees. Some committees were established to undertake tasks which were less managerial. In 1722 a nine-man group, which included no portmen and only two twentyfourmen, was assigned to assess foreign fines. Lacking members of the elite who normally filled committee positions, this committee may have been a quasi-policing body charged with identifying those liable to pay foreign fines and reporting names to the Great Court for possible prosecution.<sup>49</sup>

The 1835 report of the municipal commissioners suggests that the committees of the Corporation of Ipswich were either purely political instruments for the purposes of corrupt electioneering or moribund entities that had long failed in their duties as auditors.<sup>50</sup> E. J. Dawson has noted the importance of committees in the governance of other towns where, in some instances, they seem to have undertaken tasks with greater autonomy than was the case in Ipswich.<sup>51</sup> For the Webbs, the rise of committees was associated with the decline of the ancient principle of the obligation to serve and the communitarian character of governance under the court leet.<sup>52</sup> In this view, the rise of committees was a mark of modernity and a movement to the specialisation of government business that foreshadowed the bureaucratisation of the state.

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<sup>46</sup> For examples see: GCB, 25 June 1723; SRO/I, C1/5A/13, Ms. report of a committee meeting, 27th Feb. 1793; GCB, 25 May 1721.

<sup>47</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p.156; GCB, 14 Feb. 1782.

<sup>48</sup> GCB, 29 Sept. 1756; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 156; GCB, 27 Nov. 1722; GCB, 8 Sept. 1785.

<sup>49</sup> GCB, 27 Nov. 1722.

<sup>50</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2306, 2311.

<sup>51</sup> Dawson has generally found minutes only for the early nineteenth century. Dawson, "Finance", p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 125.



Alternatively, however, what are called "committees" in the eighteenth century records of Ipswich Corporation may not bear the weight of such a theory. It may be that these committees were simply the ancient means of practically dividing the labour of government as well as ensuring elite appropriation of the important business of government that conferred power.

One of the principal obstacles to determining the place of the committees in the process of government is that there is little evidence of them beyond the entries of the Great Court Book. It does not seem that any of the committees kept permanent records; certainly none have survived other than the transcriptions of parts of their reports in the Great Court Book. Given that other Corporation records survive so well, it would seem that the committees were not so substantial as to have produced the *sine qua non* of bureaucracy: a set of records. Moreover those Great Court Book entries relating to standing committees do not appear with the regularity to be expected from a permanent committee manifesting the continuity of a modern administrative system. The one exhibiting the best continuity was the committee to audit the Corporation's financial records. Various known as the "standing committee of the Towne" (1700), the committee "to examine the state of the Treasury" (1754) or "the committee to inquire into the state of the Accounts..." (1785), this committee seems to have lacked many of the essential characteristics of modern administration. Its composition varied considerably over time: in 1723 the quorum for the committee was nine and included the two bailiffs; in 1754 the quorum was three and it was a clavinger, not the bailiffs, whose attendance was mandatory; and by 1785 the presence of a senior Corporation officer appears to have been unnecessary. Further, as the members of these committees were drawn from the Portmen, Twentyfour and the freemen attending Great Court meetings, they were not normally paid, full-time servants of the Corporation (although by 1785 a man who joined the "standing committee of the Towne" was "to have the usual yearly fee").<sup>53</sup> Moreover, committees acted under very general mandates which, in practice, might vary considerably from one year to the next. The committees of

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<sup>53</sup> GCB, 13 Feb. 1700, 22 Oct. 1723, 29 Oct. 1754, and 8 Sept. 1785.

Ipswich lacked the identity, continuity, routine practice, and record keeping to be expected from institutions reflecting the Weberian notion of a modern ethos of governance.<sup>54</sup> In any case, there was no real continuity between these committees and the elements of the modern state which emerged after 1835. Both the municipal commissioners' 1835 report and the borough records suggest that the old Corporation's committees were less important in the years 1790 to 1833 than they had been prior to 1786. With the practices and records of those committees lost, it is difficult to view them as the progenitors of the post-reform institutions.

These committees were not mandated to manage affairs as agents or arms of the Corporation. They were always acting as delegates of the Great Court as a whole. Even though some committees were empowered to negotiate leases, undertake extensive works, and arrange property sales, they were normally required to report to the Great Court when important decisions were made or any money was involved. The 1758 water committee did have its own treasurer, but to expend sums greater than £5 he needed the authorisation of the Great Court.<sup>55</sup> It is of course possible that the committees (whose members normally included senior Corporation officers) actually made the decisions while the Great Court merely ratified them and so provided legal indemnification. But there is evidence that the Great Court did not passively accept the conclusions of its committees. When the 1785 accounts committee made eight recommendations for the better handling of the Corporation's finances, five were implemented by orders of the Great Court, two other matters were amended and another was referred to an existing committee on water leases which had been criticised by the accounts committee. Similarly, a committee inquiring into the water leases made several recommendations to the Great Court in 1757. During the next year, the Great Court adopted several of these recommendations without substantial alteration. But other

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<sup>54</sup> M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, eds., A.M. Henderson and T. Parsons, (New York, 1947), pp. 329-341; E. Kamenka, *Bureaucracy* (London, 1989), pp. 76-84.

<sup>55</sup> GCB, 11 Dec. 1722; 8 Sept. 1758.

proposals were expanded in the final orders of the Court, and still other orders dealt with matters overlooked by the committee.<sup>56</sup>

Although they did very important work, the committees were clearly auxiliaries of the Great Court. Despite models of institutional development and organisation in the central government and in other types of incorporation -- the trading corporations or, statutory authorities -- the committees of the Ipswich Corporation did not develop into the elements of a proto-bureaucracy.<sup>57</sup> Of course, in towns like Ipswich that sort of development was likely to have been neither desirable nor necessary. The volunteers who did the work of government at all levels would have been unwilling to act in the ways a more bureaucratised system would have required, and ratepayers would not have been keen to meet its cost. Amongst the governors, there simply was no interest in that much government.

#### 4. The Assembly

The Assembly, consisting of the portmen and the twentyfourmen, seems the likely executive body of the Corporation and, for most of the seventeenth century, it did play this role. It normally met twice each month to arrange matters which would go before the Great Court. Moreover, the Assembly undertook the administration of a wide range of the Corporation's affairs.<sup>58</sup> This also appears to be the picture in the early nineteenth century. William Batley, the Town Clerk for all but two years between 1785 and 1810, wrote that the Assembly considered in advance all matters which would go before the Great Court. The 1835 municipal commissioners' report acknowledged that the Assembly was purely a "deliberative body" with no "constitutional power," yet "in practice it has assumed and exercised the powers of a governing body." The

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<sup>56</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1785, 29 Sept. 1785 and 3 Feb. 1786; *ibid.* 29 Sept. 1757, 28 Feb. 1758, 8 Sept. 1758 and 29 Jan. 1759.

<sup>57</sup> J. Brewer, *Sinews of Power. War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York, 1988), pp. 69-79; Kamenka, *Bureaucracy*, p. 118.

Commissioners attention to the politics of the Assembly in the 1820s reflected their belief in its centrality to the town's government. Writing in 1830, G.R. Clarke noted that the Assembly undertook various tasks including the setting of leases of Corporation property.<sup>59</sup>

But the position of the Assembly in the eighteenth century seems to have been different. The records in the Assembly Book do not indicate that the business of the body routinely involved all or even most of the matters which would be taken-up by subsequent Great Courts. A surviving notice and advance agenda for meetings of the Assembly and the Great Court to be held in 1758 does not indicate any connection between the business of the two courts.<sup>60</sup> The Assembly met too infrequently to have routinely set the Great Court's agenda, let alone make the real decisions for the Great Court to subsequently rubber-stamp. As Table 2.2 indicates, in 1724 and 1725 the Great Court met between two or three times as often as the Assembly. Great Court meetings continued to be much more frequent in the period 1755-60, while in the period 1791-5 the gap narrowed, although there were still more Great Courts than Assemblies. Indeed, the Assembly's two or three meetings a year in the 1750s was a substantial decline from the seventeenth century when twenty or more might have been held.<sup>61</sup> Other roles of the Assembly seem to have declined as well. Matters such as some market regulation or the admission of attorneys to the Court of Small Pleas, had either lapsed or passed to the Great Court.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> M. Reed, "Economic Structure", p. 90.

<sup>59</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Bately, "Collections...", f. 120; *RCMC*, p. 2298; and Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 428.

<sup>60</sup> SROI, HD490/1, Notice to Ellis Brand, MS Letters Collection.

<sup>61</sup> SROI, C6/1/7-8, Assembly Book, 1723 to 1794, ; M. Reed, *ibid*.

<sup>62</sup> N. Bacon, *Annals of Ipswich*, p. 426; examples of the appointment of attorneys in the eighteenth century can be found in GCB, 4 May 1700, 26 June 1724, 8 Sept. 1756 and 8 of Sept. 1786.

<b>Table 2.2: Meetings of the Great Court and the Assembly</b> (annual averages per sample period)			
	<b>Great Court Meetings</b>	<b>Assembly Meetings</b>	<b>Assembly Meetings Within Two Weeks Preceding a Great Court Meeting</b>
<b>1724-5</b>	8	3	2.5
<b>1755-9</b>	4.8	2.6	1.8
<b>1791-5</b>	3	2.2	1.4
<i>Source: SRO/I, C5/14/7-10, GCB; SRO/I, C6/1 Assembly Book.</i>			

As will be discussed below, partisan divisions within the town's elite came to be centred, from the 1750s, on the Portmen and Twentyfour.<sup>63</sup> With its constituent elements divided, the Assembly could not be the centre of elite political control as it had been in the seventeenth century. Accordingly, the Assembly became a less important element of town government as those with political influence tried to exercise it through the Great Court. The eighteenth-century Assembly did, however, continue to play an important role in the selection of charity officers and awarding scholarships or places in charitable foundations. Certainly, the value of the charities in terms of the patronage, perquisites, and advantages which could be taken in handling their cash balances, was something that governing elites sought to control, and it was greatly facilitated by the management of the charities in the Assembly. But the doings of the Assembly were not beyond the scrutiny of the Great Court. In 1747, for example, after some controversy erupted over the election and salary of a new master for the grammar school, the Assembly's records were copied and presented to a Great Court meeting where the matter was thrashed out again.<sup>64</sup>

However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the role of the Assembly was beginning to resemble that described by nineteenth century observers. The Assembly had occasionally been ordered to act as a kind of committee for the Great Court. But even as late as 1793 when acting as a leasing committee, the Assembly did not simply

<sup>63</sup> Canning, *Gifts and Legacies*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Assembly Book, 13 Feb. 1747.

present the Great Court with a finished agreement to validate. Like other committees of the Great Court, its recommendations were variously accepted, amended and rejected.<sup>65</sup> After 1793, however, the Assembly assumed a stronger executive role. When the new Improvement Commission demanded that the Corporation demolish the shambles in late 1793, it was the Assembly which effectively dealt with the matter. The first notice of the issue in the Corporation records appears in the Assembly Book, which detailed the terms of an agreement with a developer who would replace the shambles with a new structure. Both the *Ipswich Journal* and the Great Court Book suggest that the Great Court simply ratified the Assembly plan.<sup>66</sup> Two years later, again reacting to pressure from the Improvement Commission, the Great Court empowered the Assembly to make whatever repairs and alterations to the Moot Hall which it deemed necessary. Substantial work was subsequently undertaken and funds disbursed without further reference to the Great Court.<sup>67</sup>

The Assembly's assumption of this executive authority was commensurate with the lessening frequency and importance of the Great Court. Both developments depended on the changing pattern of politics in the last decade of the eighteenth century. For most of the period of this study, however, the Assembly cannot be cast in the role of the Corporation's executive body. It met too infrequently and its meetings did not engage a range of issues co-extensive with the business of the Corporation. It may be that this reflects deficiencies of the Assembly Book and other evidence of the Assembly's activities. But if many meetings were held for which there is not so much as an attendance list in the Assembly Book, then it is doubtful that these can be considered occasions of a formal body of governance. Moreover, if there were other meetings and the Assembly was active in other ways, there is little trace of it the Corporation records or other evidence of government in this period.

## **5. The Borough Sessions and the Court Leet**

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<sup>65</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1793 and 1st Jan. 1794.

<sup>66</sup> Assembly Book, 9 Dec. 1793; GCB, 1st Jan. 1794; and *IJ*, 4 Jan. 1794.

<sup>67</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1796 and Assembly Book, 12 Oct. 1796.

The central powers of town government were vested in distinct institutions. While the Great Court was the crucial venue for the management of corporation affairs, including the selection of officers and the deliberation on a wide range of issues, the Borough Sessions possessed substantial judicial power and considerable administrative authority. The sphere of the justices' authority was determined by the common law, statute and the instructions of the central government. Whether sitting in Sessions or acting on their own authority, the borough justices of the peace acted, formally at least, without reference to the freemen, the Great Court, or any other Corporation body. Yet although their jurisdiction and the exercise of their authority was independent of the rest of the Corporation, the selection of the justices was very much a matter of Corporation politics. The Great Court elected the recorder and the bailiffs who, as *ex officio* chairmen of the Sessions, selected the remaining four magistrates from the portmen. Moreover, in practice, there were instances when the Great Court and the Sessions would act to reinforce one another, while on different occasions one body might assert some measure of authority over the other. For the greater part of the period of this study, however, the Great Court and Sessions were normally complementary instruments of the governing elite.

The criminal jurisdiction of the General Sessions of the Peace at Ipswich extended to all offences committed within the boundaries of the Borough and was exclusive of the county magistrates. As in many other boroughs, however, capital offences were sent for trial at the Assize Sessions.<sup>68</sup> Much of the business of the Borough Sessions consisted of the administration of the statutes relating to poor relief, highways, and various forms of moral or economic regulation.<sup>69</sup> It is difficult to be certain of the extent and nature of the government of the justices because only the records of the General Sessions survive; the many summary judgements, orders and administrative business of the justices acting singularly or in petty sessions can only

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<sup>68</sup> RCMC, p. 2314; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 294.

<sup>69</sup> The activities of county and borough sessions have been the subject of many works ranging from eighteenth-century justices' manuals to modern scholarly monographs. For the Webbs' account, see Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, especially pp. 349-58; S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act*, vol. i: *The Parish and the County* (London, 1907; reprinted 1963), 2; Landau, *Justices*, and Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*.

occasionally be discerned when they were subsequently entered into the General Sessions records.

<b>Table 2.3: <i>The Activity of the General Sessions</i></b> (annual averages per sample period)				
	<b>Recognizances Issued</b>	<b>Poor Rate Appeals</b>	<b>Other Orders</b>	<b>Trials</b>
<b>1726-1730</b>	21.6	26	4.6	2
<b>1755-1759</b>	10	31	3.4	1.2
<b>1791-1795</b>	16.2	na	11	4
<i>Sources: SRO/I, C8/4/9-11, Sessions Book, 1720-1795.</i>				

The justices were certainly the most powerful officers in the government of the town, and there is strong evidence that their power grew over the course of the eighteenth century. While urban magistrates may have lacked the social prestige and, perhaps, the economic leverage of the landed gentlemen on the county bench, it seems likely that they exercised their authority with equal, if not greater, effectiveness. As the Webbs have observed, compared with their rural counterparts, the borough justices had jurisdiction over a much smaller geographical area. Accordingly, they were able to assert their authority more persistently, and with greater knowledge of their jurisdiction.<sup>70</sup> The justices of Ipswich were normally resident in the town. The most active justices, generally the two bailiffs, also presided over various other borough courts and proceedings. On any of these occasions, or in the course of the daily conduct of their personal affairs in the town, the magistrates could act under the authority granted to single justices or those sitting in petty sessions. Moreover, as the town's magistracy was smaller with fewer active justices than that of a county, it had the potential to act with more cohesion. Only six justices were named to join the recorder on the bench, and typically only five attended the General Sessions in the years 1721-34 while only three or four were active in the 1750s and 1790s.

<sup>70</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 387-8.



**Table 2.4: *Justices of the Peace Court Attendance and Recognizances Signing***

	1721-5	1755-9	1791-5
Ave. No. of JPs Attending One or More Sessions Meetings (per year)	5.6	3.8	3.6
Ave. No. of JPs Signing at Least One Recognizance (per year)	4.8	3	na

*Source:* Sessions Book, 1720-1795, (SROI, C8/4/9-11)

The selection of the assistant magistrates by the bailiff/chief magistrates, who themselves were normally political allies, made for a unified bench, closely engaged with the community over which it had jurisdiction. Under these circumstances it would be more difficult to evade the authority of a particular magistrate or to choose to take a complaint to one presumed to be more sympathetic.

Several historians have observed the growing importance of petty sessions in county government. It has been argued that, between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, the authority of justices grew as the petty sessions either substantially augmented the meetings of the county quarter sessions or, indeed, took over much of their business.<sup>71</sup> Urban justices too would have experienced an enhancement of their power by this means. Moreover, the statutory extension of the justices' power continued throughout the eighteenth century. The Webbs saw the Borough Sessions bench as "virtually a local Legislature" because, in some towns, justices applied poor rate funds to matters normally beyond the legally prescribed sphere of Sessions business, including many tasks which, prior to 1689, had been the business of other corporation bodies. The general effect of this was, the Webbs assert,

<sup>71</sup> S. and B. Webb, *Parish and County*, pp. 400-1, 419, 552-3, 529; P. King, "Crime, Law and Society in Essex, 1740-1820" (Univ. of Cambridge, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1982), pp. 277-9; Landau, *Justices*, p. 207-39, 247-53; J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (Harlow, Essex, 1984), pp. 25, 89-90; A. Fletcher, *Reform in the Provinces. The Government of Stuart England* (New Haven, 1986), pp. 125-9, 132-3; Shoemaker, *Prosecution...*, pp. 202, 269.

to shift the centre of government in the boroughs from the common councils to the Sessions bench.<sup>72</sup>

While this sort of development did occur in some towns, it was neither inevitable nor particularly characteristic of the eighteenth century. Peter Clark has established that before 1640 the Gloucester common council was in decline, while the Sessions bench emerged as a central institution of a new town oligarchy. Yet R.W. Greaves found that the magistracy of eighteenth-century Leicester was powerless to effect its intended reforms because of hostility from other town institutions.<sup>73</sup> Much depended on the constitution and the pattern of politics in a particular town. In Ipswich the Sessions was a vital component of the government, but it did not entirely supplant the other courts of the Corporation.

The Webbs also suggested that the Sessions took over the business of the courts leet.<sup>74</sup> But in Ipswich this was only partly true. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Headborough's Court met as the Court Leet formally once each year.<sup>75</sup> But its officers were active in inspecting the Town's streets for muck, paving defects and nuisances, on average five times a year during the period 1725-34. During each year of that period, the Court typically dealt with about 175 muck, nuisance and paving presentments or orders relating to other matters. This volume of business is sustained until the late 1740s when it began to decline rapidly so that by the late 1750s as few as two such matters may have been dealt with annually (although there were still occasional "enforcement waves" such as in 1759 and 1760 when thirty presentments or orders were entered).<sup>76</sup> Paving and muck presentments in the Headboroughs' Verdict Book diminished from the late 1740s until they ceased to appear after 1760. The Court Leet remains active, however, hearing nuisance presentments, settling real estate

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<sup>72</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 377-90.

<sup>73</sup> P. Clark, "The Ramoth-Gilead of The Good: Urban Change and Political Radicalism at Gloucester 1540-1640" in P. Clark et al. (eds.) *The English Commonwealth, 1547-1640* (Leicester, 1982), reprinted in Jonathan Barry (ed.), *The Tudor and Stuart Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1530-1688* (Harlow, Essex, 1990), pp. 259-60; P. Clark, "The Civic Leaders of Gloucester 1580-1800" in P. Clark, *Transformation*, p. 325; R.W. Greaves, *The Corporation of Leicester, 1689-1836* (Oxford, 1939), p. 25.

<sup>74</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 349.

<sup>75</sup> The sixteen members of the Twentyfour who were designated "headboroughs" attended the Court Leet, and the bailiffs and coroners were also normally present.

<sup>76</sup> SROI, C7/2/9, Headboroughs' Verdict Book.

disputes and enforcing the Corporation's land use regulations. Unfortunately, the evidence of Headborough and Court Leet activity diminishes after the 1760s. The Headboroughs' Verdict Book ends in 1765 and no successor volume survives. However, the "Dirt Books" -- rough notebooks in which paving, nuisance and muck inspection records appear to have been initially made -- suggest that the headboroughs were active in these matters until at least 1789. Moreover, the municipal commissioners reported that the Court Leet had been held until 1793 when the Improvement Commission took over its responsibilities.<sup>77</sup>

Although the Borough General Sessions had received presentments relating to paving and muck throughout the period, these rarely exceeded more than three or four per year. These appear to be either the final assertions of official pressure on individuals who had defied previous attempts to make them pay or act in respect of road maintenance, or they were made against parishes or the Corporation. It may be that after the 1740s paving and street cleansing were increasingly being dealt with by the petty sessions. Accordingly, these matters would fade from the records of the Court Leet. A statute of 1767 empowered the General Sessions to appoint scavengers and impose a borough rate of up to 6d in the pound for the cleansing and maintenance of the streets. Early the following year the Ipswich Sessions, citing the Act, appointed a scavenger for each parish and set a rate of 4d. It may be that the scavengers, or like officers, had been hired by the Sessions to attend to the roads since the 1750s when that task seems to have passed from the Court Leet.<sup>78</sup> In any case, although paving and cleansing were no longer significant matters for the Court Leet after 1750, it remained active dealing with nuisances, the arbitration of real estate disputes and the enforcement of Corporation land use regulations.

Although the Borough Sessions do appear to have assumed some of the business of the Court Leet after the middle of the eighteenth century, this does not presage a take-

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<sup>77</sup> SROI, C7/2/3&4, Headboroughs' Dirt Books, "A" and "B"; *RCMC*, p. 2317..

<sup>78</sup> 7 Geo. III c.42 s.44 (1767); SROI, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 25th April 1768. This Act did not create scavengers for the first time -- they had been active in each parish in the reign of Henry VIII -- but the 1767 Statute first allowed rates to support scavengers' activities. See Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 178; Corfield, *Impact*, p. 177.

over of the government of the town by an aldermanic (portman) oligarchy operating through the Sessions bench. As discussed below, the political life of Ipswich was not conducive to such a development.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of whether the portmen or some other faction dominated the town's politics, the relationships between the Sessions, the Great Court and the other borough courts were generally unchanged in terms of their respective types and volumes of business. For the most part, the activities of the Great Court and the Sessions operated in support of each other as parts of the same system of governance. Thus, in 1759 after the Sessions had some difficulty collecting the bridge rate, the Great Court ordered the indemnification of the constables against suits arising from distraining the goods of those persons owing rate payments. In 1722 the General Sessions ordered that the Corporation should be reimbursed for the £53 16s 8d it spent on the emergency repairs of the town bridges -- a matter which, at this time, would have normally been the responsibility of the Sessions.

Such institutional reinforcement did not, however, obstruct the Sessions from executing its authority against the Corporation. Thus, in 1723 the Corporation was presented and ordered to make repairs to the pavements in front of the shire hall and on Foundation Street.<sup>80</sup> For most of the eighteenth century the Sessions and the Great Court functioned as effective components of the same system of government. The magistracy did not emerge as a separate power base taking over the functions of other borough courts, and while the Sessions were of great importance, they did not supplant the Great Court or render it a nullity. The Great Court was not to be easily subordinated to the General Sessions because, as noted above, it directly selected three members of the bench two of whom, in turn, selected the remaining four. As well as regularly appointing the justices, there were a few occasions when the Great Court passed extraordinary orders bearing on the composition and conduct of the Sessions. Political faction fighting in the Great Court seems to have been behind its order to remove Charles Whitaker from the office of recorder in 1704. But the Great Court might also act to ensure the Borough session's effectiveness. In 1759, it was felt that the business

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<sup>79</sup> See below pp. 241-7.

<sup>80</sup> GCB, 31st Oct. 1759; Sessions Book, 13 Dec. 1722; Sessions Book, 18 Dec. 1723.

of the Borough Sessions was unnecessarily delayed because the recorder did not live in Ipswich; accordingly, the Great Court ordered the recorder, Sir Richard Lloyd, to appoint a resident deputy.<sup>81</sup> Thus, because the Sessions and the Great Court were never completely captured by opposing factions, they do not accord with the Webb's model of one body supplanting the other. The nature of officeholding and Ipswich's constitutional arrangements helped to prevent this.

## 6. Other Corporation Courts

While the Corporation's most important formal decision-making occasions were the Great Court and the meetings of the General Sessions, other courts, although more restricted in their jurisdiction, were also significant for the government of the town. Certainly the most active of the Corporation's bodies were the Court of Small Pleas, the Portman's Mote and the Petty Court, which were jointly held and whose records appear together in the same books.<sup>82</sup> Typically meeting between 30 and 40 times per year, these Sessions undertook many administrative matters at the direction of the Great Court. Amongst their business was the swearing in of officeholders, dealing with apprenticeship matters, enrolling agreements such as mortgages and conveyances, and applying the Corporation's seal. These courts also undertook to enforce the orders of the royal courts. Thus, the town's sergeants at mace might be instructed to effect a recovery of property on the order of a higher court.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the Petty Court's most important function, and certainly that which generated the greater portion of its business, arose from its cognisance of pleas real and personal. Most of the actions brought in the Court of Small Pleas were for the recovery of debts such as overdue loans, unsettled bills, and sums due to the executors of estates. The value of these actions could be as little as 25s or as much as £130, but more typically the range would be between £3 and £20.

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<sup>81</sup> Serj. Whitaker's Case, "Regina v. Bailiffs of Ipswich"; G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 72-6; GCB, 8 Sept. 1759.

<sup>82</sup> SROI, C5/13/19-22, Ipswich Petty Court Books.

<sup>83</sup> SROI, C5/13/21, Petty Court Book, 18 Feb. 1764 and 10 March, 1764.

<b>Table 2.5: <i>The Activity of the Petty Court/ Court of Small Pleas</i></b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Meetings Held</b>	<b>Non-Routine Transactions*</b>
1725	34	207
1730	44	84
1734	31	99
Average	36.3	130.0
1755	31	122
1760	23	55
1764	33	76
Average	29.0	84.3
1785	39	87
1790	48	60
1794	39	49
Average	42.0	65.3

\* Does not include freemen admissions, apprenticeship enrolments, or the swearing in of Corporation officers.  
Source: SROI, C5/13/19-22, Petty Court Book, 1720-1804.

It has been suggested that the costs of bringing actions in borough courts like Ipswich's Court of Small Pleas discouraged their use.<sup>84</sup> The place of borough institutions in private dispute settlement will be considered more fully below.<sup>85</sup> There certainly does appear to be a gradual long-term decline in the number of actions brought before Ipswich's Court of Small Pleas. But, as Table 2.5 suggests, this decline was gradual and there was considerable fluctuation in the yearly volumes of the Court's business. Of those sampled, the busiest year of the last decade of this study was comparable to sample years in the 1730s. Given the commercial and demographic development of the community, this must be considered as something of a relative decline, yet it is clear that the Petty Court/ Court of Small Pleas remained an important institution. As the town did not acquire a court of requests until 1807, the Court of Small Pleas remained the principal venue for debt settlement throughout the eighteenth

<sup>84</sup> C.W. Brooks, "Interpersonal Conflict and Social Tension: Civil Litigation in England, 1640-1830" in A. Beier, D. Cannadine and J. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society: Essays in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 374-5, 382.

<sup>85</sup> See below pp. 259-64, 273.

century. Meeting at least fortnightly, with one of the Bailiffs normally presiding, this court was a central institution of local authority.

Ipswich's Admiralty Court was important as the instrument through which jurisdiction was exercised over the port and the Orwell River. Charters granted in 1464 and 1518 gave the Corporation admiralty jurisdiction and rights of escheator excluding the authority of crown and county officials on the Orwell from Ipswich to the open sea.<sup>86</sup> The Admiral's Court was presided over by the bailiffs or their nominee, and it acted on the presentments of a special jury selected by the clerk of the court. In theory, the Admiral's Court had cognisance of a wide range of matters including civil actions, criminal offences and violations of Corporation bylaws at sea. The Court was also to regulate fishing and the oyster beds, as well as maintain sea-marks and ensure that the navigation of the river was not obstructed.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, in the absence of surviving records it is difficult to assess the activities of Ipswich's Admiralty Court. The 1835 report of the municipal commissioners suggests that, while the Admiral's Court was then still held in Ipswich, it was of doubtful relevance because it met so infrequently and was unable to enforce its orders. The Webbs assert that, over the course of the eighteenth century, the legislative and administrative functions of the admiral's courts in most towns had passed to their corporate bodies.<sup>88</sup> The Great Court Book does include some entries relating to the admiral's jurisdiction, but there are too few orders here or elsewhere among the surviving Corporation records to suggest that the business of the Admiral's Court had been taken-over by another body.

There is evidence that throughout the eighteenth century the Corporation was keen to assert its right to this jurisdiction. In 1722 the Great Court ordered counsel be consulted as to the nature and extent of that jurisdiction, and the bailiffs were ordered to perambulate its bounds. In 1761 another perambulation was ordered, and in 1778 an action was successfully launched at the Essex Assize against the Corporation of Harwich for defying Ipswich's admiralty rights.<sup>89</sup> In 1805 an Act was obtained

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<sup>86</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 26-7; Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 88-9; *RCMC*, p. 2317.

<sup>87</sup> N. Bacon, *Annals of Ipswicke*, pp. 246, 261, 270, 508; Webb, *Parish and County*, p. 359.

<sup>88</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 359; *RCMC*, p. 2317.

<sup>89</sup> GCB, 1720-1795; *Ancient and Modern Perambulations*, pp.18-28; *RCMC*, p. 2317.

establishing a commission to improve the port and better maintain the river. This suggests that the administration of the Admiralty Court was found wanting, and it might be seen, together with establishment of the Court of Requests (1807) and the Improvement Commission (1793), as part of an attempt re-establish local authority in vital areas where the Corporation, paralysed by the state of its politics, had ceased to effectively govern. The Admirals Court, like the Court of Small Pleas and the Court Leet might have been effective up until the later 1780s when it succumbed to new developments in the town's politics. This must, however, remain largely a matter of speculation in the absence of better records. What is clear is that the Admiral's court provided the town's governors with another type of authority and an instrument for its application. It was clearly an autonomous body in that its legal foundations were distinct from those of other Corporation courts, yet, as the bailiffs were its presiding officers, it could be closely linked to the town's general system of government.

## **7. Conclusions**

As a collection of nearly autonomous courts, the Ipswich Corporation's institutional form embodied conceptions and practices of government which were quite remote from those of its nineteenth and early twentieth-century critics. The plurality of authority founded on various charters, statutes, bylaws and ancient usage, together with the diverse purposes, jurisdictions and composition of the borough's courts, presented a system of governance quite contrary to the liberal, utilitarian or progressive ideals implicit in the critiques by the 1835 Municipal Commissioners' Report or the Webbs. But to assess an eighteenth-century municipal corporation in terms of such assumptions obscures the nature of this institution.

While the ambiguities of the charters were the focus of some conflicts in the eighteenth century, those disputes did not seriously destabilise the government of the town, nor were they substantially different from the sorts of conflicts which can arise over the provisions of more systematic, integrated constitutions. Moreover, the



flexibility of the charters, which afforded considerable latitude in the practice of government, may have helped to forestall the acquisition of new statutory authorities. Of course, the situation in Ipswich was not characteristic of every borough. Much of the continuing effectiveness of government there depended on the pattern of the town's politics and the particular features of its constitution.

The borough courts of Ipswich made for a system of government which was potentially quite open and afforded a comparatively wide diffusion of power. For most of the eighteenth century, the Great Court retained control over much of the Corporation's business. Little real power formally devolved to its committees, and its influence over the Sessions Bench was considerable. Amongst the lesser courts and the Great Court's committees, the delegation of authority was normally of brief duration and limited scope. While the lesser courts were actively engaged in important business, their jurisdiction was confined and normally subordinate to that of the Great Court. The size and character of the Great Court, together with the diffusion of power through these various bodies, suggests that leadership and cohesion could be problems in this system of government. There was no formal specification of the relationship between the various courts; and little provision was made for an executive other than the mandated presence of the bailiffs at most courts, and the practical necessity that the clerk also attend. As argued below,<sup>90</sup> the patterns of officeholding helped to provide the Town's government with cohesion and leadership.

While this structure of government encouraged contentious politics, it also made factional domination difficult. Much power resided in the Great Court but its large membership posed obstacles to persistent control. The dispersal of decision-making amongst the other courts further obstructed any domination by a particular faction. The Bailiffs who, as noted, presided in all the principal bodies of the Corporation, were elected by the Great Court. The Headboroughs, who administered the Court Leet, were selected from the Twentyfour. Although the Portmen supplied four of seven JPs, that selection was made by the Bailiffs. Thus, to control the important courts, a faction

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<sup>90</sup> See pp. 106-7.

needed substantial followings in the Portmen, the Twentyfour and the Great Court -- a difficult achievement given that the former two bodies were self-electing and the Great Court was so large.

The constitution and institutional features of the government of Ipswich did not substantially change until late in the eighteenth century. Prior to the Improvement Commission in 1793, the constitutional basis of authority changed little, except as various statutes gradually augmented the power of the Magistrates. It has been shown that the business of the Court Leet appeared to diminish with respect to the maintenance of roads after the middle of the eighteenth century; and it seems probable that the Petty Sessions had assumed that task. Little other change seems to have occurred until the last two decades of the eighteenth century. It was then that nearly every court of the Corporation shows a decline in most types of activity. To account for the institutional stability characteristic of most of the century, and its rapid decline late in the century, it will be necessary to look more closely at the course of politics. But the process of government must be more fully explored before effects of political contention can be assessed. Accordingly, to understand how the cohesion and leadership vital to the system was achieved, it is necessary to now examine the offices through which much of the business of government was conducted.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE SENIOR OFFICES OF THE CORPORATION

While the courts and assemblies were important as tribunals and occasions of deliberation, the routine business of government was carried out by the officers of the Corporation. Given the ad hoc and episodic character of the Great Court's committees and, in the absence of anything resembling permanent departments or agencies of government, the Corporation's various offices were the vital instruments of government. This chapter examines the senior and administrative offices of the corporation to understand more fully how public authority was exercised. The selection of officeholders, the distribution of authority and responsibility, together with the means of control and supervision will be examined in order to understand the nature of this organisation and how it was suited for particular forms of politics and governance.

### 1. The Bailiffs

The bailiffs were indisputably the heads of the Corporation, but the extent of their power and their place in the process of government is less obvious. The scope of the bailiffs' activities and the independence with which they exercised their authority are vital features in assessing the character of their leadership. But are the bailiffs better understood as administrator-managers or, alternatively, as chief executives who made policy and adjudicated important matters on their own initiative? The character of the office of bailiff has important bearings on: the nature of the decision-making process; the structure of the governing elite; and the character of politics. Ipswich was the largest of about twenty corporations, which included Cardiff, Southwold, and Scarborough, where two bailiffs acted as joint leaders of equal rank.<sup>1</sup> Each year two men were selected from the freemen to serve a one-year term of office as bailiffs. They took the same oath of office, and the charters made no distinction between their respective authority and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> The Bailiffs were not only seen as equals; in a

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<sup>1</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 309 n2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. vol. ii, 309, 318, 320; see also *Principal Charters; The Oaths of Office*.

sense, they together constituted a single entity. The attendance of both was required to validate meetings of the Great Court and the borough sessions; and indeed, it was felt that there must always be two bailiffs appointed and serving if the charter was not to be forfeited.<sup>3</sup> Eighteenth-century sources occasionally refer to the "senior" and "junior" bailiffs. These designations appear to have been marks of prestige based on years of membership of the Portmen or Twentyfour. They did not uniformly denote any difference in the exercise of real authority. Moreover, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, antiquaries and commentators alike remarked that the power of the two bailiffs was equal.<sup>4</sup>

In practice, the two bailiffs normally acted as joint leaders. Election at the same Great Court was likely to assure the bailiffs' compatibility and established their ability to work together.<sup>5</sup> Both were men of influence in the town and took leading roles in the management of the Corporation's affairs.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally, one might appear to be the more influential figure of the two, but in only one instance, during the controversial leadership of Cooper Gravenor, who sought to dominate the town in the first decade of the eighteenth century, did one of the bailiffs virtually cease to act. One of Gravenor's many opponents charged that as bailiff:

...he has taken care to get an easy person for his colleague, that wants experience and has more money than sense and [Gravenor] tells him he [the other bailiff] shall have the honour of a Scarlet Gown and Mace, but for himself will do all the business for which, besides all the other perquisites, takes the whole  $\text{£}50$  allowed the 2 bailiffs for their Table to himself, and so his partner is excused from treating, as well of

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<sup>3</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", f. 48.

<sup>4</sup> See the entries for the bailiffs' elections, SRO/I, C5/14/8-10, GCB. The dates of admission to the Portmen and Twentyfour are listed in the SRO/I, C6/1/7-8, Assembly Book. One early eighteenth-century view that only portmen could be bailiffs maintained that one bailiff should be senior (i.e. longer serving) member of that body while the other should be one of its more recent recruits. This was not adhered to in practice. See: "Gravenor's Proceedings", f. 259; Nathaniel Bacon noted no distinction in the bailiffs duties. See: Bacon, *Annals of Ipswich*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Freemen could vote for two candidates, and surviving poll books suggest that they normally cast their votes for politically allied pairs. For examples see: SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls taken upon different occasions...in electing Burgesses to serve in Parliament for the said Corporation choosing Bailiffs, Recorder, Honorary Freemen, Schoolmaster, Town home keeper" (Devereux Edgar (ed.) ?, unpublished manuscript); *The Poll for Bailives of Ipswich...1754* (Ipswich, 1754).

<sup>6</sup> See below pp. 111-31.

business which suits his purpose exactly for by these means he remains master of the town...<sup>7</sup>

After Gravenor was driven from power, no single bailiff would again so completely dominate the governance of the Corporation. Although one of the bailiffs elected in a given year may have enjoyed more personal prestige than his colleague, when it came to bearing the weight of their joint responsibilities and performing their prescribed duties, the bailiffs of eighteenth-century Ipswich generally worked closely together.

The chief officers of the Corporation of Ipswich were formally styled: "Bayliff, Escheator, Admirall and Clerk of the Market". This collection of titles reflects the diverse responsibilities as agents of the Crown, justices of the peace, managers of corporation property, regulators of the river and supervisors of the town's markets. Certainly their first duty was to preside over the Borough's courts. The sessions, the Great Court and sessions of any other court at which officers were to be sworn, could not be held without the attendance of both bailiffs.<sup>8</sup> Since the formal role of the Assembly was confined to the deliberation and recommendation of measures to be put before the Great Court, its meetings could be held with only one of the bailiffs present; however, both bailiffs attended all but nine of the 113 Assembly meetings held between the years 1723 and 1795.

Both the 1835 Municipal Commissioners' report and William Batley, a town clerk in the 1780s and 1790s, maintained that the Petty Court could not be held without at least one bailiff present.<sup>9</sup> But it is uncertain that this was so throughout the eighteenth century. With the exception of the period of Samuel Kilderbee's clerkship, 1755-67, neither the Petty Court records nor other sources were kept consistently enough to indicate who the presiding officers were. A sample of the years 1755, 1760 and 1764 does, however, indicate that one or both of the bailiffs attended slightly less than half the meetings of the petty court.<sup>10</sup> It seems clear that, at mid-century at least, the bailiffs'

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<sup>7</sup> "Gravenor's Proceedings", f.259.

<sup>8</sup> *Principal Charters*; RCMC, p. 2295.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2296, 2317. BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 48.

<sup>10</sup> SRO/I, C5/13/19-22, Petty Court Books.

presence was not necessary to the valid operation of the court. Their role as commissioners of oaths, would account for the bailiffs' attendance on those occasions when officials were to be sworn into various offices, but they also attended some, though not all, meetings dealing with the more routine debt settlement business of the court. There was no clear pattern in the value of these debt cases or the status of the litigants to suggest why the bailiffs were present on some occasions and not on others. It may simply be that they attended when they were able or so inclined and the coroners presided otherwise. The situation with respect to the Court Leet and Headboroughs' Court appears to have been similar. William Batley notes that while the Courts Leet were once held in the presence of the bailiffs, this was no longer so when he wrote in the early nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Records of these courts are irregular and cannot be used systematically after 1765, but in the sample years 1725-34 one or both of the bailiffs attended nearly two-thirds of the Court's meetings, and at least one of them was present at nearly three-quarters of the sessions held in the years 1756-64.

Moreover, as Admirals of the port, the bailiffs presided over the court that regulated shipping, heard maritime civil cases, and enforced the corporation's jurisdiction within the waters described by charters issued under Edward VI and Henry VIII. Because the records of this court do not survive, the bailiffs' assertion of this authority is not well documented. Occasional orders in the Great Court Book give some indication of the duties of the admirals. There were directions that the "Bayliffs and such other persons as they shall think fitt do go the bounds of the Admiralty Jurisdiction of this Corporation". Such orders usually ensured that the expenses of the bailiffs and their companions would be met. This normally involved the bailiffs treating those who went the bounds with them to a dinner which was probably a pleasant affair at a local inn. But enforcement of the admiralty jurisdiction was not entirely an excuse for treating. On more than one occasion the bailiffs faced down or fled in the face of angry and armed opponents of their authority at Harwich. The threats of violence and

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<sup>11</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f.48.

litigation provoked on these occasions may explain the infrequency with which the bailiffs enforced this aspect of the admiralty jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup>

The bailiffs derived further influence over the process of government through their authority to appoint and supervise other officers and servants of the Corporation. The first and most important appointment the bailiffs made upon the commencement of their term of office was the selection of four portmen to serve as assistant justices on the sessions bench. Although the recorder was appointed by the Great Court, he could not be removed from office without the concurrence of the bailiffs.<sup>13</sup> The bailiffs' magisterial influence was further extended by their power to make the annual appointment of the four serjeants at mace, whose task it was to serve legal documents and implement other orders of the justices. Prior to 1754, the Sergeants were normally selected by the Great Court. After that year, however, they were routinely appointed by the bailiffs without reference to the Great Court.<sup>14</sup> In addition, it should be noted that from time to time the bylaws permitted the bailiffs to appoint minor officials, occasional servants, and persons employed for specific tasks such as the maintenance and repair of Corporation property. Thus, after an investigation and reforming of the procedures for the collection of town duties on coal landed at the Corporation's quay, the bailiffs were empowered to hire men to collect the dues. Similarly, the bailiffs were at various times instructed to hire people to clean the river or to repair the town's bridges.<sup>15</sup>

The bailiffs were the chairmen of most Great Court committees or at least, until late in the century, their attendance was necessary for committee meetings to be quorate. Considerable power could accrue from their positions on auditing committees, or those charged with the on-going management of Corporation assets such as the town's water supply. The bailiffs were often instructed to undertake the management of occasional projects such as the construction or repair of the Corporation's mills, port facilities, the grammar school, or buildings on farms leased by the Corporation's charities. Early in

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<sup>12</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, p. 360 n1; Cross, *Justice*, pp. 13-14, 29; *Principal Charters*; GCB, 19 Sept. 1721; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 110.

<sup>14</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1723, 29 Sept. 1754.

<sup>15</sup> For examples see: GCB, 13 Aug. 1729, 28 July 1757, 21 June 1758, 6 June 1760.

the eighteenth century, the bailiffs had very close, direct involvement in completing the work on some projects. In 1725 the Great Court requested that the bailiffs, John Cornelius and John Sparowe, draw up a plan for repairing the Common Quay and Crane House at the port. The bailiffs' proposals were accepted, and they were empowered to hire workmen and exercise their discretion in the use of materials and methods to make the repairs. The Great Court was to be kept informed of the measures taken and its approval was necessary for major cash expenditures or the use of Corporation assets (such as timber from its farms), but the work was essentially under the bailiffs' management. Moreover, Cornelius and Sparowe financed the work, and were eventually reimbursed by rental fees collected on the quay and its crane.<sup>16</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, the bailiffs' personal involvement in such work was much reduced. Thus, for the repairs of Handford Mill in 1754, they were to review building contractors' tenders and report with recommendations to the Great Court. Thereafter, the bailiffs were to ensure that the contractors kept costs down and met the Corporation's expectations with respect to the speed and quality of the work.<sup>17</sup> Occasionally, bailiffs negotiated the sale or purchase of Corporation lands. In September 1721, the Corporation intended to sell Handford Hall Estate for £2,000. A sale had been arranged by a committee, but Cooper Gravenor, the more active of the two bailiffs, clearly had a major role in the matter. He was to receive the money and apply it, at the Great Court's direction, to reduce some the Corporation's liabilities and to make repairs to various Corporation-owned buildings. On other occasions, the bailiffs were empowered to evaluate and purchase specified tracts of land on behalf of the Corporation.<sup>18</sup>

As clerks of the markets, the bailiffs' supervisory duties were of a more routine character. While it is true that much of the direct work of market inspection and fee collection was delegated to a variety of inferior officers, the overall control and supervision of the town's economic life remained the duty of the bailiffs. Notices in the *Ipswich Journal* and the comments of observers from the 1650s through to the 1820s

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<sup>16</sup> GCB, 10 June 1725, 2nd Nov. 1725.

<sup>17</sup> GCB, 8 Jan. 1754.

<sup>18</sup> GCB, 16 May 1721, 19 Sept. 1721, 1 Feb. 1722/3.



indicate the bailiffs' responsibilities to proclaim market days, to issue regulatory orders and to swear in the market inspectors.<sup>19</sup>

Under the first charters, the bailiffs were required to scrutinize the trading practices of the five fairs held annually in the town.<sup>20</sup> It seems, however, that from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, both the fairs and the bailiffs responsibilities for them were in decline. William Batley observed that, while he was aware that the bailiffs had formerly proclaimed the fairs, they had ceased to do so before he assumed office in the 1780s. Certainly, the Great Court issued few orders relating to the fairs after the 1750s. The fairs of many towns declined over the course of the eighteenth century as wholesale and retail trade was increasingly conducted in other ways. Ipswich appears to be among those places where, as Martin Daunton has observed, "by the end of the eighteenth century, the commercial importance of fairs was largely confined to trade in livestock, horses, and pastoral products".<sup>21</sup> Both Penelope Corfield and Peter Borsay have observed that while fairs generally may have been in decline as points of commercial exchange, their significance as important social and recreational occasions was retained and often enhanced. At Ipswich, it may be that the horse races augmented and then superseded the summer fairs as the great public events. Certainly at Ipswich, the bailiffs were central figures in the organising and presiding over the races and the attendant social events.<sup>22</sup>

The bailiffs' role at the races suggests another important aspect of the office: they were the symbolic heads of the community. This might have been the intended role of the High Steward, yet, in practice, the holder of that honorary title had too little engagement with the town to be its leader in any real sense. The bailiffs, however, assumed the mantle of community leaders by frequently acting as the convenors and

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<sup>19</sup> "Short Directions to be observed by the Bayliffs of Ipsw<sup>ch</sup> ffrom yere to yere" in Bacon; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 48.

<sup>20</sup> Bacon, *ibid.*; Reed, "Economic Structure", p. 124; Kirby, *Suffolk Traveller*, p. 57. The five fairs are also described in the text accompanying a published engraving of the town. see: S. and N. Buck, *The South-West Prospect of Ipswich in the County of Suffolk* (1741).

<sup>21</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 48; Daunton, p. 321. Extracts of the documents relating to live stock fairs can be found in: Cross, *Ipswich Markets*, pp. 30-34.

<sup>22</sup> Corfield, *Impact*, p. 20; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 143, 155, 243. The role of the bailiffs at the races is evident in the announcements that they would be setting out the course and screening entrants. For examples see *Ipswich Gazette or Bagnall's News*, 19 May 1733; *IJ*, 11 May 1754.

hosts at public events. On the occasions of royal birthdays, anniversaries or to celebrate military victories, the Great Court would authorise the bailiffs to organise and spend Corporation funds on the festivities. Recorded instances of a bailiff providing a public celebration at his own expense are rare in the first half the eighteenth century and non-existent in the second half. One such case did occur in 1733, however, in the form of a "very handsome entertainment" provided by Nathaniel Cole on the occasion of the King's birthday in October 1733. The celebrations included bonfires and the drinking of toasts by the magistrates. It is difficult to ascertain the motives behind Cole's largesse. The election for the Bailiwick had been held nearly two months earlier, and the next parliamentary election, for which Cole might have been trying to mobilise support on behalf of himself or an ally, was more than six months away (and, in any event, Cole did not stand).<sup>23</sup> Perhaps he was moved by genuine patriotism, the enjoyment of a large party and a general desire to ingratiate himself with the community and the government -- always a likely motive for a public figure like Cole. The bailiffs acted as the Corporation's hosts at dinners or other occasions of a less public nature. When it was believed that an agreement to sell Hanford Hall Estate had been concluded in 1721, the Great Court ordered "that the Bayliffs have Liberty to Treat said Mr. Strode [the purchaser of Hanford Hall] and Mr. Nottingham [who brokered the deal] whenever they come to see the Corporation at the discretion of the said Mr. Bayliffs and at the Cost of the Corporation".<sup>24</sup> After going about the bounds of the Corporation or its Admiralty jurisdiction, the bailiffs were entitled to treat those who accompanied them to dinner.<sup>25</sup> Rarely were the bailiffs dispensing this hospitality at their own expense and, officially at least, it was not on their own account. They were, rather, doing it as the leaders of the Corporation and were acting on its behalf.

The bailiffs' place as heads of the community was reinforced by their status as the Crown's local agents. As the chief magistrates and admirals on the River Orwell, the bailiffs acted on a statutory basis independently of the Corporation's own deliberative

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<sup>23</sup> *Ipswich Gazette or Bagnall's News*, 3 Nov. 1733.

<sup>24</sup> GCB, 16 May 1721.

<sup>25</sup> Although previous instances of this seem most likely, the earliest eighteenth-century example of this is recorded in the GCB, 16 May 1721.

and legislative processes in the Assembly or Great Court. Moreover, they were the chief returning officers for the election of Members of Parliament for the Borough. Although the recorder, Members of Parliament, and the High Steward might all act to facilitate contact between the central government and the town, the government looked to the bailiffs for local information or action. Conversely the bailiffs sometimes wrote to members of the government to seek their support in some local matter. The Corporation also looked to the bailiffs to deal with relations with other towns. Thus, the office was one of the town's principal points of contact with the wider world.

The formal heading of documents with the words: "the Bailiffs, Burgesses and Commonality of the Borough of Ipswich" was an explicit recognition of the bailiffs' distinctive place in the community. Yet it is not easy to assess the real power derived from their various activities. It is possible that the diffusion of their authority through so many different functions and titles diluted and compartmentalised their power. Alternatively, the bailiffs' real power may have extended beyond its official limits because the various occasions of their authority could be co-ordinated for greater cumulative effect. The difficulty of making this judgement is evident in the inconsistency of the Webbs' general characterisation of the office variously as one which "filled a large part in the town life, and on whom great power and dignity was heaped" but, alternatively, as "nothing but a glorified Reeve".<sup>26</sup> Assessing the place of the office in the process of government necessitates a consideration of both the extent to which they were able to act on their own authority, and the restraints on the bailiffs' power.

Certainly, the restraints on the bailiwick ensured that the town would not be subject to the tyranny of a "boss". The binary nature of the office and the necessity of the incumbents' concurrence in their official action inevitably helped prevent the

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<sup>26</sup> When the variety of the bailiffs' activities is contemplated, they are seen as officers "...who filled a large part in the town life, and on whom great power and dignity was heaped." Yet, when the manorial origins of the office are considered, "...whether the Bailiffs were the Heads of their several Corporations, petty officers of the borough Courts, or dignified functionaries of independent status, they always retained traces of an apparent descent from the Reeve or Bailiff of the Lord's Court. As Head of the Municipal Corporation, the Bailiff was, as we have seen, nothing but a glorified Reeve." Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 309-10, 320.

concentration of power. Further, the stipulation of one year terms of office and a prohibition on consecutive terms ensured that the burdens of office were spread around, and that its powers were not vested too long in the hands of the same people.<sup>27</sup> Whether making appointments or undertaking projects on their own or as part of a committee, the bailiffs acted within limits set by the Great Court. In the case of capital works, such as Sparowe and Cornelius's repair of the Common Quay, the bailiffs could exercise considerable judgement, but the work was initiated by the Great Court and subject to its continuous approval. It is possible that the bailiffs' political influence in the Great Court meant its orders were more in the nature of a rubber stamping of the bailiffs' decisions than commands directing their action. Moreover, bailiffs might have only sought Great Court orders to ensure the legal validity of their acts and to acquire indemnification against potential law suits. Yet, as the detailed political analysis will later show, the bailiffs rarely had such power.<sup>28</sup> The evidence suggests that, rather than commanding the Great Court, politically powerful bailiffs were those adept in obtaining its consent.<sup>29</sup>

The political career of Cooper Gravenor was fraught with controversy about the limits of the bailiffs' powers. Gravenor's election to the bailiwick in September 1702 was based on the expectation he would bring a firm hand to the management of the Corporation's financial affairs and end its political divisions. But in the twelve terms he was bailiff between 1702 and 1719, Gravenor's aggressive use of his considerable power resulted in much criticism. In addition to charges of corruption and the making of false allegations to remove other officials, Gravenor was most persistently faulted for his high-handedness and severity in imposing sanctions. After the defeat of his bid to secure a second consecutive term in 1721, Gravenor was not elected again and declined

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<sup>27</sup> A 1429 resolution of the Great Court prohibited a bailiff from holding the office again until two years had passed. Bacon, p. 94; This was not closely observed in the seventeenth century, although consecutive terms were not common. After 1710 there was a general statutory prohibition against borough returning officers, in Ipswich the bailiffs, holding office in consecutive years, 9 Anne c. 20 (1710).

<sup>28</sup> See below pp. 210-50.

<sup>29</sup> This is not, perhaps, a surprising conclusion given that the GCB is a principal source for this study's understanding of the bailiffs' activities. Since most of its entries relating to the bailiffs are orders instructing them or granting them licence to under take some act on behalf of the Corporation, the impression of the bailiffs acting only at the behest of the Great is inevitable. But other sources, such as newspaper accounts and the written observations of contemporaries also reinforce this view. See: "Gravenor's Proceedings"; SRO/I, HD490/, 1Humphrey Rant to an unspecified person, undated, MS Letters Collection; *IJ*, 4 Jan. 1794; G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 46.

as an important figure thereafter. The controversy that Gravenor's career generated was in part about his personal abuse of office, but it was also about the methods and limits of the bailiffs' authority.<sup>30</sup>

After Cooper Gravenor, no single person would dominate the bailiwick as he had nor would the powers of the bailiffs be pushed so far. John Cornelius and John Sparowe appear to have established firm control over the bailiwick for the next thirty years -- one or other of them was bailiff on an alternating basis for all but four of the years between 1721 and 1750 -- but they did not provoke anything like the controversy or opposition which characterised Gravenor's ascendancy. This may have been a consequence of the easing of "rage of party" tensions after 1720. Further, although Cornelius and Sparowe appear to have been able to assure their own selection as bailiffs, neither of them solely dominated the bailiwick in the manner attempted by Gravenor. Both of them were active in committee work, as justices and in the management of Corporation property; and it is not readily apparent which of them might be regarded as the senior of the two bailiffs. Moreover, the other men who served as bailiffs with either Cornelius or Sparowe were also active in these ways.

The type of leadership established by Sparowe and Cornelius was generally to persist until the last years of the eighteenth century. Both men appointed as bailiffs in any given year appear to have been active, although not always equally so. Moreover, Cooper Gravenor's high-handedness was never again attempted by anyone else. After John Sparowe's last selection in 1753 (his thirteenth turn as bailiff), the bailiwick was shared out amongst a larger circle of men; none of whom held the office more than five times and typically would do so three times.

There was some change in the officially sanctioned power of the bailiff over the course of the eighteenth century. When, after 1754, the power to appoint the sergeants at mace shifted from the Great Court to the bailiffs, the opportunity for the politically active members of the Corporation to vet the selection of the serjeants was lost, and the power of the bailiffs was thereby augmented in that they not only made the orders, they

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<sup>30</sup> See above pp. 211-26.

also appointed and supervised those executing them. Thus, a small but not unimportant measure of the diffusion of public authority was lost. In 1756 a similar concentration of power was achieved when it was ordered that the clerks could distrain the property of the Corporation's debtors and/or proceed with suits against them at the instruction of the bailiffs. The decision to take this type of action had formerly been made, or at least validated, at meetings of the Great Court.<sup>31</sup> This kind of shift of authority from the forum of the Great Court to the bailiffs, together with the increasing summary jurisdiction and administrative authority exercised by single justices, certainly enhanced the power of the bailiffs.<sup>32</sup>

These developments may have raised the prestige and influence of the office. This, in turn, may have been a contributing factor in the increased contention over the office in the second half of the eighteenth century. But it is important to recognise that the bailiffs' place in the process of town government remained essentially the same throughout the period of this study. Bailiffs were more than mere town managers, yet they were not rulers. They were not given a general brief and the authority to execute it; rather, they were assigned a variety of tasks which were effectively conceived of as discrete matters. The bailiffs were to act as chairmen-convenors, not presidents, of the Great Courts and borough sessions. As the chief magistrates, managers of Corporation property, and as the presiding officials at public occasions, the bailiffs were able to exert a leading influence in the Corporation's affairs. But, in having to work through the Great Court and with the support of other propertied men, some of whom held other Corporation offices, the bailiffs' power was dependant on the collaboration of others.

## **2. The Sessions Bench**

More authority was concentrated into the office of the justice of the peace than any other post. Given the criminal law jurisdiction of the Ipswich sessions and the statutory

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<sup>31</sup> GCB, 19 Nov. 1756. This was reinforced by a report of a committee on the Corporation's accounts and Great Court orders based on its recommendations. GCB, 8 June 1786.

<sup>32</sup> Webb, *Parish and County*, p. 419.

imposition of manifold responsibilities for civil administration, the burden of governance fell as heavily on the Corporation's magistrates as it did upon their county counterparts.<sup>33</sup> This work was the lot of a small core of the bailiff-magistrates and their portmen assistant justices. They, in turn, were heavily reliant upon their clerk and the recorder.

The 1665 charter provided that the Great Court appoint "a discreet Man, and skilled in the Laws of England, who shall be, and be named, Recorder...". The recorder's oath charged him with keeping records of all the town's courts and the legal proceedings of the Corporation magistracy.<sup>34</sup> In practice, these duties were handled by the clerk, but the recorders did apply themselves to their other important tasks of chairing the general sessions and providing legal counsel to the rest of the bench. The Webbs assert that the recorder brought professionalism and much needed legal expertise to the magistracy. The recorder's training and experience made the lack of "attainments and character" of the other justices of less consequence in dealing with serious criminal matters.<sup>35</sup> But while the recorder's counsel was sought on numerous matters throughout the eighteenth century, he did not have a monopoly on advising the other magistrates. In 1760, for example, the Great Court ordered the town clerk to initiate legal proceedings against an overseer who refused to serve. The clerk was instructed to first seek the counsel of the recorder and, if the recorder advised against the legal action, to seek other advice from some other lawyer keener to proceed.<sup>36</sup>

The recorders of Ipswich were normally eminent men. Sir William Thompson, held the office from 1707 to 1739, during which time he was, variously, one of the town's MPs, one of the Barons Exchequer, Solicitor General and a Recorder of London.<sup>37</sup> Thompson was not the only Ipswich recorder to be active in national politics and the affairs of other towns. In 1754 Sir Richard Lloyd is believed to have spent £3,000 trying to get himself and his son elected as MPs for Ipswich and Maldon

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<sup>33</sup> Landau, *Justices*, pp. 197-9, 201, 203-04.

<sup>34</sup> *The Oaths of Office*, p. 5; *RCMC*, p. 2329.

<sup>35</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 55; Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 356-57.

<sup>36</sup> GCB, 8 Aug. 1760.

<sup>37</sup> SRO/I, qS IPS 352, Glyde, J., (ed.), "Materials for a Municipal History of Ipswich", unpublished cuttings and mss.; Cross, *Justice*, pp. 20-21.

respectively. Charles Grey was recorder from 1761-76, and was a central political figure in Colchester for which he was also an MP. In 1776 Humphrey Rant succeeded Sir Richard Lloyd as recorder of Ipswich, Orford and Harwich.<sup>38</sup> Such men were major figures in the government and politics of the town. But the office of recorder may have been less a source of their power than a conduit through which they could exert their influence. Possession of the office was a mark of status, and it was a mechanism for binding an influential lawyer to the service of the Corporation.

For all but twenty-four years of the eighteenth century, most of the recorder's routine duties were handled by an officially designated deputy. These deputies, like the recorders, were substantial men who might also hold the same office in other towns. Under the recordership of Charles Grey, two other Colchester solicitors served successively as deputy recorders of Ipswich. Thomas Evans, who was the deputy 1755-61, was also the deputy recorder for Bury St. Edmunds. The careers of William Thompson and Humphrey Rant showed that deputies might subsequently become the recorder themselves<sup>39</sup>. With the annual turn-over of bailiffs and, potentially, of assistant justices as well, the longer-serving recorders provided continuity. In the eighteenth century eleven people served on the bench as either active recorders or their deputies. Eight of them served six years or more and the average period of service was nine years (see Table 3.1). The recorders and their deputies were offices which brought valuable skill, prestige and stability to the sessions bench.

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<sup>38</sup> D'Cruz, "Provincial England", p 253; Namier, *Structure*, p. 110; BL Add. Ms. 32735, ff. 178-9.

<sup>39</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", ff. 73-4.



**Table 3.1: *Number of Persons Appointed to Various Offices, 1700-1799***

	<b>No. of Persons Appointed</b>	<b>Ave. No of Years in Office</b>
<b>Bailiff</b>	59	3.4
<b>Recorder<sup>1</sup></b>	11	9.0
<b>Clerk</b>	11	9.0
<b>Treasurer</b>	36	2.8
<b>High Steward</b>	3	33.0

<sup>1</sup> Active recorders or their deputies.

Sources: Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 441-43; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", ff. 73-4.

The attendance of the recorder, or his deputy, both bailiffs and at least one of the four assistant justices was necessary for a valid meeting of the sessions. As table 3.2 indicates, the attendance of assistant justices at the sessions declined in the eighteenth century; nearly half as many appeared annually in the sample period 1791-5 as did in the years 1726-30.

**Table 3.2: *Attendance of Justices at the Borough Sessions***

	<b>1726-30</b>	<b>1755-9</b>	<b>1791-5</b>
<b>No. of Individuals Attending All Sessions as JPs</b>	11	14	12
<b>Ave. No. of JPs Attending per Year</b>	6	5.6	3.6
<b>Ave. Attendance per Meeting</b>	4.9	3.6	3.6

Source: SRO/I, C8/4/9-11, Sessions Books.

It is difficult to assess the activity of the individual justices, but a sampling of the numbers of recognizance's issued by each JP is suggestive of the distribution of their work load in at least one sphere of their business. In 1726-30, an average of

sixteen recognizances per year can be attributed to identifiable justices.<sup>40</sup> During this period, the most active justice might issue as many as two-thirds of all recognizances. Typically, the busiest JP would issue between about a third and half the total -- some six or seven recognizances. The three most active JPs normally accounted for four-fifths of the recognizances. These proportions do not vary appreciably for the sample periods 1755-9 and 1791-5. It is worth noting that although designated the chief magistrates, the bailiffs were not necessarily the most active issuers of recognizances. At only three of the eight sessions in 1726-30 were the bailiffs the most active JPs by this measure. In 1726 the two bailiffs accounted for only a quarter of the recognizances; in 1730 they issued none at all. John Sparowe was bailiff only once in the years 1726 to 1730, but he was the most active justice in five of the eight sessions, having issued more than a quarter of all the recognizances of this period. There is no evidence to reveal the volume or patterns of the justices' activity out of sessions. The general sessions records do suggest, however, that most of the business of the bench was handled by a group of only four or five men, on an already small panel of seven justices.

**Table 3.3: *The Activity of the Justices of the Peace***

No. of Recognizances Issued Annually	No. of JPs Issuing Recognizances	
	1725-1729	1755-1759
1-2	5	8
3-4	10	6
5-10	8	2
10+	3.2	0
<b>Ave. Annual No. of Recognizances</b>	22.6	9.6
<b>Ave. Annual No. of Active JPs</b>	5.4	3.8
<i>Source: SROI, C8/4/9-11, Sessions Book</i>		

<sup>40</sup> This was 85% of the total number of recognizances -- the balance were taken in court or, in a few cases, the documents were damaged or indecipherable.

During the eighteenth century, seats on the bench were being shared around more widely, although individual JPs attended the sessions less frequently. In 1725-34, sixty appointments to the bench were made but only eleven individuals actually attended the sessions or issued recognizances. The rate of turnover increased by nearly one-third in the period 1755-64. In the first five years of the 1790s, the ratio of possible bench appointments to active JPs was less than three-to-one, or twice that of the first sample period. But while more faces might appear on the bench in the course of a decade, business seemed to remain in the hands of a few very active JPs. For example, John Sparowe and John Cornelius, who were justices every year between 1725 and 1734, were also the most active JPs. The same sort of persistent service was evident in the 1750s, from Thomas Richardson and John Gravenor, and in the 1790s from Henry Seekamp and Thomas Hallum.

This small group of active JPs played a major role in the town's government. Their supervision of poor law administration and road maintenance duties helped bind the parishes to the government of the Corporation. The appointments of petty constables, overseers and surveyors were all subject to the approval of the justices. Moreover, these parish officers were frequently subject to the commands of the justices to make inspections, provide records and co-ordinate activities with the officers of other parishes or the agents of statutory authorities.<sup>41</sup> The requirement that two justices approve the setting of a parish poor rate, and that rate assessments could be appealed to the general sessions, gave the magistrates a central role in the financing of one of the most important functions of local government. The justices' determinations of settlement questions, and the punishment of vagrancy, idleness and disorder were powerful instruments for intervening in the lives of others.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the justices'

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<sup>41</sup> Sessions Book, 17 April 1759.

<sup>42</sup> Control of settlement was further vested in the JPs by the 1700 "Vagrants Removal Costs Act", 11 Wm.III c.18 (1700), which shifted responsibility of the costs of removal of vagrants from the parish to the county or borough sessions. See J. Innes, "Parliament and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century Social Policy", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., (40), p. 73; idem, "Prisons for the poor: English bridewells, 1555-1800" in D. Hay and F. Synder, (eds.), *Labour, Law and Crime* (London, 1987).

powers of cultural, moral and economic regulation were facilitated by their licensing of Dissenters Meeting Houses, victuallers, alehouses, badgers, drovers, and butchers.

The growing powers of eighteenth-century magistrates had an important bearing on the general character of town government. For example, it has been previously noted that the magistrates were taking over some of the Court Leet's road business. Moreover, the justices' expanding summary jurisdiction and the growing use of the Petty sessions greatly enhanced the frequency and speed with which they could act.<sup>43</sup> Both the Webbs and Norma Landau have asserted that the Petty sessions and the single justice acting summarily became much more important over the course of the eighteenth century. The Webbs further argued that urban justices were even more active than their rural counterparts because they freely blurred the lines between the occasions of their authority. Thus, it is claimed, borough JPs acted in borough courts, petty sessions, and general sessions without much differentiation. Together with the statutory expansion of their powers, this made for very powerful local authorities with very little accountability. It is further maintained that in the face of this expanding magisterial power, the offices and institutions of the municipal corporation atrophied as an institution of local government.<sup>44</sup> Such generalisation is difficult, however, because local constitutional and political circumstances seem to be vital determinates of the magistracy's real place in a town's government. As already noted, Greaves found that the justices of Leicester were powerless to effect their reform plans in the face of opposition rooted in the Corporation.<sup>45</sup> At Ipswich, the election of three of the magistrates (the two bailiffs and the recorder) by the Freemanry, and the selection by the bailiffs of four of the seven justices from the self-electing Portmen, were powerful restraints on magisterial power. The town's justices could not operate without considerable regard to the Corporation's institutions and the dynamics of its politics.

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<sup>43</sup> Webb, *Parish and County*, pp. 392-5; Landau, *Justices*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>44</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, 358; Landau, *Justices*, pp. 209, 263.

<sup>45</sup> Greaves, *Leicester*, p. 25.

### 3. The Portmen and the Twentyfour

The portmen and the twentyfour were not assigned any specific tasks by the charters or their oaths of office. When they met in their separate bodies or together as the Assembly they had no legislative or judicial power, and only very slight administrative functions. Yet these offices were essential to the Town's government because most of the senior posts in the Corporation were filled by them.<sup>46</sup>

The twelve portmen undertook various duties in addition to those of the bailiffs and assistant justices. In the seventeenth century, they were directly involved in such matters as supervising the watch and making personal expenditures to secure the defence of the town.<sup>47</sup> By the eighteenth century such uncompensated personal expenditures were not necessary and the direct supervision of the watch passed to the high constables. The portmen did, however, act in an executive capacity in the Corporation's affairs. Portmen were normally members of the Great Court's audit and property management committees.<sup>48</sup> As governors, wardens or trustees, they managed such diverse matters as Christ's Hospital, clerical livings in the gift of the Corporation, and the election of scholars to attend the grammar school or Cambridge University. Under an Elizabethan statute, the rates for the maintenance of the churches and ministers were to be set by the bailiffs and a majority of the portmen in conjunction with the churchwardens and four principal inhabitants of each parish.<sup>49</sup> The community's always keen interest in the matters of taxation and religion made this supervisory role one of some influence. Finally, as statutory authorities were established after 1792 the portmen were named to their commissions.<sup>50</sup>

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the place of the portmen in the process of government changed considerably. In the 1720s they were an active body of men dominating the bailiwick and the borough sessions; but by the 1790s they were a small insular group following a hopeless political stratagem heading towards their self-

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<sup>46</sup> *The Oaths of Office*, pp. 8,9.

<sup>47</sup> Bacon, *Annals*, pp. 348, 383.

<sup>48</sup> For examples see: GCB, 13 Feb. 1700, 25 May 1721, 1 Feb. 1722/3, 2 Feb. 1723, 17 Oct. 1724.

<sup>49</sup> 13 Eliz. c. 24 (1572). These arrangements were affirmed in 1751. See Assembly Book, 15 April 1751.

<sup>50</sup> RCMC, p. 2297.

extinction. Their loss of power is evident in their diminished attendance at meetings of the Great Court or the Assembly. In the 1720s there would typically be five to eight portmen at these meetings. This level of attendance was sustained until the middle 1750s. The boycotts and ejections of controversy in 1755 and the fierce factional conflicts of the following thirteen years resulted in irregular attendance patterns,<sup>51</sup> but throughout the 1770s and 1780s at least five or six portmen would routinely attend the Great Court and the meetings of the Assembly. By the early 1790s, however, the average attendance of portmen at these types of meetings was two or three and never exceeded four.

There was a corresponding loss of control of the Great Court committees and the offices of the Corporation charities. After the 1750s the portmen lost their domination of Tooley's and Smart's charities, as well as the governorships of Christ's Hospital. In the 1720s the portmen normally constituted a majority of the members of Tooley's and Smart's management committees, and the renterwarden, or treasurer, was always a portman. But after 1755, the Portmen and the Twentyfour supplied an equal number of members to the committee, and the office of renterwarden alternated annually between them.<sup>52</sup>

<b>Table 3.4 : Average Attendance of the Assemblymen at Meetings of the Great Court</b> (annual averages per sample period)			
	<b>Portmen</b>	<b>Twentyfourmen</b>	<b>Portmen as a Percentage of all Assemblymen</b>
<b>1723-5</b>	8.3	13.7	37.7
<b>1756-9</b>	4.4	11	28.6
<b>1791-5</b>	2.3	13	15.0

*Source: SRO/I, C5/14/7-10,GCB; SRO/I, C6/1, Assembly Book*

By the late 1790s the Portmen was hardly a functioning body. Both the number of portmen and the proportion of those who were active progressively decreased from

<sup>51</sup> See pp. 237-41.

<sup>52</sup> GCB, 1725-30, 1755-60, 1791-5; Assembly Book, 1725-30, 1755-60, 1791-5.

the 1780s until the dissolution of the Corporation in 1835. In the years 1791 to 1795 seven portmen attended meetings of the Great Court, but nearly two-thirds of the appearances by portmen were made by just two individuals: Henry Seekamp and Thomas Hallum. If the attendance of John Spooner is added, these three men accounted for eighty percent of the portmen's appearances at the Great Court.<sup>53</sup> Seekamp and Hallum were by far the most active of the portmen justices and they dominated the portmen's share of charitable offices in the early 1790s.<sup>54</sup>

The collapse of the Portmen as a vital component of the process of government was most evident in its members' reluctance to fill vacancies in the body caused by death or resignation. The surviving members appear to have understood that their privileges as portmen -- which included revenues from endowed lands -- would only be diluted by electing all twelve members as provided for under the charter. Further, the 1835 Municipal Commissioners asserted that the portmen were reluctant to elect new members because the only available candidates among the eligible freemen "... who are competent for the discharge of magisterial duties, are the common councilmen [members of the Twenty-four who were politically hostile to the Portmen]." Selecting such men for the Portmen would have allowed the bailiffs, usually Twentyfourmen by the 1790s, to load the sessions bench with members of their own faction. Rather than face the prospect of the Great Court and the sessions being dominated by their opponents, the portmen simply refused to fill vacancies arising in their body.<sup>55</sup> By 1833 the number of portmen had fallen to four. In 1830 concern was expressed that unless a writ of mandamus was procured, allowing the portmen to replenish their body, "the charter must, in a few years, naturally expire, for there will not be a sufficient number of

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<sup>53</sup> There were sixteen meetings of the Great Court between 30 Sept. 1790 and 29 Sept. 1795. The following lists those attending and the number of meetings at which they were present: Henry Seekamp, 13; Thomas Hallum, 12; John Spooner, 5; Peter Clarke, 4; Samuel Wollaston, 2; William B. Clarke, 1; and Sir John Hadley D'Oyly, 1. Seekamp and Hallum's appearances constituted 66% of the total attendees GCB, 1790-5.

<sup>54</sup> Henry Seekamp and Thomas Hallum account for 70% of the portmen's appearances at the borough sessions in 1790-5. Throughout the 1790s Seekamp and Hallum held seven of the ten wardenships of Tooley's and Smart's charities which were held by portmen. Three other portmen each held that office once. Hallum was the only portman to serve as a governor of Christ's Hospital in these years, and he was frequently a treasurer as well. GCB, 1790-5; Assembly Book, 1790-5.

<sup>55</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, 62-4; RCMC, p. 2297.

portmen left to constitute a great court for transacting the business of the Corporation".<sup>56</sup> But, before this could happen, the old Corporation was dissolved by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835.

That the Portmen as a body had to become a shadow of its former self, lacking power, coherence and even the will to survive, suggests that it had lost its functions in politics and the process of government. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Portmen, as an institutional form, had ceased to be a means of effectively translating social and economic power into political power and a leading role in town government. At no time in the eighteenth century did the office of portmen convey particular resources or powers which conferred special authority upon its holders. At best, it made an individual eligible for other offices which might accord some authority. Membership of the Portmen alone did not convey power, rather it was an important instrument for people whose social and economic condition afforded them the means to acquire the office and exert influence through it. As an institution, the Portmen had provided coherence and definition to a section of the town's elite in terms which affirmed the legitimacy of its exercise of public authority. By the last decade of the eighteenth century, however, Portmen no longer functioned as an effective conduit of political power because of the way in which partisan politics developed.<sup>57</sup>

Like the Portmen, the formal role of the Twentyfour, occasionally called "Common Council", was that of a deliberative body providing counsel to the Great Court. But its practical significance derived from its place as a pool from which Corporation officers were drawn and, eventually, as a focus of factional organisation. In the second half of the eighteenth century, as the foregoing discussion of the portmen suggests, the twentyfourmen were increasingly selected as bailiffs and as managers of the town's charities. But the most important offices which were customarily drawn from the twentyfour were the headboroughs or chief constables, clavingers and coroners.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, pp. 2297, 2338.

<sup>57</sup> See pp. 241-50.



Moreover, between 1700 and 1795, nearly three-quarters of the treasurers were also members of the Twentyfour.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the importance of the offices they held, they were generally regarded as inferior to the portmen in status. The twentyfourmen's oath of office stressed their obedience to the bailiffs while the portmen's oath implied that they were the peers of the Corporation's heads. That the twentyfourmen were not thought destined for the highest levels of authority was reflected in early eighteenth-century assertions that only portmen could be bailiffs. In fact, in the eighteenth century, it was not until 1754 that twentyfourmen were elected bailiffs.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the two men elected that year resorted to some sharp political manoeuvring to ensure their prompt election into the Portmen. The regulations regarding Corporate livery were more onerous for the portmen than the twentyfour. Perhaps it was assumed that men of lesser status and means could not be expected to be as well turned-out.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, more modest though the twentyfour might have been, throughout the eighteenth century they played a central and growing role in the administration of the town's affairs. Indeed, by the 1790s they had almost completely eclipsed the Portmen in significance.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. The Administrative Offices of the Corporation**

Much about the process of corporation government is revealed in the appointment of, and the distribution of authority and responsibility amongst, five other senior offices: the clerk, treasurer, Chamberlains, coroners, and clavingers.

##### **4.1 The Town Clerk**

In a sense, the town clerk was the bureaucracy of the Corporation. Although the recorder and the clerk took the same oath of office, it was the clerk who actually acted as registrar and managed the formal process of the borough's various courts.<sup>62</sup> The Great

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<sup>58</sup> Derived from list in BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", ff. 102-3.

<sup>59</sup> *The Oaths of Office*, p. 9; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", ff. 112, 115. Twentyfourmen were unusually elected bailiffs in 1690, but normally the seventeenth-century bailiffs were portmen.

<sup>60</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 49; GCB, 8 Sept. 1725, 4 March 1729.

<sup>61</sup> See pp. 246-50.

<sup>62</sup> *The Oaths of Office*, p. 8;

Court routinely instructed the clerk to prosecute persons having overdue debts to the Corporation. The clerk also brought prosecutions against market offenders, negligent Corporation officers and those who refused to serve in offices to which they had been elected. When bailiffs or Constables were sued for action taken in connection with their duties, the town clerk normally organised their defence. Inevitably, the clerkship was held by a lawyer possessing expertise needed by the bailiffs and other Corporate officers whose experience was usually more in the way of commerce than law.<sup>63</sup> The clerks were the stewards of the manors held by the Corporation, and they attended the courts of the manors from which the Corporation leased land. Finally, although the town had its MPs and High Steward to press its interests in the capital, the clerk was also ordered to lobby House of Commons committees and convey messages to the town's members and others in support of its interests.<sup>64</sup>

Historians have seen clerks as very powerful individuals exerting inordinate influence over the sessions and other corporation business. The Webbs maintained that some justices became merely "mouthpieces of the clerk". R.W. Greaves saw the "overworked unprofessional officers" of Leicester as holding a "defenceless position" from which they were "open to be hoodwinked by the unscrupulous" clerk.<sup>65</sup> But the ability of clerks to exert this kind of influence depended on the political and constitutional environment in which they operated. Town clerks of Ipswich enjoyed considerable influence in this vital administrative role, but the circumstances of the office imposed important restraints upon their power.

Various features of the clerk's position suggest that the post was an unlikely base from which to wield pre-eminent political power. Although the Charter of 1665 specified that the clerkship was a life appointment, in practice the office was normally subject to annual election by the Great Court.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the clerk depended upon support in the Great Court to retain office. It is noteworthy that a shift in control of the

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<sup>63</sup> For examples of these actions see: GCB, 2 June 1721, 10 April 1725, 1 Jan. 1756, 29 Jan. 1759, 8 Aug. 1760.

<sup>64</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1785, 28 July 1757, 2 Feb. 1794, 5 March 1791.

<sup>65</sup> Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 347-50, 697; Greaves, *Leicester*, p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 90; GCB, 8 Sept. 1721; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", ff. 80-6; Bacon, *Annals*, p. 54.

Bailiwick between the Portmen and the Twentyfour was always accompanied by the appointment of the new clerk. A number of factors suggest that for most of the eighteenth century the clerks were the servants or partners, rather than the leaders of the partisan grouping within the Great Court. As shown below, the social and economic connections of the clerks were not characteristic of political leaders. In most cases, at the time of their first appointments, they were not natives of Ipswich and/or were not engaged in the town's commercial life.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the authority of the clerk's office did not readily translate into electoral power in the Great Court. Although charged with the management of many things, the office did not control significant amounts of patronage. Normally, when the clerk employed tradesmen or disbursed funds he was acting on the specific orders of the Great Court or the bailiffs. Similarly, the clerks did not handle large funds whose balances might be manipulated to secure electoral support or gain financial advantages. This is not to say that the clerks were without influence in the management of these matters for political purposes but, normally, the clerk did not directly hold or control much money. The clerk was, therefore, without some of the most important assets of a local political leader.

The clerk's office appears to have become more politically significant in the second part of the eighteenth century. Before 1747 no clerk was a member of the Twentyfour or Portmen. From then until the end of the century, three of the five clerks were members of these contending bodies. A common law rule held that a justice (the bailiffs) could not also be an agent or "minister" (the clerk) of the sessions since he would be subject to his own discipline.<sup>68</sup> Despite this, Peter Clarke became the first person in the eighteenth century to hold both offices simultaneously, doing so in 1776 and again in 1778. Between 1784 and 1810 William Batley was intermittently the clerk or a bailiff, although not in the same years. Holding both offices, either at the same time or in proximate years afforded a considerable concentration of power. Clarke and Batley were clearly major political figures whose incumbency in the clerkship reflected changes in the social and economic identities of those holding the office. Longer terms

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<sup>67</sup> See below pp. 117-8.

<sup>68</sup> *The Law of Corporation*, p. 46.

in the office may have also reflected its increasing value and the willingness to contend for it. It is not possible to calculate the value of the clerk's fees accurately over the course of the eighteenth century; however, the Municipal Commissioners found that in the early nineteenth century the income from the office was £500 per year.<sup>69</sup> If the figures for the period of Peter Clarke and William Batley were similar, it is easy to understand the interest of such men in the office and its changing place in town politics.

#### 4.2 The Financial Officers

The governors of early modern towns appear to have seen no advantage in concentrating fiscal responsibilities. It might have been thought too burdensome to saddle one individual with holding and managing the Corporation's cash balances. Moreover, sudden personal bankruptcy, vulnerability to crime, and the temptation to embezzle or to abscond with the treasury, were hazards which could be reduced by the dispersal of funds amongst various officers. Thus, in 1701, Ipswich had two Chamberlains and several treasurers for various matters. In addition to the town treasurer, each charity had its own treasurer or receiver. The sessions bench appointed a treasurer responsible for what was variously known as the "Bridge Rate", "Marshalsea Rate" or "County Rate".<sup>70</sup> Other corporation officers handled their own funds. The clavingers managed a lending fund and kept their own accounts, and in the 1720s the town water leases were administered by a specially designated treasurer. Generally, these accounts were managed quite distinctly with the responsible officer receiving funds, holding balances and making disbursements either at his own discretion or upon orders from the Great Court. Over the course of the eighteenth century, this diffusion of financial duties was gradually giving way to a greater concentration of fiscal matters in the hands of the town treasurer.

The decline of the Chamberlains clearly exemplifies this process. Early in the eighteenth century the Chamberlains still collected foreign fines and reported non-payers to the Great Court; but by the mid-century, neither the Chamberlains nor anyone

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<sup>69</sup> *RCMC*, p. 2300.

<sup>70</sup> Sessions Book, 6 Aug. 1733; GCB, 29 Sept. 1756, 11 Dec. 1722; *RCMC*, p. 2302.

else seemed much concerned about foreign traders. As late as the 1720s they collected the town duties, rents on Corporation property, various market dues, and fees for access to the town water. These various funds were either turned over to the treasurer or held until the Great Court or bailiffs gave instructions for their disbursement.<sup>71</sup> As late as 1785 the Chamberlains were still handling substantial sums of money. In that year £350, forty-two percent of the Corporation's receipts, were received by the Chamberlains; and they made payments of £252, or thirty-five percent of Corporation expenditure. In 1786, however, the Great Court enacted the recommendations of its audit committee, that Chamberlains be confined to the collection of market dues, water rentals and butcher shop rentals, which would be submitted quarterly to the treasurers. Moreover, only the treasurers were authorised to make payments from the Corporation's funds. Sometime after 1810, William Batley wrote that the "office of the Chamberlains [has] dwindled into an almost empty name". The rents and dues once collected by the Chamberlains were, over time, either paid directly to the treasurer or received by a salaried collector. The office of Chamberlain did, however, retain its place as the first rung on ladder of the Corporation hierarchy. Those hoping to be co-opted into the Twentyfour or Portmen had to serve a turn as the Corporation's revenue collectors, even as the real requirements of that office declined over the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup>

The development of the town treasurer's office entailed more than simply absorbing the functions of other financial officers. In the first decades of the eighteenth century this officer was required to act on matters which might be thought beyond the sphere of a modern treasurer. In the 1720s the Great Court ordered the treasurer to make repairs to pavements, the Market Cross and bridges, as well as to sue a lessee of Corporation property for "non-performance of the Covenants of his lease".<sup>73</sup> As the century progressed the treasurers were less frequently required to undertake such tasks, which were more typically the jobs of parish surveyors, committees of the Great Court

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<sup>71</sup> For examples see: GCB, 21 Sept. 1722; 26 April 1726; 1 June 1701; 29 Sept. 1756.

<sup>72</sup> GCB, 8 June 1786; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 107; *RCMC*, p. 2303.

<sup>73</sup> GCB, 11 Dec. 1722, 5 June, 1 Jan. 1722/3.

or the town clerk. After the 1785 audit committee's recommendations were adopted, the treasurer was primarily to receive revenues collected by other officers and make disbursements upon the Great Court's warrant.<sup>74</sup> This undoubtedly eased the management of the Corporation's funds. Not only were there fewer sets of books, but funds could be more flexibly and quickly applied when they were in fewer hands. Of course, this is also likely to have added to the attractiveness of the office and the contention over it.

The treasurers' tenures of office tended to be short, and re-election by the Great Court was not so easy. Thirty-six men held the office between 1701 and 1800 compared to eleven town clerks and eight recorders. The turnover of treasurers is even higher than that for bailiffs (sixty-three men were bailiffs but, of course, two were selected each year) (see table 3.1). This is likely to have reduced the political influence of the office of treasurer, although its potential for dispensing patronage and profiting from holding large balances of Corporation money remained considerable.

#### 4.3 The Coroners and Clavingers

The coroners' were charged with two rather distinct tasks whose only connection seems to have been that they be handled by respected, disinterested men. Conducting inquisitions into deaths was undoubtedly the coroners' most important job because their findings could provide the basis for criminal indictments.<sup>75</sup> The two coroners' status was further reflected in their being called upon to witness the conveyancing of estates at the Petty Court. That they were in some minor sense regulators of other officers is suggested by their empowerment to swear in the bailiffs and their role as receivers of fines of portmen and the twentyfour not appearing in livery.<sup>76</sup>

Although well remunerated, the coroners' offices were not the subjects of much contention. None of the selections in the eighteenth century appear to have required polls, nor, indeed, were there any in the early nineteenth century, when almost all fee-

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<sup>74</sup> GCB, 8 June 1786.

<sup>75</sup> Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>76</sup> RCMC, p. 2301; *Principal Charters*, p. 5; GCB, 8 Sept. 1754; Assembly Book, 4 March 1729.

earning offices were frequently contested. The reasons for this are not immediately obvious, particularly as there were contests for the county coroners' office.<sup>77</sup> It may be that the nature of the coroners' principal task and its requirements for special skill, together with its lack of patronage opportunities, ensured that townsmen were content to let established, respected men hold the office for lengthy periods.

Three clavingers were annually selected to keep custody of the Corporation's records and to insure that the seal was not applied without the Great Court's consent. The number of clavingers appointed each year does not reflect the amount of work attached to the job, but rather the principle that the greater the number of officers, the more difficult it would be to corrupt them. Originally each of the clavingers had a key to a separate lock on the chest containing the Corporation's seal and papers in the treasury room of the Town Hall. By the end of the eighteenth century one bailiff had the key to the treasury room, the other bailiff had the key to one of the locks on the chest and the clavingers had the key to another.<sup>78</sup> The clavingers also kept legal documents relating to Corporation business, records such as the Great Court Book, and bonds taken in connection with loans to freemen. Having possession of the bonds, the clavingers also held the lending cash fund and were responsible for advising the town clerk when borrowers were in default.

The clavingers' did not have an onerous job, but it could be politically tricky. The Corporation's records were grist to the mill of litigation which surrounded the senior offices. Access to records and complaints about missing documents were important matters. In 1754 a committee was struck to "inspect and regulate the Treasury". While this might seem to have been a laudable reformist measure to ensure better record-keeping, the timing and composition of the committee suggests it was a partisan exercise in marshalling documents to support the dubious removal of some portmen. The committee did institute the keeping of a clavingers' record book, but the

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<sup>77</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 100; *RCMC*, p. 2301; *IJ*, 17 November 1747; Webb, *Parish and County*, pp. 292-4, 302 and 304.

<sup>78</sup> Bacon, *Annals*, p. 53; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", ff. 100-1

practice seems to have lapsed in 1756 -- or perhaps some negligent clavinger lost the books kept after that date.<sup>79</sup>

The clavingers were elected annually, and tended to remain in office for a number of consecutive years. The only fee they appear to have been allowed was 2s 6d when the Corporate seal was used. Handling the lending cash balances for long periods was of some advantage, although perhaps limited when shared out amongst four officeholders. The clavingers were not particularly powerful officers, but these could be important offices in periods of fierce factional politics.

Important as the senior and administrative offices were, the business of the community's government also depended on a number of officials who can be distinguished as agents of the Corporation, or "official servants" as the 1835 Municipal Commissioners' Report describes some of them. These other officers are distinguishable in that they were not normally elected by the Great Court, nor were they selected from the portmen or twentyfour. Amongst this group were the policing and enforcement officers such as constables, serjeants at mace, the watch, and the beadles. Those concerned with revenue and market supervision included: the searchers, water bailiffs, coal meters, and others who were at various times employed on an *ad hoc* basis. Also of great importance were the parish officers, especially the overseers of the poor and the surveyors of the roads. The role of the grand and petty jurors must also be recognised. The place of these offices in the process of government and in the course of political interaction within the community will be examined in three contexts. Subsequent discussion will explore the social and economic identities of these officers and their changing roles in the actual business of the Corporation.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> GCB, 19 Nov. 1756; SRO/I, C1/2/21, "Orders of [the Great] Court Relating to the Clavingers".

<sup>80</sup> See below pp. 108-47; 251-90.



## 5. The System of Officeholding

Having considered features of the principal offices of the Corporation, it is worth considering how the offices fitted together and determined the character of the town's government.

An essential feature of the organisation of the senior offices of the Corporation was the lack of a formal hierarchy of authority and responsibility. The Corporate officers did not constitute a vast organisation requiring tiers of authority or chains of command. The senior and administrative officers bore no relations of rank; they were not appointed by, nor normally answered to, any of the others.<sup>81</sup> With the exception of the assistant justices, all of these officers were chosen and directed by the Great Court. When the Great Court did give the bailiffs, clerks or committees supervisory powers over others, it was for the limited period required to complete a specific task. The control of officers was also achieved by carefully delimiting the authority of any given office, and by the necessity of the co-operation of other officers. The range and nature of the clerk's responsibilities, for example, constituted a considerable concentration of power. But, normally, the clerk could only proceed with prosecutions on the instructions of the bailiffs or the Great Court. Moreover, the various valuable documents which the clerk would need in many cases, could only be released with the consent of the clavingers and bailiffs. This is not to say that these sorts of restraints were fail-safe - corruption or joint conspiracy, could occur -- but it was difficult for a single officer to accumulate power or to abuse office seriously without the notice or consent of others.

This delimitation of officeholder's authority was consistent with another characteristic of the system in Ipswich: the diffusion of power. This was most apparent in the dispersal of various accounts and financial responsibilities across several offices. The justices, bailiffs, clerks, clavingers, chamberlains and various treasurers were each engaged in a distinct aspect of the collection and disbursement of the Corporation's

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<sup>81</sup> See Max Weber on the incompatibility of appointment by election and hierarchical organisation. M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. T. Parsons (New York and London, 1947; New York, 1964), pp. 334-5.

revenue. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, after some consolidation of financial affairs, the treasurer did not have the power that the exclusive handling of income and expenditure would have conveyed. The binary nature of the bailiffs' office, and the prohibition on consecutive election to the post, also ensured a diffusion of the power at the highest level.

The cohesion and co-ordination of the officers within this diffuse organisation depended on their social and political bonds. With the exception of the clerk and the recorder, the senior officers throughout the eighteenth century were drawn entirely from the Portmen or the Twentyfour. These self-electing bodies were the essential conduits of elite power and, while political divisions could run between and within them, they ensured that the men taking office were of broadly common interests. Although the levels of activity of this corps of thirty-six men varied, the turnover of most offices ensured that people had experience of more than one job. When posts such as church warden and other parish offices are included in the consideration, these men would have had substantial common experience of government.

The ethos of the system was reflected in its weak hierarchical organisation and the structural retardants to individuals' accumulation of power. Corporation government was, in theory, to be co-operative self-government. Accordingly, the senior offices were conferred no superior status, but merely defined a set of duties to be executed in the common interest. In practice, of course, only a few burgesses possessed the social, economic and political strength to be likely candidates for these offices. But such men were sufficiently numerous that provision had to be made for sharing the personal burdens and benefits of holding the higher offices. People did profit from office in various ways, and offices conferred, or reflected, varying degrees of status; but fundamentally, Ipswich's senior officeholders were, in a general sense, peers of one another.

This system of officeholding functioned well under the cohesive, loosely oligarchical politics prevalent from the 1720s to the 1750s. After the mid-eighteenth century the elite consensus began to corrode. Contests for offices became more frequent

as their financial and political value escalated, and a growing concentration of authority began to undermine the formally hierarchic dispersal of power among Ipswich's elite. Thereafter, the political function of Corporation offices began to shift.

While the elite once used these offices for the translation of their social and political power into legitimised public authority, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards these offices became important precisely because they imbued incumbants with the power to more effectively pursue their social and political aims. The decline of the Portmen was the most dramatic symptom of this development. The Portmen's constitutional position meant that it was an effective instrument for sharing power amongst a cohesive elite. As such it was a central feature of corporate government. But, from the mid-eighteenth century, as the governing elite's divisions became more persistent and characterised by factional politics contested through increasingly frequent and costly elections, the significance of the Portmen as a body gradually declined. The timing and nature of these changes depended on the shifting socio-economic identities of officeholders, the finances of the Corporation, and the dynamics of politics. These are the subjects of the following chapters.

## **PART TWO**

### **GOVERNANCE, POLITICS, AND PARTICIPATION**

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE PERSONNEL OF THE CORPORATION**

### **1. Themes and Historiography**

The character of corporate governance was determined as much by its personnel as by its formal institutional arrangements. The qualities of the people who held office, their social and economic identities, their personal skills, connections, and material resources all helped to shape the way local government worked and fitted into the town's social relations. This chapter examines various aspects of the identities, interests and capabilities of Ipswich's corporate officers. The concern here is to understand how the human resources of public authority -- the various qualities of the Corporation's personnel -- impacted upon the aims and methods of governance, and further helped establish the place of the Corporation in the social relations of the community. Of course, this is a vast subject, and limitations of sources and space prohibit a comprehensive reconstruction of these relations. Nonetheless, it is possible to consider some important aspects of these questions.

Historians' assessments of the personnel of eighteenth-century municipal corporations have been mixed. The Webbs maintained that the 1835 report of the royal commission on municipal corporations went too far in its fierce and almost uniform indictments of the corruption of town government officers. The Webbs' own view, however, while acknowledging occasional episodes of virtuous officeholding, is not very positive. Personnel, like the other problems of the municipal corporation, was seen to be a function of obsolete principles and institutions. The imposition of the obligation to serve in local office was, the Webbs maintained, simply not practical in the rapidly growing, increasingly anonymous urban communities of the eighteenth century. In towns with fluid populations it was not possible to impose the various duties of local government fairly upon each householder in their turn. Moreover, as towns grew and the volume and complexity of official business increased, the amateur taking his turn

was less willing and capable of executing the duties of office.<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances, the Webbs assert, the obligation to serve collapsed and some official duties were increasingly farmed or contracted out while other offices were dominated for long periods by men who found personal advantage in public office. While both of these arrangements allowed the business of government to continue in some fashion, they also afforded much opportunity for corruption, sloth and ineptitude.<sup>2</sup>

Although some of the Webbs' successors have accepted their assessment -- and even felt it too generous<sup>3</sup> -- more recent studies have set forth more positive views of the early modern municipal corporation which stress that local officials were not utterly venal, or at least that their sense of self-interest was more enlightened and linked to the general condition of the community. Perry Gauci has suggested that in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, despite the personal inconvenience and financial cost of public office at Great Yarmouth, there was a "...sense of duty which the assembly instilled in its members as heirs of a tradition of responsible self-government [which] did much to appease such personal considerations, thus providing the principal momentum for the continued effectiveness of corporate rule."<sup>4</sup> Hence the domination of town affairs by prosperous men cannot be automatically taken as evidence of a venal system of officeholding in the clutches of a self-serving oligarchy. Some studies suggest that the senior offices of the municipal corporation had to be held by a town's wealthiest members because only they could afford the burdens of office and were best suited to manage the affairs of the community.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Municipal Commissioners' denunciations of local officers' incompetence and corruption is typified in their report on Ipswich: *RCMC, passim*; Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 355-65. For an interestingly similar eighteenth century critique see: Ereunetes, "Reflections", pp. 9-10, 105-7.

<sup>2</sup> Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 429-35. It should be noted that while the general characterisation of local officers and the effects of contracting is as suggested here, the Webbs do cite various examples of effective, virtuous local officers. Greaves' study of Leicester, however, maintains that the officers of Leicester were not lacking in "a sense of obligation to the community at large" and "old-fashioned philanthropy": R.W. Greaves, *The Corporation of Leicester, 1689-1836* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 19, 144.

<sup>3</sup> Keith-Lucas, *Unreformed Local Government*, p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Gauci, *Yarmouth*, p.39. Also see G. Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Economic and Social History* (Hull, 1972), p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> See: P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 1976), p.130; Triffit, "Parliamentary Boroughs", pp. 148-152; and Dawson, "Finance", p. 63; A. Cowan, "Urban Elites in

Other work suggests that one needs to look beyond the elites to see how the character of town government was shaped by its personnel. It has been noted that the powers of office were more widely diffused among social ranks than the historiographical emphasis on oligarchy suggests.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as Simon Renton has argued, mistaken assumptions about the homogeneity and cohesiveness of the "middling sort" can mislead us with respect to the identities, interests and conduct of some of the people in local authority.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, various studies of early modern elites and the middling sort have begun to illuminate the social relations of the personnel of town government. Kinship links, together with social and commercial connection, have featured in these studies.<sup>8</sup>

In an effort to understand the particular character of the corporate personnel at Ipswich and its impact on the governance of the town, this chapter looks beyond the elites, as far as possible, because, of course, the process of government involved a range of other people as well. The chapter begins with an examination of the economic and occupational identities of officeholders. Although the identification of the occupations of many of the more junior officers and servants has been limited by the nature of the available sources, it has been possible to develop a fairly reliable profile of relative wealth across the whole spectrum of corporate personnel. Even amongst the senior officers it is not possible to establish occupations or economic interests for

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Early Modern Europe: and Endangered Species?" *Historical Research: The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 64 (1991), p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> See S. Pole, "Crime, Society and Law Enforcement in Hanoverian Somerset" (University of Cambridge, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1984). Studies of county governance have noted the distribution of power beyond local elites, see J. Kent, *The English Village Constable, 1580-1642: A Social and Administrative History* (Oxford, 1985); P.J. King, "'Illiterate Plebeians, Easily Misled': Jury Composition, Experience, and Behaviour in Essex, 1735-1815" in J.S. Cockburn and T.A. Green (eds.), *Twelve Good Men and True, The Criminal Trial Jury in England, 1200-1800* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 255-304.

<sup>7</sup> S. Renton, "The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort in the Eighteenth Century: The Case of Norwich in 1766 and 1767" in A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds.), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996), pp. 115-136.

<sup>8</sup> P. Clark, "Civic Leaders"; D'Cruz, "Middling Sort". The urban elites of London have been interestingly examined in N. Rogers, "Money, Land and Lineage: the Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London" *Social History* 4 (1979), reprinted in P. Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1688 - 1820* (Harlow, Essex, 1990) 268-90; D. Andrews, "Aldermen and the Big Bourgeoisie of London Reconsidered" *Social History* 6 (1981), pp. 359-69; H. Horwitz, "'The Mess of the Middle Class' revisited: the case of the 'Big Bourgeoisie' of Augustan London" *Continuity and Change* 2 (1987), pp. 263-96.

everyone. Nonetheless, it has been possible to observe important changes in the occupations of corporation officers. The economic and social identities of those who held the various offices of the Corporation reveals the social distribution of power and the burdens of community governance. Moreover, the wealth and occupation of officers at various levels of authority suggests their respective economic interests and motives for participation in government.

The chapter next considers kinship, other forms of social connection, and the reputation of officeholders. These subjects are considered with particular emphasis on their impact on the conduct of corporate administration and politics. It will be seen that Ipswich was not subject to a tight, oligarchic regime. Nevertheless, a cohesive elite characterised much of the period of this study and facilitated an effective administration of the Corporation. The institutional dispersal of power, which was so characteristic of Ipswich, could be managed through the informal relations of officeholders to ensure effective exercise of state power.

Lastly, the chapter considers the relationship between the conditions of corporate officeholding and the character of the corporation's personnel. Here the incentives and burdens of office are assessed as they impacted upon the recruitment and assiduity of the corporation's officers and servants. Together with a consideration of the career patterns of certain key offices, some assessment is made of the motives and interests of those who undertook the business of the corporation.

## **2. Wealth and Vocations**

The assemblymen of Ipswich, like the common counsellors and aldermen of other similarly constituted corporations, were drawn from the more prosperous members of the town.<sup>9</sup> Even a cautious reading of the ratepayer assessments made in the late 1750s suggests that these men were drawn from the upper reaches of the community's

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<sup>9</sup> 47% of the Assemblymen at Ipswich in 1755 were amongst the top 15% of ratepayers, which is comparable to figures for Great Yarmouth in the years 1660-61 where 41% of the Assemblymen were amongst the top 10% of ratepayers. Gauci, *Yarmouth*, p.85. table 2.6.



property owners (see Table 4.1).<sup>10</sup> But it is important to acknowledge that the highest offices were not routinely held by the richest people. Samuel Hamblin, the wealthiest bailiff in the 1750s owned properties worth £60 15s, but ranked only thirty-six amongst all ratepayers; the average assessment for bailiffs was £23 5s -- 129th amongst all ratepayers. The average assessment for justices of the peace was lower than that of one hundred other ratepayers.<sup>11</sup> Only nine of the 100 highest ratepayers in this period were members of the Assembly. Great property owners in the town, such as William Fonnereau, the owner of Christchurch Mansion and an important London financier, Thomas Cobbold, the successful brewer or John Barnard, the shipbuilder never joined either the Portmen or the Twentyfour.

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<sup>10</sup> Poor rate assessments must be cautiously used as indicators of relative wealth within towns. For this study, data on poor rate assessments was derived principally from the rate books of every parish in Ipswich for the year 1759 or the closest year for which rate books survived. For most parishes, records for 1759 or 1760 were available, however, data from 1765 had to be used in the case of St. Matthew's. Examinations of other parishes' rate books suggest that there was very little fluctuation in the assessed values of properties between 1759 and 1765. Suitable poor rate books do not survive for three parishes. Data for St. Helen's was collected from the church rate books for that parish. Records from both later years at St. Helen's and those of other parishes in the early 1760s suggest that the same property evaluations were made for church rate and poor rate assessments. In the absence of parish or church rate assessments for St. Nicholas and St. Mary Key, land tax assessments have been used. The propensity of land tax evaluations to undervalue property has been recognised in instances where the status of particular individuals is under consideration. St. Nicholas and St. Mary Key constituted about 13% of town's houses and population in 1801. Accordingly, the under-valuation of these parishes is unlikely to distort substantially wider patterns within this data. See: J. V. Beckett, and D. M. Smith, "The Land Tax Returns as a Source for Studying the English Economy in the Eighteenth Century" *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, LVI (1981), J.V. Beckett, "Land Tax Administration at the Local Level, 1693-1798" in M. Turner and D. Mills (eds.), *Land and Property: the English Land Tax 1692 - 1832* (Gloucester, 1986); W.R. Ward, *English Land Tax in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1953). It should also be recognised that it is not always possible to distinguish ratepayers who have the same name. However, in many cases, and nearly all of those amongst the corporate elite, other sources have made it possible to distinguish cases of single individuals paying rates on several different properties from instances where there were two or more ratepayers with the same name. It should also be noted that individuals may have owned property outside the bounds of the town's parishes and, moreover, that all persons did not have the same proportion of their wealth in real property. Nonetheless, the rate data provided here gives a useful indication of the broad patterns of wealth.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Thirkle, the justice with the highest poor rate assessment, ranked seventeenth amongst all ratepayers, and thus he was also not amongst the town's very top property owners. Yet Thirkle's case is peculiar in that it was reported that he won £10,000 in a lottery in 1747. This was clearly an example of the limitations of real property assessments as indicators of total wealth. See *IJ*, 19 Dec. 1747.

**Table 4.1 Distribution of Rate Payers and Corporation Officers by Poor Rate Assessments (1755-1760)**

Rates Paid	0-£3 19s	£4-£8 19s	£9-16 19s	£17-£49 19s	£50+	Total No.
No of Rate Payers	604	336	208	155	49	1,352
% of All Rate Payers	44.7	24.9	15.4	11.5	3.6	
Freemen Voters	35.2	26	15.5	19.6	3.7	219
<b>Senior Officers</b>						
Bailiffs	0	22.2	11.1	55.6	11.1	9
Portmen	0	0	25	56.2	18.7	16
Twentyfourmen	0	23.3	33.3	36.6	6.6	30
Assemblymen	0	18.4	34.2	36.8	10.5	36
Justices	0	13.3	13.3	60	13.3	15
Treasurers	0	0	33.3	33.3	33.3	3
<b>Overseers</b>						
St. Clement's	37.5	25	12.5	12.5	12.5	16
Sample from all Parishes	22.2	22.2	27.2	22.2	5.5	18
<b>Churchwardens</b>						
St. Clement's	0	33.3	22.2	11.1	33.3	9
Sample from all Parishes	4.3	30.4	21.7	26	17.3	23
<b>Other Officers</b>						
Headboroughs	0	25	75	0	0	8
Grand Jurors	7.2	17.4	36.2	31.8	7.2	69
Petty Jurors	23.8	47.6	19	9.5	0	21
Petty Constables	68.7	6.3	12.5	12.5	0	16
Sergeants at Mace	100	0	0	0	0	4

**Notes:** Figures for the Portmen, Twentyfour and Assembly include only those persons who attended meetings of the Great Court in the years 1755 to 1760. Twentyfourmen who later became portmen are listed in both rows. Thirty-six men were active as twentyfourmen in this period but it is not possible to establish the rates paid by six of them. The Churchwardens of St. Clements are from the period 1754 to 1767. The "Sample from all Parishes" consists of thirty-six overseers from various parishes in the period 1754 to 1760. The petty jurors rates could only be established for the years 1755, 1758 and 1760. The figures for freemen are those freemen listed in the 1754 bailiffs poll book. Those freemen whose rates could not be clearly established are not included in these figures. *Sources:* SRO/I, Overseers' Rate Books, Church Warden's Rate Books and Land Tax Records: FB98/G12/7-9, St. Clement's; FB101/G9/2, St. Peter's; FB95/E1/1, St. Matthew's; FB107/G2/1, St. Stephen's; FB91/F1/1-2,6, St. Mary, Tower; FB104/G1/2, St. Mary, Elms; FB106/G1/2, St. Lawrence; FB92/G1/2, St. Mary, Stoke; FB93/94/4, St. Margaret's; FB96/E2/4, St. Helen's; C10/1/73, St. Nicholas; C10/1/73, St. Mary Key; *The Poll for the Bailives of Ipswich, Taken Sept. 8, 1754.* (Ipswich, 1754).

While not the richest members of the community, the Corporation's senior officers were certainly amongst the more prosperous freemen: at least three quarters of the assemblymen were included in the top twenty-five percent of rate payers. Yet it

should be noted that there was a considerable spread of wealth amongst the senior officeholders. Although all the assemblymen paid rates higher than those of at least half the community (an estimated 375 households [perhaps 30% of all households] did not pay rates at all),<sup>12</sup> the senior officers were not an economically homogeneous group. One-quarter of the twentyfourmen owned property worth less than £11, which was just ten percent of the assessed value of the wealthiest portman. The average assessment among the portmen, £33 10s, was nearly twice the twentyfourmen's average of £18. This gap in the wealth of the portmen and twentyfour in the middle of the eighteenth century is further reflected in their few surviving wills and other scattered pieces of evidence.<sup>13</sup>

The concrete implications of this gap are not obvious, but given the development of partisan divisions in Corporation politics along portmen-twentyfour lines, it is not unlikely that there was some resentment amongst the twentyfourmen of the wealth and power of the portmen. Moreover, it may have been that the portmen's wealth conferred important advantages in the borough's political contests. Not only was cash needed to secure the votes of freemen, but assemblymen with more highly assessed businesses or trades were likely to have had greater patronage resources with which to court support amongst voters. These matters will be explored more fully below, but for the moment it is sufficient to recognise that, in general, the portmen were wealthier than the twentyfourmen.

The occupations of the Corporation's senior officers were also an important reflection of the character of the town's government and politics. It is not perhaps surprising that Ipswich's role as a trading centre was reflected in the economic activities of the portmen and twentyfourmen. Merchants and traders were, throughout the eighteenth century, important figures in the town's government and politics. After the middle of the century, however, the place of lawyers and bankers became more

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<sup>12</sup> The total number of households at Ipswich in 1755 has been estimated at about 1,710. This is based on a population estimate of 8,000 (see above p. 32). There were approximately 1,350 ratepayers listed in the town's twelve parishes during the period 1759-1765.

<sup>13</sup> SRO/I, IC/AA1/178/51, Will of Cooper Gravenor (1) (1735); SRO/I, HB10: 50/20/38.1, will of John Sparowe (1763).

prominent. This reflected the development of the local economy and attendant changes in the occupational composition of the more prosperous freemen from whom the assemblymen were selected. The increasing presence of these professions in the senior corporate offices appears to have had important implications for the conduct of politics and government.

Despite silting problems in the River Orwell and the general shift from overseas to coastal trading, the port continued to be the major factor in the Ipswich economy. While mariners and shipbuilders do not seem to have been active in local government, merchants certainly were.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to determine the occupations of many of the assemblymen, but such powerful, long-serving bailiffs as Cooper Gravenor, John Cornelius and John Sparowe are easily identified as traders whose own activities reflected the diversifying nature of the local economy. Although primarily a coal merchant, by the time of his death, Cooper Gravenor had accumulated a number of urban and rural rental properties as well as substantial malting facilities. Similarly, Cornelius and Sparowe were both merchants who enjoyed substantial incomes from land rental. Both men held several properties in town, and Sparowe owned land in four parishes of Suffolk and one in Norfolk.<sup>15</sup> All three men, in common with other bailiffs and assemblymen, also held locally important government revenue jobs. Gravenor was collector of customs at Ipswich from 1716 and customer of Harwich until 1728. Sparowe began a long career in customs as a searcher in 1736, and Cornelius was named the customer in 1731.<sup>16</sup> The activities of these men as merchants, rentiers, and revenue officers assured them of diverse income sources and provided several different conduits through which local patronage and influence could be channelled.

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<sup>14</sup> Ship owners and masters' prolonged absences from town may have made them less likely candidates for local office. Throughout the eighteenth century the Barnard and Bayley families amassed fortunes building ships for the Royal Navy and other customers but were at no time members of the Assembly. See: A.G.E. Jones, *Shipbuilding in Ipswich* (1957) and J. Leather, *The Shipbuilding Bayleys* (1965). Michael Reed similarly notes the absence of mariners from local office in the seventeenth century. See Reed, "Economic Structure", p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> The wills of Cooper Gravenor and John Sparowe, as cited in n. 13 (above). Cornelius's holding are evident from parish church rates: SROI: C2/5/4/1. *IJ*, 17Feb. 1739, 23rd Aug. 1740 and 1st Sept. 1744 provide further evidence of the business dealings of these men.

<sup>16</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Treasury Books*, vol. 30.2, 1716, 576; *Treasury Books and Papers*, cited in H.B. Copinger, *Suffolk Records and Manuscripts* (Manchester, 1908), vol. iii, pp. 281-2.

From the mid-eighteenth century, however, the merchants' domination of the senior offices of the corporation appears to have weakened. Lawyers had long been important as the recorders and town clerks; but from the 1750s their presence among the assemblymen was more noticeable, and they began to serve as bailiffs, treasurers, and clavingers. Between 1700 and the election of Humphrey Rant in 1745, only one of the thirty-two men serving as bailiff can be identified as a lawyer. Following Rant's election, at least eight of the thirty-four bailiffs elected until the end of the century were lawyers. Moreover the lawyer-bailiffs tended to serve multiple terms in a period when there was a higher turnover of bailiffs.<sup>17</sup> Humphrey Rant and Peter Clarke were each elected to the office six times, while John Kerridge served seven terms. These were the greatest number of multiple terms in a period when those elected bailiff would typically serve three terms. The few lawyers who did become bailiffs in the first half of the eighteenth century, were always listed as the "junior" bailiff, and they never served more than one term. Samuel Kent, for example, took over as bailiff in the middle of the 1750 corporate year after the death of one of the incumbents, John Margerum; Kent was never again elected bailiff. Later, lawyer-bailiffs such as Humphrey Rant, Peter Clarke, Goodchild Clarke and others were particularly active in town affairs as bailiffs, portmen and through their legal practices. They were deeply engaged in the political controversies of their day, and were active in the charities and committees of the Great Court. The lawyers' presence in town government grew so that by the time of the 1833 Municipal Commissioners' visit they were the largest single occupational grouping in the politically ascendant Twentyfour. Of the twenty serving members of that body, six were attorneys who also held the jobs of the town clerk, coroner, clavinger and treasurer.<sup>18</sup>

The growing place of the lawyers in the higher offices of the Corporation was a reflection of the changing nature of the local economy and the occupational structure of

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<sup>17</sup> See above p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> *RCMC*, p. 2298. Similar change in the occupation profiles of civic leaders was occurring in Gloucester in this period. *VCH, History of the County of Gloucester*, vol. 4, *The City of Gloucester*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 148.

those seeking senior Corporation posts.<sup>19</sup> Great merchant families like the Sparowes lost their pre-eminence in Ipswich society in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, families like the Cobbolds, who built a fortune in brewing, or the shipbuilding Barnards and Bayles, did not seek Corporate offices. It may be that the decline of great merchant families afforded a more open environment and greater opportunity for affluent newcomers to ascend the Corporate ladder. In any case, the rising status and incomes of lawyers seems to have been an important factor contributing to their greater presence in higher office. By the time they had become bailiffs in the late 1740s and early 1750s, Humphrey Rant was amongst the top five percent of rate payers and Goodchild Clarke was in the top twenty percent.<sup>21</sup>

Lawyers' increasing role in town government may also have been attributable to the continuing litigious nature of corporation business and politics, along with the growing importance of statute law in local affairs. The turnpiking of roads leading to the town, disputes over parliamentary bills relating to the port and the navigation of the River Gipping, and general statutory directions to local authorities, all meant that those with legal training were better equipped to understand the Corporation's affairs. Moreover, the perception of lawyers, as having great understanding and capability in handling these matters, might have been an important political asset. From the middle of the eighteenth century the town clerkship became an important route to the bailiwick.

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<sup>19</sup> For an important discussion of lawyers and other professionals and urban growth see G. Holmes, *Augustan England. Professions, State, and Society, 1680-1730* (London, 1982), pp. 11-16, 139-142, 159-162. Also: Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp. 205-7; P. Clark, "Civic Leaders", pp. 315, 323-4; Cowan, "Urban Elites", pp. 126-27. The place of the professions in seventeenth-century Ipswich is also considered in: Reed, "Economic Structure", pp. 102, 110-13.

<sup>20</sup> Members of several ancient trading families had, by the early nineteenth century, made the jump to law or banking. K. J. Atton, "Municipal and Parliamentary Politics in Ipswich, 1818-1847" (University of London, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1980), Appendix.

<sup>21</sup> Parish rate sources cited in Table 4.1

<b>Table 4.2: <i>Town Clerks as Bailiffs</i></b>		
	<b>1700-1749</b>	<b>1750-1799</b>
<b>No. of Bailiffs</b>	28	32
<b>No. of Town Clerks</b>	7	4
<b>No. of Bailiffs Who Had Previously Been Town Clerk</b>	0	3
<i>Source: GCB, 1700-99.</i>		

The growing presence of lawyers had a parallel in the increased holding of senior office by bankers and a sort of local "monied interest" founded on investments and property dealings in the area. Ipswich's first bank was established by a Quaker family in 1744 and was quickly linked with the "Yellow" political interest centred in the Portmen. The second bank was founded by Charles Crickitt in 1786. Crickitt was presented with the freedom and elected an MP for Ipswich in 1784, and he was inducted into the Twentyfour the following year.<sup>22</sup> Crickitt and his business partners, fellow twentyfourmen John Kerridge and William Truelove, like the lawyers, reflected the rise of new sorts of men in the town's government. They did not necessarily have long ancestral connections with the community, nor did they inherit family businesses around which the local economy revolved. They were, however, wealthy and their wealth and position afforded politically useful influence reflected in their rapid ascent through the corporate hierarchy to the office of bailiff or member of parliament.

It is important to stress that what is described here was the growing presence of the professions in the senior officers, not a take-over by them. Merchants of various types continued to play important roles in the higher levels of the Corporation throughout the eighteenth century. But the expanded place of the lawyers and the decline of the great merchant families does suggest that the development of the local economy both changed the nature of Corporation business and broadened the range of occupational types ascending to senior office. Accordingly, the qualities of corporate leadership also changed. When the Sparowes had been a great family in the seventeenth

<sup>22</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", ff.118-19; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 350.

and early eighteenth centuries, the Corporation was trying to sustain the town's collapsing role as a centre and port for the region's overseas textile trade, as well as fighting to preserve its share of the Newcastle coal shipping business.<sup>23</sup> But by the end of John Sparowe's last term as bailiff in 1751 the local economy had reoriented as an agricultural distribution and production centre, and as a coastal trading port. The more diversified, less narrowly controlled economy was perhaps more likely to be ineffectively managed by an oligarchy of merchant families whose pursuit of personal interests could be irrelevant or damaging to sectors of the economy in which they had no stake.<sup>24</sup>

The skills and understanding which such people brought to the management of corporation affairs were less well matched to the circumstances of the Corporation by the middle of the eighteenth century. In whatever sense Ipswich might have once been like the Webbs' ideal type of a "community of producers", wherein the leaders of trade in the town were also its political leaders, this was certainly no longer the case by the mid-eighteenth century. Although the increasing role of the lawyers can be seen as the advent of new leaders spawned from a newly important sector of the local economy, their significance here lies in the fact that they embodied new ideas about the nature and qualifications of town leadership. The seventeenth-century merchants who understood the infrastructural needs of the cloth or coal trades and were well connected with the trading networks upon which the town depended, possessed the skills and expertise to serve the community. Moreover, they possessed the political resources to be able to hold office and exercise power. By the mid-eighteenth century, the town's economy no longer produced such central figures nor did it need them. The growing role of the lawyers reflected a changed set of circumstances in which their administrative, financial, legal and, perhaps, communication skills were particularly useful in the execution of Corporation business and in the politics of officeholding. The impact of

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<sup>23</sup> M. Reed, "Economic Structure...", pp. 97, 104-5.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the dissolution of Norwich's town oligarchy as a partial result of that town's economic diversification in the seventeenth century, see: J. T. Evans, "The Decline of Oligarchy in Seventeenth Century Norwich" in *Journal of British Studies* 14 (1974-5), pp. 46-76.



lawyers and bankers was visible on the influential 1785 committee to examine the management of corporate finances. Such men held more than a third of the places on the committee, the same number as the merchants, manufacturers, and other service providers combined, and more than the gentry.<sup>25</sup>

It might be argued that the rise of the lawyers and bankers, and indeed, clergymen like Richard Canning, reflected an element of growing professionalisation within governance.<sup>26</sup> At one level the virtue of these new men was that they did not appear to represent a particular economic interest such as shipbuilding or brewing and malting. They were disinterested professionals whose advocacy, financial, and legal skills could serve the collective interest which now embraced a variety of economic activities. Corfield has asserted that in the eighteenth century the professions developed an ethos founded on the belief in their "disinterested contribution to the greater good" and an identification of their concerns as being with the entire community.<sup>27</sup> This ethos afforded a kind of legitimisation of the attorney's holding of senior civic office which was quite different from that relied upon by the merchant oligarch. In the diversified economy of the eighteenth-century town, where many people were not members of the corporation, senior officers could not be legitimised as the agents selected by a self-governing community of producers whose interests were common. The lawyer could not only claim to be disinterested but also technically more capable of undertaking the tasks of government.

Of course, against this view there was the long-held suspicion of the professions, and it seems unlikely that the public actually believed that the lawyers and bankers of Ipswich were nothing but public-spirited men. In the last decades of the eighteenth century Ipswich was likely to have been a very politically cynical community as electoral corruption spread and the Ark Masons and Wellington Club came to dominate politics.<sup>28</sup> But even in this sort of climate, the local governors may nonetheless have

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<sup>25</sup> See below pp. 168, 207.

<sup>26</sup> Clergymen never held corporate office, but they could be influential in the public affairs of the Corporation. For a discussion of the participation of Canning and other clergymen, see below p. 255.

<sup>27</sup> Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, p. 202.

<sup>28</sup> See below pp. 246-7.

found it useful to assert claims to professional status and stress its relevance to their worthiness as corporate officers. As Corfield has observed, even though there was much scepticism about the real integrity of many professionals, the standards to which they claimed to aspire nonetheless became the basis of expectations of their performance.<sup>29</sup> In the context of town government in Ipswich, the growing presence of the professions may have helped change the local political culture. Disinterestedness and competence, understood in professional terms, may have become more important qualities than an enduring, personal participation in the chief trades or manufactures within the community. This in turn may have been part of a shift in the expectations and understanding of the purposes of local government which helped to animate calls for reform. The advent of the professionals, and their avowal of an ethos of public service, was certainly consistent with strands of radical writing hostile to conceptions of town governments as private corporations of persons with common economic interests, in favour of notions of public service which ought to be concerned with all members of the community regardless of the basis of their association with the community.<sup>30</sup>

Parochial offices and the Corporation posts not normally held by incumbent assemblymen were filled by less wealthy people. As Table 4.1 suggests, while drawn from the full spectrum of rate payers, churchwardens tended to be in the third quartile. Thomas Cobbold, who was the third highest ratepayer in Ipswich with property assessed at £185, served as the Churchwarden for St. Clements; Jonathan Rant, who held the same post, was the eleventh highest ratepayer with an assessed value of £110. More typically, however, churchwardens owned property worth between £7 and £30. Overseers were generally more modest property holders; but, again, the range was broad: Jonathan Rant was also one of St. Clements' overseers, yet more than one-half the parish's overseers in the years 1754-9 were rated at £3 or less.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, pp. 201-2.

<sup>30</sup> Ereunetes, "Reflections....", pp. 9-10, 105-7; Oldfield, *Boroughs of Great Britain*, vol. 1, pp. 103-8.

<sup>31</sup> This figure includes seven overseers who were not rated. The figures in table 4.1 exclude person not rated.

After overseers, jurors were drawn from the widest socio-economic range of people in the community. By law, jurors in incorporated towns were required to possess £40 in goods. In most cases it is not possible to ascertain if Ipswich's jurors met that criteria but, as Table 4.1 indicates, in the 1750s seventy-five percent of grand jurors were amongst the upper quarter of all rate payers, while the same proportion of petty jurors were amongst the top half of all rate payers. The profile of grand jurors as ratepayers is comparable with that of churchwardens.<sup>32</sup> Petty jurors, however, were spread more widely across this spectrum of wealth, though they were more commonly at the lower, most numerous end of the scale of ratepayers.

Petty constables were predominately found amongst the lower end of the spectrum of ratepayers. Nearly seventy percent of petty constables were amongst the lower half of all ratepayers and, unlike the other important parochial offices, there were none amongst the highest rate band shown on table 4.1.<sup>33</sup> Yet these were not likely to be poor men. They were, after all, ratepayers, and contemporary expectations of the social standing of a petty constable were that he be an "Able Man, both in Body and Estate, and not of the meaner Sort".<sup>34</sup>

Nearly all of the other lesser corporation officeholders were also rate payers, although some, such as the beadles and sergeants at mace, like the petty constables, could be excused from making payments during the period of their service.<sup>35</sup> In the 1750s and 1760s those who were sergeants typically had been rated at around £2, which put them amongst the lowest fifteen percent of ratepayers. Amongst the twelve men

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<sup>32</sup> 23 Hen. XVIII c. 13; R. Burn, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, 12th edition (London, 1772), vol. II, p.478.

<sup>33</sup> The real relative wealth of all the petty constables may be even less than suggested here. This sample is based on a five year period during which many constables were not rated because they served throughout the sample years and were granted exemptions. Thus, the rates which have been used here are those who were not constables of long duration. It may be that those who took the job on a longer term basis did so because, for them, the fees and perquisites were attractive. See the "Incentives to Serve and Career Patterns" section below.

<sup>34</sup> W. Nelson, *The Office and Authority of a Justice of the Peace...*, (London, 1729), p. 188. The Webbs have traced this view to the orders of the early Stuart's Privy Councils, see: "Ms. Register, Privy Council, 1631; *Orders ... for the Better Administration of Justice*, 1630", quoted in Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. i, p. 117 n3.

<sup>35</sup> The following estimates of their rate payments are based on the nearest years in which they did not hold these offices.

appointed scavengers in 1768, only six appear in the rate books for the sample years 1755-1760, five of whom were rated from between £2 and £8. Valentine Pickney and James Churchman were alehouse or tavern keepers who were respectively rated at £6 and £8 pounds placing them amongst the upper sixtieth and seventy-fourth percentiles of ratepayers.<sup>36</sup> Thus, although the sergeants and scavengers -- offices which could be expected to attract poorer men -- were typically amongst the lowest ranks of ratepayers, more prosperous people would occasionally take these jobs. Similar ranges can be found in the ratings of the market officers such as flesh wardens or leather searchers, although, here as well, these officeholders were typically amongst the bottom half of rate payers. The clerk of the market in the 1750s was just amongst the upper half of rate payers with property assessed at £5. Leather searchers and the flesh and bull wardens paid rates ranging from £2 to £7. These offices were never filled by people in the upper three rate bands shown in table 4.1. It would appear that usually these lower offices of the Corporation were held by men of sufficient means to be ratepayers but who typically fell among the lower echelons of that group. Nonetheless, it is clear that men of who might be described as amongst the middling ranks of wealth could hold the most junior offices of the Corporation. Although some of these officeholders were relatively low on the ladder of ratepayers, in a town with about 1,350 ratepayers and perhaps 300 or 400 household which paid no rates, they were still likely to be better off than a large part of the community.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The possibility must be acknowledged that the six men who paid rates in 1760 may have ceased to do so on account of poverty by the time of their appointments as scavengers in 1768.

<sup>37</sup> Female officeholders can occasionally be found throughout the century, usually as overseers and, in one instance, as the gaoler. Anne Sparkes, an overseer in St. Peter's in 1722, was a wealthy widow holding the lease on the Stoke Mill. SRO/I, FB101/A1/3 St. Peter's Overseers' Account Book; SRO/I, C9/11/138 Chamberlains' Accounts, also see below, p.287.. The participation of women as officeholders is considered in: "Notes and Queries" in *The East Anglian*, new series vol. i, (Ipswich, 1885-6), pp. 309, 320; Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 448, 452, 474, 480; and D'Cruz, "Provincial England", pp. 70-80.

### 3. Kinship, Connection, and Reputation

As important as wealth and occupation were, the construction of officeholders' social identities was interwoven with other factors. Historians have seen kinship links, social and business connections, and the nature of prestige and reputation as essential elements of urban elites.<sup>38</sup> While the political dimensions of elite association and oligarchy are considered more fully below, it is worthwhile focusing here on kinship, social connections and reputation as factors in both the acquisition and exercise of corporate office.

Kinship links amongst Corporation officers are evident in eighteenth-century Ipswich, but they do not seem to be a decisive factor in either the composition or the conduct of the elites. Of the sixty-eight men who became portmen in the eighteenth century, twenty had a surname in common with another portmen. Fifteen of the fifty-nine bailiffs had a common surname. This crude measure suggests that perhaps a quarter of these men had at least one relative who had held the same office in a one hundred year period.<sup>39</sup> Some cases of marital or paternal links are evident, but they are not characteristic nor even particularly decisive. The Sparowe family had, for instance, been important merchants since at least 1576. A member of the family served as a bailiff at least once in every decade between 1640 and 1700. After Henry Sparowe was bailiff in 1698, it was another twenty-four years before John Sparowe would resume the family presence in the Corporation's highest office. John Sparowe was bailiff a record thirteen times between 1722 and 1753; moreover, he was amongst the most active justices of the peace. But Sparowe's long tenure at the centre of town government assured no continuity of family-based political power. He had no children to inherit his

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<sup>38</sup> N. Rogers, "Money, Land and Lineage"; J. T. Evans, "The Decline of Oligarchy in Seventeenth Century Norwich" *Journal of British Studies* 14 (1974-5), pp. 46-76; P. Clarke, "Civic Leaders" in Clark, *Transformation*, pp. 311-45; 205-206; D'Cruz, "Middling Sort"; and Gauci, *Yarmouth*, pp. 57-91.

<sup>39</sup> Surname links can only be used as a crude indicator of kinship connection. Such connection can be under-represented by this means because it does not detect marriage or matrilineal bonds. Conversely, surname links may exaggerate the extent of kinship connection because persons sharing common names may be unrelated or only remotely related. Nonetheless, it is suggestive of the relative significance of kinship links

political and economic capital; and it was not until 1817 that a Sparowe (the last Sparowe bailiff's great-grand-nephew) would again become a member of the Assembly or serve as bailiff.<sup>40</sup>

Sons of prominent townsmen might occasionally follow their father into a central role in the Corporation's affairs, but this was not how elite power was constructed. John Gravenor's career in town government seems to have owed little to his father, Cooper Gravenor, who had stirred up so much controversy as bailiff in the first two decades of the eighteenth century. John, Cooper's second son, did not acquire his freedom until 1725 -- after his father's fall from power a few years before. Moreover, John did not tap into any sort of political network his father had created. Cooper had been a portman, while John was elected to the Twentyfour. Moreover, the son gained that office at least a year after his father's death. Most importantly, as shown below John's allies and opponents in his great moment of political crisis, the 1754-6 dispute over the illegal election of portmen, suggests little factional continuity with the people who variously opposed or supported Cooper during his aggressive bailiwicks of the years 1702 to 1720.<sup>41</sup>

Although kin connection was common amongst the twentyfourmen, it was not a powerful determinant of that body's membership. Few of the town's families placed men in the Twentyfour for more than two generations. From 1700 to 1820, 54 of 136 twentyfourmen had the same surname as another twentyfour man. Of that total only 14 persons shared a surname with two or more persons over the course of this 120 year period. Four members of the Hamblin family served on the Twentyfour. On three occasions Samuel Hamblin was bailiff, and he was town treasurer for two years. His three descendants, however, while all members of the Twentyfour, never held one of the senior offices of the Corporation. Four members of the Thorndike family entered the Twentyfour between 1754 to 1800. Between 1795 and 1820 either James or Samuel

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<sup>40</sup> SRO/I, HB10 50/20/38.1, Will of John Sparowe, (1763); Sparowe family letters and genealogical material in the private possession of Mr. G. Colchester, London.

<sup>41</sup> SRO/I, IC/AA1/164/76, Will of Cooper Gravenor (1), (1732); SRO/I: IC/AA1/177/17, Will of Cooper Gravenor (2), (1742); SRO/I, C2/11, Alphabetical list of Freemen admitted 1722-1822; SRO/I, K15/2A Collection of many polls..."; GCB, 8 September 1723 & 29 September 1723; See pp. 238-

was a bailiff in nine of those fifteen years; and one or other of them was treasurer for all but three years between 1800 and 1820.<sup>42</sup> But the Hamblins and the Thorndikes were not typical. In any case, the potency of the Hamblins' presence is doubtful given that they did not hold high office. The Thorndikes appear to have been a greater power, but this was not until after the mid-1790s when, as argued below, the politics of the community underwent a decisive structural change.

Kinship does not appear to have been a vital element in the success of townsmen in local office, but amongst those members of landed society who played a role in town affairs kinship links are more evident. Yet, here again, they do not appear to have been an essential feature of participation in town governance. Leicester Martin, who married into the influential Devereux family and acquired Christchurch Mansion in the process, was made recorder of Ipswich in 1704. William Churchill, the town's MP from 1707, was succeeded as one of the borough's representatives by his nephew, Francis Negus. Similarly, William Wollaston, MP from 1733 to 1741 was succeeded by his son William, who held a borough seat from 1768 to 1784; Samuel Wollaston served as bailiff in 1781 and was an active portman. Where landed families were concerned, it may not be surprising that kin links were stronger. Not only was this perhaps a more entrenched feature of landed society, but the security of landed fortunes compared to those based on Ipswich's urban trades may have made an inter-generational presence in local government more likely amongst landed families than those whose fortunes were dependent on town-based commerce. In any case, wealthy rural landowners were not normally holders of corporate offices other than the costly parliamentary seats. Yet for landed men sitting as MPs, like the townsmen holding other corporate posts, kinship links do not seem to have been a pronounced feature of officeholding. Moreover, the significance of kinship links is not always clear. Edward Vernon, the hero of Porto Bello and an Ipswich MP from 1741 until 1757, was eventually succeeded by his nephew, Francis Vernon, in 1761; but this was quite contrary to Edward's wishes.

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<sup>42</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", ff.643-46; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 441-2.

Francis had to wait until his uncle's death before succeeding to the family estate at Nacton and becoming involved in Ipswich politics.<sup>43</sup>

That kinship appears to have played a less significant role in the determination of corporate personnel in eighteenth-century Ipswich than in the previous century or in other towns may be attributable to several factors. The demographic trends of the early eighteenth century which undermined the continuity of many families across the nation undoubtedly also diminished the importance of kinship links among the elite at Ipswich.<sup>44</sup> The nature of the local economy in the eighteenth century may have also been less conducive to long family dynasties and a sustained inter-generational presence amongst the senior offices of the Corporation. The advanced decay of the traditional cloth-related industries and the overseas trade of the port may have weakened some of the families which had been more dominant in the seventeenth century. Moreover, the weakness of the local economy in the first decades of the eighteenth century may have made it difficult for new dynasties to arise and hold power. Indeed, economic diversification may have further inhibited the concentrations of wealth and influence that formerly were more likely to endure from one generation to the next. Interestingly, however, in the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, lawyers became more prominent in town affairs and their practices were increasingly continued by their heirs. Thus, the Hammonds, Notcutts and Clarkes, though not great inter-generational oligarchs, were families of lawyers whose members were active as bailiffs or town clerks.

While Corporate officers did not need to have strong kinship links to acquire and sustain themselves in office, other kinds of social connections were clearly important. As will be seen below, business partnerships, political alliances and association through service to either the central government or the Corporation had an important bearing on officeholding.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 435-46.

<sup>44</sup> E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London, 1981), 333-5.

<sup>45</sup> See below pp. 210-250.



Given that Ipswich's government was not a closely integrated structure, but rather an accretion of courts and offices with variable jurisdictions, there was much potential for an overlapping of authority in some instances, and gaps in jurisdiction in others. This appears to have been offset, however, by the social, business and political connections of the Corporation's officeholders. The informal links of officeholders outside their official roles were important factors in assuring the cohesion of town government. Although the connections between John Cornelius, John Sparowe, and Michael Thirkle featured largely in what might be seen as a closed, elite political clique, they also demonstrate that an active, cohesive governing elite could act quickly and mobilise resources in the public interest when required.<sup>46</sup> Shani D' Cruz has shown how connections developed through a variety of roles in the social and economic life of a community and became important for the establishment of political networks in eighteenth-century Colchester. While D'Cruz emphasises the political significance of "community brokers", it seems clear that such social links could also bear on the process of governance and the effectiveness of administration.<sup>47</sup>

Such connections could, for example, afford officeholders additional resources to execute their duties. An escape from the county gaol in the 1730s revealed how various connections, together with multiple officeholding, could bridge gaps in institutional organisation and afford cooperation where formal, official channels did not exist. William Hues and Milford Coe escaped from the county sheriff's gaol at Ipswich with the assistance of the turnkey Gabriel Cockburn who fled with Hues and Coe after they locked the gaoler in one of the cells. Eventually, the gaoler freed himself and raised the alarm. The county under-sheriff, G. Cornelius, sent a posse after the escapees, and sought the assistance of his relative, John Cornelius, who was an Ipswich justice and the Surveyor General of Customs for the area. John Cornelius was described as being "... so kind as to send the [customs] riding officers all along the Coast both in

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<sup>46</sup> Note the repairs to the Crane House and Common Quay undertaken by Cornelius and Sparowe. While they undoubtedly profited from the work, the town in general had an interest in its prompt, effective completion. See above p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> D'Cruz, "Provincial England", p. 149; and D'Cruz, "Middling Sort", pp. 181-207.

Suffolk and Essex to give them notice of the Escape and ordered them to be aiding and assisting in the retaking" of Hues, Coe and Cockburn. Cornelius also provided the county gaoler with a letter to the captains of the Harwich and Wivenhoe customs sloops enjoining vigilance to catch the fugitives. And, indeed, five days later, they were taken at sea by the Harwich-based customs sloop.<sup>48</sup> In this case, it is clear that men in authority were prepared to use the resources at their disposal quickly to reinforce the authority of other officers.

The personal connections of an officeholder might also help contribute to his prestige and reputation in the community. Contacts and affiliation with important people in the wider world were of value not only because of the influence or political support they could provide, but also because of the local value of the general perception of that association. Accounts of a humorous misunderstanding between Sparowe and George I during the King's visit to Ipswich in 1727 probably enhanced the bailiff's reputation in the town. As the King's procession approached the Ipswich, "links" [lanterns] were called for by members of the King's party. Sparowe, understanding links to be a string of sausages, ordered that some be brought immediately. He then stood ready greeting the King with a stick to which a string of sausages was tied. George is reported to have found this very amusing. Sparowe subsequently sent the King a marchpane [marzipan] cake "of extraordinary dimensions", and George responded by presenting Sparowe with full-length portrait of the King. The perception of Sparowe as enjoying royal favour would have had particular importance for the Ipswich Bailiff given that some members of his family had, in the recent past, been supporters of the exiled Stuarts.<sup>49</sup> Connections with important figures beyond the Corporation were marks of power and influence. The link between the social and political status of office and connections with the wider world was most evident in the

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<sup>48</sup> SRO/I HD 490/1, Deposition of G. Cornelius in Collection of Ms. documents in a book entitled "Private and Proof Portraits".

<sup>49</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 92. See also pedigrees and genealogical materials the Sparowe family in the private possession of Mr. Giles Colchester of London; and Wodderspoon, *Memorials...*, pp. 30, 33.

offices of the recorders and the high stewards. The men who filled these prestigious posts were selected in large part because they were well connected.

The status and prestige of office holders was affected by other factors as well. An officeholder's perceived engagement with the community was of great importance. A residence requirement for portmen and twentyfourmen was taken to be a matter of prescription. Normally, members of those bodies always seemed to have some sort of substantial residence in the town and, several elections to both the Portmen and Twentyfour were held to be invalid on the grounds of non-residence.<sup>50</sup> Residence in the community seems to have been important, or at least convenient, for the lesser officers as well. All fifteen of the petty constables in 1755-60, whose place of residence could be established, lived in the parish for which they were responsible. Five of the eight high constables, or headboroughs, were responsible for parishes within the wards in which they lived.<sup>51</sup> Even in the posts where residence was not strictly necessary, it was important for officers to have a strong connection to the town. Thus, Edward Vernon, the famous admiral and landed gentlemen who was one of the town's MPs, appears to have owned no property in Ipswich, but his estate was at nearby Nacton and his naval connections were seen very favourably by the coastal trading and shipbuilding interests of the town. In those cases where the recorders did not reside in Ipswich it was normally not long before they were required to appoint deputies who could more routinely address the interests of the Corporation.<sup>52</sup>

In general, therefore, most of the Corporation's officeholders, engagement in the life of the town grew naturally out of their residence and work there. In some cases, this extended into the town's cultural life. John Sparowe's home, the grand, sixteenth-century "Ancient House", was the meeting place of the town's music club, whose members included the organist and composer Joseph Gibbs and Thomas Gainsborough, who,

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<sup>50</sup> See: GCB, 29 Sept. 1755, 1st Jan. 1756; Assembly Book, 16 Oct. 1755 for the removals of John Tuffnell, Robert Tuffnell and William Hall.

<sup>51</sup> There was some foundation for this in the Common Law, see: Nelson, *Justice of the Peace*, p. 188. John Triffit, considering towns in the south-west of England, has argued that it was necessary for constables to live and work in the wards in which they served. Triffit, "Parliamentary Boroughs", p. 154.

<sup>52</sup> See above pp. 87-89.

before moving to Bath and fame, did portraits of John Sparowe, Samuel Kilderbee, the town clerk, and the MP, William Wollaston.<sup>53</sup> While it is difficult to gauge the significance of the music club with respect to Sparowe's status or reputation, it may have provided him with some distinction and, perhaps, something of a patronage opportunity.

#### **4. The Incentives to Serve and Career Patterns**

In 1714 Defoe characterised the job of parish constable as "an insupportable hardship" of which "there is neither profit nor pleasure".<sup>54</sup> The 1835 municipal commissioners' report and the Webbs reiterated the view that local government office was an onerous burden unless it was corruptly used for personal advantage. Various historians have noted the powerful disincentives to holding either corporate or parochial office. The Webbs have observed that the system of local officeholding, based on what they called "the principle of the obligation to serve", had become obsolete with the unravelling of the social and economic bonds which had made feasible the governance of small communities by unpaid, amateur local officials. They argued that the persistence of a relic of that system long after it had ceased to function yielded forms of local authority which inadequately struggled to govern and were vulnerable to corruption.<sup>55</sup> Although the eighteenth-century municipal corporation did not accord with the Webbs' ideal model of pre-modern officeholding, it does not follow that officeholding in corporations was thus inevitably some decayed, dysfunctional wreckage awaiting modern, utilitarian reform. Undeniably, officeholding and official practice did not conform to any set of eighteenth or twentieth century ideals, but it reflected the values, interests and capabilities of those who, given the patterns of power relations, came to hold local office. More recent historians, while rejecting the depth of the Webbs' critique, have nonetheless recognised the great burdens of local government service. In his study of

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<sup>53</sup> *East Anglian Magazine*, (June 1978), pp. 37, 8, 414 ; Redstone, *Ipswich*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Moreton [Daniel Defoe], *Parochial Tyranny* (London, 1714), p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 355-65

Great Yarmouth, Perry Gauci has stressed the Corporation's difficulties in recruiting officers and ensuring that they fulfilled their difficult, time-consuming and sometimes personally costly tasks. Indeed, that some men came forward and undertook the demanding duties of the constable or the justice of the peace has been taken as evidence of their sense of public duty and enlightened self-interest.<sup>56</sup>

Certainly, the bailiffs of Ipswich were men much pre-occupied with the business of government. In addition to their duties as the principal magistrates, they chaired the sessions of the Great Court, its various sub-committees and the Assembly; and they presided over the Petty Court and frequently attended the Headborough's Court. Moreover, the Town's bailiffs sat on the county militia committee, usually attended the Assize, and were appointed to the 1793 improvement commission. These men were normally involved in the management of at least one of the Town's charities. Because the records of several of these bodies do not survive, it is impossible to ascertain precisely the workload of the bailiffs and other JPs. It seems clear, however, that these posts required much time -- at least one or two days a week -- and a nearly continuous local presence. The recorder and town clerk were undoubtedly of much help to the bailiffs and other justices, but the tasks of the senior officers remained substantial.

The burdens of governance fell heavily on other unpaid officers as well. Not only was the corporation and parochial business time-consuming, but some tasks were likely to have been disagreeable to anyone but a resolved misanthrope. Chamberlains, clavingers, overseers and constables were all responsible for the collection of various rates, dues or loan repayments. Twice a year twelve overseers were charged with collecting rates from more than 1,350 ratepayers. The constables faced a similar task collecting the bridge or borough rate. Constables were subject to the hazards inherent in the tasks of keeping the peace, making arrests or distraining the property of those owing money to the Corporation or the Sessions. In addition to the risks of suffering serious physical injury in the course of their duties, it is quite apparent that there were concerns about civil suits which might be brought against constables as a consequence of their

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<sup>56</sup> Gauci, *Yarmouth*, pp. 26-32; Triffit, "Parliamentary Boroughs", p. 145; Jackson, *Hull*, p.309.

official actions. On numerous occasions, the Great Court agreed to indemnify constables against such legal action. Other officers were also indemnified against suits arising in the course of doing Corporation business. In 1755, after all but one of the portmen had been ejected from office, the Great Court ordered that the bailiffs, town clerk and any one else who had voted for the removal order be indemnified against any litigation it should provoke. Ipswich's corporate officers were not the agents of a modern bureaucratic, legal entity; an office was not a shield against personal civil liability for official actions.<sup>56</sup> But it was recognised that all officers would act less vigorously if they were not relieved of at least some of the liability they faced in the service of the Corporation, and so orders for the indemnification of corporation officers became a routine matter at the Great Court.

The personal liability of officeholders was entirely unrelieved where financial accounts were concerned. Chamberlains, overseers, various treasurers, rent wardens and others who held corporation, charity or parish funds had to balance their accounts each year. While they might take advantage of a positive balance in the course of their tenure, they would also have to dig into their own pockets to cover cash-flow deficits arising when demand for expenditure was high and rates or dues were delinquent or paid late. It does not appear, however, that officers were required to subsidise accounts when legitimate spending exceeded expected income. Normally, in such cases, additional rates would be levied or funds supplied from other accounts. If, however, an account was in deficit because receivables were overdue at the end of the term of office, an officer could not simply pass it on to his successor. Typically, in 1724, a special order was issued empowering the out-going chamberlains to collect sums due to their accounts after their term of office expired; but it was up to them to get the money and pass it on to their successors. The Corporation rarely made good an account in arrears if

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<sup>56</sup> The significance of the Corporation's legal status and the shifting character of officeholding will be more fully considered in light of recent work on custom, legal development and social power relations. See below pp. 248-50.

there were rates or dues receivable.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, neither the Corporation nor the parishes were willing to assume any responsibility for the accounts in the hands of their officers. This was made clear in 1756 when St. Clements Parish would accept no liability for the official debts of Thomas Moore, one of its former overseers, who owed three men sums of money for goods and services they had provided for the parish workhouse in 1753. Moore died without paying these debts, nor would his estate settle them. Accordingly, the men refused to pay their poor rates until the parish paid what they were owed. The vestry maintained that the parish had no obligation to pay and so ordered that the men's goods be distrained by the present overseers in order to collect the rates which were due.<sup>58</sup> Officers might incur other financial penalties even when accounts were not involved. In 1727, the gaoler, Nathaniel Webb, was fined ten pounds for allowing the escape of a prisoner. In 1796 it was ordered that if the town sergeants allowed any escapes or took bail without first consulting the bailiffs and the sum demanded was not sufficient, they would be financially liable up to the full value of their annual salaries.<sup>59</sup>

As well as being time-consuming and subjecting one to legal and financial liability, it has been argued that local government service could damage one's relations within the community. The constables, chamberlains, overseers as well as various market and quay dues collectors could expect all the odium usually accorded tax gatherers and regulation enforcers. Moreover, in a century of growing clashes between custom and law in which tension developed between "two concepts of order", the town's constables, sergeants at mace and overseers were likely to be at an uncomfortable point of interface in social conflicts which turned, in part, on the purposes and methods of state authority in the control of property, the regulation of morality and the relief of the poor. While there were no battles specifically over common rights at Ipswich, militia riots and market protests, and riots over attempts to regulate the seamen, typified the types of conflicts which historians have seen as

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<sup>57</sup> GCB, 17 Oct. 1724; various audit committee reports appear fairly routinely in the Great Court Book, for example see: GCB, 27 Nov. 1722.

<sup>58</sup> SRO/I, FB98/G12/6, St. Clements Parish Rate Book, 1756.

<sup>59</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/9, Sessions Book, 10 Aug. 1727 ); GCB, 29 Sept. 1796.

symptomatic of the utilisation of state authority to reinforce the recasting of social and economic relations.<sup>60</sup> Of course, the extent to which an individual would have been uncomfortable in such a role would have depended on their personal interests and attitudes. Some officers may have found ways of reconciling their official roles with their personal place in the community. Others may have been less concerned about the sometimes negative effect their official duties had on their relations with their neighbours. It seems clear, however, that duties which put officers at the point of confrontation in these types of social conflicts, meant that such posts could not be filled on an annual rotational basis under the principles of obligation to serve.

As considerable as these negative aspects of officeholding might have been, there was sufficient incentive for some men to take up the various tasks of government on a regular basis. In the eighteenth century, positive incentives rather than penalties seem to have been the more potent inducements to take-up office. In accordance with provision of the Corporation's 1665 charter, fines were still levied against those refusing to do the jobs they had been assigned, but this relic of the obligatory principal was uncommon and in decline in the early eighteenth century. After 1750 there is no evidence of fining for refusal to serve in an office.<sup>61</sup> In the first decades of the century, there was very occasional evidence of fines of jurors or watchmen. Thomas Booth was twice indicted for not watching and paid a fine of ten shillings in 1721. In 1739 ten men who failed to appear for jury duty after being impanelled were subjected to fines of five

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<sup>60</sup> The Work of E.P. Thompson has been most important in developing these themes; see especially his *Customs in Common* (London, 1991). The tensions between customary and elite concepts of order and the implications for constables are explored in K. Wrightson, "Two Concepts of Order: Justices, Constables, and Jurymen in Seventeenth Century England" in J. Brewer and J. Styles (eds.), *An ungovernable People: The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1980), pp. 21-22. Also see D. Hay and N. Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society* (Oxford, 1997). The difficult positions of local officers caught between two concepts of order are also considered in Kent, *Village Constable*, passim; and A.R. DeWindt, "Local Government in a Small Town: A Medieval Leet Jury and its Constituents" in *Albion* 23 (1991), pp. 627-654.

<sup>61</sup> *Principal Charters*... very few fines appear in the Sessions or other courts' records after the 1730s. It is possible that finings did continue but were handled summarily by the JPs or bailiffs in the petty sessions. But the gravity of the offence seems to make this unlikely. Moreover, other summary matters do occasionally leave traces in the Sessions records throughout the eighteenth century, but this is not the case for fines for refusal of office. Fines did continue to be levied, and became an important issue in other towns. See: Gillet and MacMahon, *A History of Hull*, p.247; T. Roch, *Proceedings of the Corporation of C\_\_\_\_y [Canterbury]: Shewing the Abuse of Corporation Government* (London, 1760), pp.1-2.



shillings each. The rarity of these sorts of fines and the unusual nature of such cases of mass avoidance of public duties, suggests that fining was not an important instrument in inducing people to hold office.<sup>62</sup> When this is considered in light of the patterns of persistent officeholding (discussed below), it would seem that even if all officeholders were not enthusiastic to serve, they were not compelled to do so. In the eighteenth century no person paid a fine either to avoid service or to be released from the Portmen or Twentyfour. The last person to pay a fine for refusing to take up the bailiwick was Richard Phillips, who paid £100 in 1687. He was selected again in 1702 and chose to serve that year. Early in the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for men chosen to be chamberlains to pay a fine rather than to serve in the office. In 1721, for example, the first pair of men elected chamberlains paid the five pound fine to be relieved of the office. Their successors also paid the fine and it was the third set of men selected who finally served.<sup>63</sup> The Corporation's records indicate that into the 1730s, fines were often paid by those seeking to be excused from the post of chamberlain. Fines were also paid by those refusing the post of guild merchant. Until 1727 two men were elected to the office, and they invariably opted to pay the fine of £3 6s 8d rather than serve. No replacements were sought for them and the funds were applied to the costs of the Assemblymen's annual feast. By the eighteenth century the election of guildholders was not an effort to find needed officeholders, but rather it was mechanism to ensure that wealthy freemen took their turn providing for the Corporate elite's annual banquet. By the fourth decade of the century even this use of the office had died out and fines were no longer applied.<sup>64</sup>

While the compulsion of fines diminished, there were a variety of inducements that prompted people to accept corporation offices willingly. The appeal of corporate office was not, however, universal. Among the attractions were particular interests, as

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<sup>62</sup> Sessions Book, 26 Sept. 1721; and 20 Aug. 1739. Also see below for the discussion of repeat officeholding.

<sup>63</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 439; GCB 19 Sept. 1721, 28 Sept. 1721.

<sup>64</sup> Wodderspoon, *Memorials...*, p. 179; GCB, 7 May 1725, 26 April 1726. Jackson also notes the use of appointments to offices and fines for refusal to serve as a kind of "primitive wealth tax", see : Jackson, *Hull...*, p. 327.

well as social and personal characteristics, that were important in shaping the governance of the community. Many Corporation offices offered the prospect of appreciable financial reward. The various salaries, fees, perquisites, and the advantages of holding large cash balances would have been significant inducements for some men to take up the burdens of the Corporation's posts. While some offices carried yearly stipends, the Corporation was far from a modern, salaried bureaucracy. The bailiffs were each paid £25 annually, while the recorders received £20 each year. Given that Joseph Massie's tables suggested that the average incomes for "civil officers" and men in the law were respectively £60 and £100, it is clear that these senior officers were not dependant on their salaries. Moreover, the costs of office -- especially the costs of elections in the later decades of the eighteenth century -- were, for the bailiffs, likely to have exceeded this stipend.<sup>65</sup> Still, these were not trivial sums, and such payments could help defray the costs of office.<sup>66</sup> In the 1790s, the Justices ordered that the Town's corn inspector be paid £30 per annum. It is unclear whether this was compensation for the onerousness and importance of that post in times of high grain prices, or rather was symptomatic of the growing corruption of electoral politics. By the earlier nineteenth century, the gaoler received £80 per year. This figure, however, represents more of a contracted fee than a paid salary because the costs of running the gaol were met from it.<sup>67</sup> Normally, annual stipends were not so high. The sergeants at mace received £10 per annum, the chamberlains 20s and others, such as the water bailiffs and town house keepers, received 40s.<sup>68</sup> Such officers also might enjoy additional income from fees and perquisites.

Indeed, fees were the principal form of remuneration for most officers and agents of the corporation. The town clerk, who normally was also the clerk to the borough sessions, collected fees from the Corporation, the sessions and those who used

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<sup>65</sup> Hay and Roger's revisions of Joseph Massie's tables as printed in P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, "Revising England's Social Tables 1688-1812" in *Explorations in Economic History* 19 (1982) in D. Hay and N. Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society* (Oxford, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1756; *RCMC*, p. 2296; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", f. 76.

<sup>67</sup> *RCMC*, p. 2301; *Sessions Book*, 19 Sept. 1792.

<sup>68</sup> GCB, 29 Sept. 1753 and subsequent years; GCB, 10 April 1725; GCB, 8 Sept. 1725; Bacon, *Annals*, 54.

his services in appearing before those bodies. The clerk's fees for preparing, copying and distributing an order for a town rate -- one of many tasks the clerk might perform at a meeting of the sessions -- totalled nearly £5 in 1760. By the 1790s the clerk's bill to the sessions for just one meeting came to more than £25. The sessions and the orders of the Great Courts generated fee levying opportunities for other officers as well. Each of the two coroners, whose fees were regulated by statute, were by the 1790s, typically billing the sessions for about £12. In addition to the two guineas they received when they were required at the sessions, they collected £4 for each assize appearance and £1 for every inquest.<sup>69</sup> The constables could also profit from fees associated with their duties. In 1729, for example, the constables were permitted to keep three pence in the pound of their collections for an extraordinary bridge rate. Constables were also paid additional fees for providing security at the Ipswich races. By the early nineteenth century these payments were amounted to 2s 6d per day -- a rate so high that these were thought by the municipal commissioners to be nothing more than corrupt payments for partisan political purposes.<sup>70</sup> The clerk of the market paid two shillings a week to men assisting him with the management of the stalls and, after legislation in 1770, the corn inspector was entitled, by statute, to two shillings for each of his returns on market prices.<sup>71</sup> The levels of these sorts of fees and the applicability of them may have changed over time, but it is clear that almost every agent of the corporation was entitled to some sort of fee for the execution of his duties. It is impossible to establish if these fees invariably covered the costs of office or even made it lucrative, but they must certainly have been an important factor in offsetting the disincentives to act for the Corporation.

It should be noted that officeholders might receive other forms of irregular compensation. Thus, in 1767 the vestry of St. Mary Tower ordered that Mr. and Mrs. Smith, the former Governors of its workhouse, be allowed three shillings a week "so

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<sup>69</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2300-01. The clerks' and coroner's fees normally appear under one annual entry in the Sessions Books. The clerks' other fees appear intermittently in the Great Court Book.

<sup>70</sup> For example see: GCB, 19 June 1755; *RCMC*, p. 2318.

<sup>71</sup> GCB, 29 Sept. 1758; Sessions Book, 19 Sept. 1772; 10 Geo. III c.39.

long as their necessity require". In 1796 the Assembly "...agreed that a compliment of Five Guineas be made the Rev'd John Sharp the Gaol Chaplin for his attendances on the Prisoners in the Borough Gaol."<sup>72</sup> The perquisites of office were also important inducements for many who did the Corporation's business. In addition to their salaries, the bailiffs enjoyed entitlements such as the right to claim two bushels of coals from colliers not owned by freemen entering the port, an allowance of £1 11s 6d which historically had been granted to light their wives' way home at night, and two pounds of fish from every boat (although this was not normally claimed by the end of the eighteenth century). The bailiffs were the lords of the Corporation's manors and were entitled to "the right of sporting over the estates". The town clerks were stewards of these manors and enjoyed various perquisites attached to those positions.<sup>73</sup> Other offices enjoyed a variety of perquisites and privileges as well. Since 1200 the portmen had been granted the right use a large meadow near the town for grazing their horses. By the eighteenth century, they routinely let this land even though the Corporation retained the fee simple and occasionally mortgaged it. The constables were normally granted exemptions from their poor rates during the years they held the office.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to these gratuities, salaries, fees, and perquisites, there were other economic benefits to holding corporate offices. The corrupt use of office has certainly featured in the historiography of the eighteenth-century town government.<sup>75</sup> Undoubtedly, some embezzlement did occur, but there were significant deterrents to the direct appropriation of corporation funds or the use of creative accounting to disguise dishonest practice. The audit committees of the Great Court were active every year and were composed of five or six active members. Moreover, the accounts of overseers or chamberlains were never in the same hands from one year to the next, and most other accounts were frequently passed as well. Political contention and personal rivalry

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<sup>72</sup> St. Mary Tower, Vestry Minutes, 16 Feb. 1767; *Assembly Book*, 29 Sept. 1796.

<sup>73</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2296, 2300.

<sup>74</sup> SRO/I, HD 490/1, Ms. documents..."Private and Proof Portraits"; Wodderspoon, *Memorials...*, p. 129. Petty constables' generally not listed as rated during the years they served. Specific orders of the Sessions make petty constables' exemption clear, e.g.: Sessions Book, 31st July 1721.

<sup>75</sup> Webb, *Manor and the Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 405-568. Chapters VIII and IX; Webb, *Statutory Authorities...*, pp. 378-79.

amongst Assemblymen, the desire not to get stuck with a predecessor's deficient or false accounts, and the recognition that the funds in question were Corporate property to be applied in the general interest of the freemen, would have all prompted diligent scrutiny of the accounts of others. Nor would it have been easy to build a conspiracy routinely to embezzle substantial amounts of Corporation funds. Other forms of corrupt practice would have been more likely. It is, however, difficult to be certain about the nature and extent of such practice in Ipswich. The sort of detailed evidence required is scarce. Moreover, understandings of what constituted corruption appears to have changed. When the bailiffs, John Sparowe and John Cornelius, were effectively awarded the "contract" to repair the Common Quay and Crane House in 1725 it was not a matter of controversy. Indeed, their status seems to have implied the matter was in safe hands. Yet such practices were clearly identified as wrong by the Municipal Commissioners in 1835.<sup>76</sup>

Corrupt practice might have been more restricted because there were many legitimate, not officially endorsed, ways in which officers could profit from corporate office. Even if Sparowe and Cornelius did not overpay themselves for the repairs to the Common Quay, they probably profited from the business, and to be reimbursed from the future rents of the quay and the Crane House was a convenient, relatively safe way for such men to tie up their capital. Even if officeholders could not secure business directly with the Corporation, senior office may well have been a useful avenue to wider sources of profit. As noted above, Humphrey Rant of Ipswich and Charles Grey of Colchester were lawyers whose prominence in their respective towns led to work for other corporations.<sup>77</sup> In addition to the commercially valuable information and contacts which senior office might afford, positions within the influential Portmen and Twentyfour could be helpful in the protection of business interests through the Corporation's regulation of markets and the port.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> GCB, 10 June 1725 and 2nd Nov. 1725; *RCMC*, pp. 2323, 2340.

<sup>77</sup> See above p.88.

<sup>78</sup> For the regulation of dockworkers' hiring and pay see GCB, 20 May 1725. Also see below p. 196.

Beyond these direct material rewards, posts in town government offered other personal advantages. A wide range of offices conferred various opportunities to grant patronage and exert influence. The bailiffs and the justices appointed a number of lesser officers and agents. Moreover, they exercised considerable discretionary authority when acting as single justices or as agents of the Great Court. The favouring of friends would not have been confined to those in the senior offices. The petty constables, coal meters and other revenue collection or regulation enforcement officers were also in positions to grant favours.

Although sometimes subject to criticism and satire, local government offices conferred prestige. Long established civic rituals such as parades of the Corporate Mace, perambulations of the Corporation boundaries, and the wearing of livery emphasised the roles of the bailiffs, portmen and twentyfour as community leaders.<sup>79</sup> Official contacts with other powerful figures in the wider world (members of the government, the military and the county elite) enhanced the image of those holding senior corporate office as men of power. One might speculate that even offices such as that of petty constable conferred some status: the association with the more senior local government officials and the opportunity to exercise some authority over other members of one's community may have been attractions to office for some people. Historians have also suggested that participation in local institutions of public authority was an important means for the eighteenth-century middling sort to set themselves apart from their perceived social inferiors, to create a sort of class cohesion and to enjoy association with more powerful county and central government figures.<sup>80</sup>

Given the variety and nature of the incentives and disincentives to hold various Corporation offices, it is impossible to clearly establish just what people got out of being a bailiff or petty constable. But it is clear that, for some persons, the advantages of office were at least sufficient inducements to undertake the Corporation's business.

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<sup>79</sup> The Great Court Book records numerous occasions of such civic ritual. For examples see: GCB, 25 June 1723, 31 July 1723, 8 August 1755, and 6 April 1756; "Gravenor's Proceedings". Also see: Corfield, *Impact*, p. 149; P. Borsay, "'All the Town's a Stage': Urban Ritual and Ceremony, 1660-1800" in P. Clark, (ed.), *Transformation*, pp. 228-58.

<sup>80</sup> Wilson, "Urban Culture", pp. 166-67, 177, 179; D'Cruz, "Provincial England", pp. 497.

For most of the eighteenth century, few would have been in it for the pay. As already noted, the wealthiest members of the community were not tempted to seek the town's senior offices. Even for those who held the top jobs, official salaries were likely to have been only a fraction of most officeholders' personal incomes. As a bailiff in the 1750s, John Sparowe was officially paid £25, yet his poor rate assessment valued his town properties at £32; and on Joseph Massie's tables Sparowe would likely have been amongst those with annual incomes ranging from at least £70 and as much as £400. It has been noted that Michael Thirkle had won £10,000 in the lottery two years before he first became a bailiff in 1749. Yet, while official salaries were not great, various forms of office-derived remuneration could add up. The town clerk was thought to have made about £500 a year in the early nineteenth century. It seems unlikely that this was characteristic of most of the eighteenth century, given the particularly fierce political contention of the last decades of the old municipal corporation which inflated both the income of offices and the costs of acquiring them. In any case, few officers were able to collect anything like the range of valuable fees charged by the clerk; and no other officer appears to have been able to live off his fees. The material rewards of office generally lay in their perquisites, patronage and influence. The people for whom such advantages were likely to be most profitable would have been those closely involved in the economic life of the town. Its port and markets were most often subject to the authority of the men like John Sparowe, John Cornelius and Cooper Gravenor who were local merchants. Thomas Fonnereau, John Barnard and John Cobbold, respectively a substantial landed gentlemen, shipbuilder and brewer, all had important connections with the town in which they lived, but their concerns were more engaged with the world outside it. The status attached to office was, perhaps, of greater value to the sorts of men whose focus was in Ipswich and who, in the course of their trades or professions, would not have had prestigious association with the county rulers and central government figures but for the formal links of Corporate office.

Patterns of local officeholding further indicate that some men found local office attractive. The Town's government does not seem to be characterised by officers

reluctantly taking their turn. The turnover of petty constables suggests that men were willing to hold the post for long periods. As Table 4.3 indicates, between one-quarter and one-half of the petty constables in three sample periods served continuously for five years; and more than one-half of the petty constables in those periods served two more consecutive terms.

<b>Table 4.3: <i>The Retention of Petty Constables</i></b>			
<b>Five Year Period Beginning:</b>	<b>1727</b>	<b>1754</b>	<b>1791</b>
No. of Constables in the Sessions Records	14	15	18
No. serving two or more consecutive years	13	8	9
No. serving five consecutive years later	7	4	5
Percent retained five consecutive years later	50%	27%	28%
<i>Source:</i> Sessions Books and Rolls			

As already noted, some men were eager to be bailiffs: John Sparowe held the post thirteen times, and John Cornelius and Cooper Gravenor were bailiffs twelve times each; the average number of terms per man elected in the eighteenth century was 3.3. The resort to elections to select various officers suggests that the keenness to possess office broke through the cohesiveness of the elite. But not all offices were sought after with such interest. The chamberlain's office and that of the guild merchant were never held more than once by any freeman and, for most of the century, elections were more a matter of picking an unwilling candidate -- those nominated never voted for themselves.<sup>81</sup> While the chamberlain's post was certainly burdensome, those with aspirations to higher Corporate office would normally have to serve a turn at it. In Ipswich, as elsewhere, this sort of revenue collection post was a pre-requisite to admission to the Assembly.<sup>82</sup> While the bailiffs, treasurers, coroners, clavingers and charity governors were invariably drawn from the portmen or twentyfour, there was no other clear pattern of prerequisites to the bailiwick other than freeman, chamberlain, and

<sup>81</sup> SRO/I, K15/2, "A collection of many polls taken upon different occasions...in electing Burgesses to serve in Parliament for the said Corporation, choosing Bailiffs, Recorder, Honorary Freemen, Schoolmaster, Townhouse keeper...".

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, *Hull*, p. 308.



assemblyman. Nor was there a fixed period of membership in the Assembly prior to election as bailiff. The average period between becoming a member of the Assembly and first election as bailiff in the 1750s was twelve years; but one man served only a year in the Assembly before becoming bailiff, while another had served thirty-six years. The figures for the 1790s are comparable.<sup>83</sup> It seems that once one became a portman or twentyfourman, any of the higher offices were open. Accession to these various offices was then a matter of securing the support of the Great Court.

## 5. Implications

The qualities of the eighteenth-century Corporation's personnel reflected much of the character of its government. The governance of Ipswich in this period manifested neither the principal of obligation within an association of producers, nor a model of modern, legal-rational bureaucracy. Disparate elements of both of these ideal-types can be recognised, but they are not good likenesses. Few of the Corporation's officers were obliged to assume their posts. Compelling fines were rare. The competitions for office and the range of incentives to serve suggest that there was normally a pool of men willing to take these jobs. That various officeholders held an office numerous times further suggests that men sought these offices. Contrary to the obligatory principle, salaries, fees and other material advantages of office were important inducements. Yet these forms of remuneration were not sufficient to produced an independent salaried bureaucracy. The Corporation's officers were not subject to the appointment, training, promotion and tenure characteristic of modern public administration.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, none of the Corporation's officeholders were formally trained for their posts. The legal studies undertaken by some men who were recorders, clerks or justices was relevant, but they were not trained by the Corporation nor were their legal studies necessarily well adapted

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<sup>83</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", ff. 117-19; GCB, 1720-1795.

<sup>84</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, pp. 329-341; E. Kamenka, *Bureaucracy* (London, 1989), pp. 76-84.

to its purposes. The acquisition of office as well as the ability to manage its duties depended on the individual officeholder's personal skills, resources and connections.

For this reason the backgrounds of these people are of particular importance to understanding of the nature of the town's government. Politics and practical circumstances ensured that the senior offices of the Corporation would be in the hands of wealthy men. The potential burdens of offices, including the demands of time and the threat of expense or financial inconvenience, helped ensure that the portmen and twentyfour were amongst the highest ratepayers in town. Moreover, their selection by co-option made it likely that like-minded men of compatible interests would join these bodies. While these offices presented such rewards as prestige, connection, and opportunities to support one's business, only certain men could take advantage of these inducements. The affairs of many artisans, traders or workmen were too modest for them to be able to capitalise on these advantages. Moreover, the time demanded by such posts would have been prohibitive. For the richest members of the community these rewards were inadequate to induce them to compete for civic office. The senior offices, then, fell to men whose business was based in the town and whose wealth, connections and interests were such that they would actively seek office. Offices held by men at the lower end of the rate-paying scale tended to be either poorly remunerated and of limited duration and infrequent service (such as the petty jurors); or, if more demanding, offering better remuneration and status through association with the Corporate leadership (as in the case of the sergeants and petty constables). Reliable, routine recruitment of officers required that official posts could be exploited to personal advantage. Yet, although the methods of government allowed officers to profit, open corruption was difficult. It does not seem likely that any of the town's officers made spectacular profits from office.

Economic interest was not the sole significant quality of the Corporation's officeholders. The nature of their connections within the community were also of vital importance both when acquiring a post and when effectively managing it. Kinship was not a powerful feature of officeholding, but other types of connection were.

Officeholders relied on the support of one another. Not only was there a reciprocal reinforcement of authority between justices and constables (formal authority lent by the justice and practical power lent by the constable) but, as noted above, the linkage of a gaoler, bailiff and customers officers vastly enhanced the power of the state. Here personal connection spanned gaps in the formal structure of public authority.

The importance of the status and prestige of officeholders was reflected in the civic ritual designed to enhance the image of various officeholders. But it seems clear that, despite such efforts to affirm the dignity of offices, the officeholder brought his personal social status to an office and thereby provided it with much of the prestige necessary to command authority. In a pamphlet attack upon a former bailiff who had complained of insulting treatment by an election crowd, it was suggested that prestige derived more from the man than his office:

... I verily believe, he has long been used to Insults. He may indeed sometimes have been indulged with the *Baillyship*; but though he may have had the *Power* and *Shew* of the Magistracy, it is well known he never had *the Authority of a Magistrate*; that *cannot be give*. The Gentleman *now* divested of *Power*, will stand upon his own personal Merit; what Weight that will have, he may judge from the Behaviour of the People; and all the Comfort I can afford him, must arise from this Observation, That the Man who deserves Respect does very rarely miss of it.<sup>85</sup>

The skills and experience brought to corporation business largely depended on the occupational background of officeholders. For most of the eighteenth century, the town's merchants and coastal traders were well suited to run the Corporation in the interests of what were the town's principal industries. After the 1750s, the rise of lawyers and men engaged in finance and investment was symptomatic of changes in the local economy. Not only did the weakening of the great trading families diminish their ability to dominate the higher Corporation offices, but the diversification of the local economy as a regional service centre engendered new men of wealth who were likely to

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<sup>85</sup> SRO/I, S Ipswich 352.004, *A Collection of Papers Relating to the Election of Bailiffs of Ipswich on the 8 of September 1754*, (Ipswich, 1755?), p. 9.

see the business of the Corporation differently. The rise of the lawyers and bankers was significant in another important respect. The legitimisation of their participation in town government in terms of "disinterested" service and a proficiency in the administrative and legal complexity of government, may have been part of a more basic change in the perception of the purposes of town government. An older merchants' ethos of the Corporation as a mechanism for the management of freemen's common assets and the protection of their shared economic interests, began to erode with the rise of lawyers and a developing ethos of public administration. Moreover, that was coincidental with a period of much more contentious, partisan politics, as analysed below. Before considering conflicts over power and reform, however, it is necessary to examine more closely the activities of the Corporation.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINANCES, POOR RELIEF AND ECONOMIC REGULATION**

In the face of shifting social, cultural, and economic conditions, the eighteenth-century corporation's lack of formal institutional development might have undermined its central place in the community. It was through changes in the practices of governance and politics within existing institutional forms, rather than modifications to those forms, that the corporate regime adapted to its changing environment. The manner in which the changing conditions of the community shaped the development of corporate regime's character is reflected in three vital spheres of its activity: the collection and management of revenue; the administration of poor relief; and the regulation of the local economy. In its efforts to deal with these matters it is possible to see how the Corporation remained both an effective, active instrument of government, and the principal site of politics within the community. Yet, in these activities, it is also possible to see the emergence of the factors which began to undermine the position of the Corporation in the last years of the eighteenth century.

The management of corporation finances, the provision of poor relief, and the regulation of the local economy, all reveal how the aims, methods and resources of government were shaped by practical factors as well as by the personal and political interests of those engaged in government. Moreover, the institutional structures and practices by which these activities were undertaken are worthy of consideration because they provided much of the context for both partisan politics and the political interaction between the elites and the wider community. These spheres of governance generated influence, status, patronage, and money which were important resources for officeholders in the pursuit of their political and commercial interests. The changes in the character of the corporate regime owed much to the re-configuration of these factors over the course of the eighteenth century.

The Corporation's activity reveals the significance of its development in terms of a number of important themes historians have recently taken-up with respect to

eighteenth-century English society. The ways in which poor relief, financial management, and economic regulation feature in the partisan politics of corporate factions was connected to fundamental changes in the political culture and manner of popular participation in politics in this period. Similarly, wider developments in the government of eighteenth-century England relating to the extent of private property rights and the freedom of markets and labour were mirrored in the Corporation's handling of its money, the poor, and the local economy. The developing manner of the Corporation's engagement in these spheres of activity eventually provided the basis for challenges to the legitimacy of the corporate regime. Changes in institutional practice began to undermine ancient corporate principles through a growing adherence to conceptions of a wider public interest in local government. These changes in practice were not consistent with the political structure of the Corporation and thereby inadvertently fed into the criticisms of reformers after the 1780s.

### **1. The Finances of the Corporation**

Municipal finances are important not only because the capabilities of any government are invariably dependent on its economic resources, but also because, as one of the Corporation's central activities, the collection and management of revenue reveals its institutional culture and ways of doing things. Indeed, the Corporation's management of its finances reveal the extent to which, in the terms of a late twentieth-century institutional typology, it embodied elements of a private corporation founded to obtain profits for its shareholder-freemen, and yet was expected to function as an element of the state, an institution of local government. Both the structure of the offices and the practices of financial administration, as well as the political disputes which arose over the state of the Corporation finances, reflect the tension between the Corporation's role as an instrument for the management of assets held in common by its members, and its possession of delegated powers from the Crown to govern the community. The Corporation's finances are of further significance in that their management was a barometer of the impact of corruption and the administrative effectiveness of the

corporate regime. Corporate financial offices and the funds they controlled were important objects of political contention amongst the governing elite. This connection between financial management and politics was central to the fundamental changes which threatened the corporate regime's viability after the 1780s and on into the nineteenth century.

### 1.1 Sources of Corporation Revenue

The complexity of the Corporation's finances were reflected both in the variety of its revenue sources and the number of detached offices through which funds were collected and disbursed. Like the distribution of authority and responsibility within the Corporation more generally, these features of its finances reflected a conception of governance as a series of discrete activities assignable to particular individuals. This was, in part, a result of the Corporation's history as an accretion of various institutions and offices, but it also reflected practical considerations relating to the security of Corporation funds and the distribution of the burdens of official business.

To better understand the ways in which the various kinds of revenue reflected the complex political and administrative character of the corporate regime, it is useful to distinguish revenues raised by rates from non-rate income. The duality of the Corporation as an agent of the Crown while also an instrument for the management of the freemanry's commonly held assets, is reflected in the distinctive characters of rate derived and non-rate derived funds. While the poor and overseers' rates were raised on the authority of statute for application within the community without special regard to membership of the Corporation, non-rate income was derived from the chartered rights and privileges of the freemen and was the property of the Corporation. Not only were these two types of funds conceived of as quite separate, but the control and application of rate income was relatively circumscribed by statute, while non-rate income could be applied to virtually any purpose determined by the Corporation membership or its leaders. The routine management of rate-derived income was generally in the hands of parochial officers, but the other revenues raised from dues, tolls, and the rental of

Corporation properties were the responsibility of officers selected by the Great Court. For this reason the management and use of non-rate income is much more revealing of the character of the corporate regime. It looms large in corporate politics, and the manner of its management and application is reflective of both the Corporation's financial position and its place in the wider community's economy.

This distinction between funds raised by rates and non-rate income was not a fixed part of eighteenth-century townsmen's understanding of local governance. Indeed, the aggregation of the various accounts and forms of revenue under the headings of "rate" and "non-rate" accounts is anachronistic. Although, throughout the eighteenth century control over many accounts became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the treasurer, the various corporate and parochial accounts were nonetheless conceived of as discrete and assigned to particular purposes. Indeed, until the 1780s, the principal aim of auditing accounts was not to establish the Corporation's overall financial condition, but rather to ensure that the various account holding officers were acting honestly. Accordingly, there was generally no perceived need to establish the total balance of assets and liabilities across all of the Corporation's accounts.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is instructive to try to reconstruct the Corporation's general financial position as fully as the sometimes incomplete records allow.

The Corporation's non-rate revenues can be seen as dividing into two types; each corresponding to elements of its dual nature. Much non-rate revenue came from the Corporation's income-earning assets or commercial ventures which were notionally the collective property of the freemen as members of the corporate body. The rest of the Corporation's funding came from the dues, tolls and fees imposed on commercial activity under the terms of the charters. These forms of taxation were technically not levied by the Corporation for its own benefit, but rather in its capacity as the local agent of the Crown under the terms of the Corporation's charters or statute law. Thus, for example, some of the dues arising from the Corporation's admiralty jurisdiction were to be applied to the administration of the law on the River Orwell and in ensuring safe

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<sup>1</sup> See above pp. 100-2.



navigation on the river.<sup>2</sup> In practice, amongst these non-rate revenues, the distinction between the Corporation's earned income and the taxation, in the form of dues, tolls, and fees, was not strong. Some of these funds were, however, administered separately and applied exclusively as either a form of the Corporation's "reinvestment" in its own assets, or for a public purpose as mandated by the Crown. The significance of this distinction lies not so much in how these funds were in practice handled, as how such funds came to feature in reformer's critiques of the nature and purposes of the Corporation. Both claims for the freemen's rights in their corporate property and assertions of the public duties of the institutions of town government were variously based on how these funds were raised, managed, and expended.

Because of the limited survival of the relevant records, it is not possible to provide a precise breakdown of publicly collected revenues for given years.<sup>3</sup> The figures assembled for proximate years in Table 5.1 suggest, however, that the vast proportion of all revenues collected by local authorities in Ipswich came from rates.

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<sup>2</sup> An contemporary expression of this view was offered by Thomas Madox, whose arguments were much coloured by his office as "His Majesties Historiographer" and an obvious desire to ingratiate himself with his royal patron through politically improbable proposals for a more vigorous collection of the fee farms. Thomas Madox, *Firma Burgi, or an Historical Essay Concerning the Cities Towns and Buroughs of England* (London, 1726), p 251.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, records rarely survive for each revenue collecting office or court in a given year. Accordingly, different years have to be compared together while recognising that annual fluctuations in some revenue categories make this a rather speculative exercise. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that not all the revenue of the public authorities in Ipswich is represented here. Some minor items appeared in some years and not others, without explanation. This reflected the various accounting practices and systems of categorisation of different treasurers and chamberlains. Moreover, it should be noted that the revenues collected and accounted for by the Admirals' Court do not survive at all. Items in the chamberlains' and treasurers' accounts, as well as the orders of the Assembly and Great Court suggest that much of the Corporation's income deriving from the port and river trade were handled by courts and officers not attached to the Admirals' jurisdiction. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to assume that the Admiral's court was not a great source of Corporation revenue: it is very unlikely that value of the funds it handled was comparable to those administered by the Sessions, the town treasurer or chamberlains. Neither the amount of revenue generated by the Admirals' Court nor the magnitude of the variations in the accounting practices of the other courts and officers appear sufficiently great to effect appreciably the trends discussed here.

**Table 5.1: Charities Income, Poor Rates, and Other Corporation Revenue**  
(Selected Years)

	Parochial Charities Income <sup>1</sup>	Corporation Charities Income <sup>2</sup>	Poor Rates Raised <sup>3</sup>	Other Parish Rate Income <sup>4</sup>	Other Corporation Revenue <sup>5</sup>
1776			£3,954		
1785			£3,426†		£727
1787-8	£274				
1796					£1,089
1803			£6506‡	£1,473	
1814		£2,255			
1827			£20,438		£2,121

† This figure is the mean for the years 1783-5

‡ This figure includes the Parish of Whitton which lay partially outside the Corporation's boundaries.

\* Does not include Sessions Accounts.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. XVIIb, (1816), "Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons; 1787-1788", pp. 1218-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Reports from Commissioners: vol. vi*, (1820), Returns of ...Rents and Profits... of any Trust Established for Charitable Purposes. First Report, 117 and Second Report, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> *First Series of Sessional Papers, IX*, (1774-1802), Returns Concerning Vagrants and Houses of Correction. Reports on the Laws which Concern the Relief and Settlement of the Poor, Fourth Schedule (1776); *ibid.*, Returns to Parliament by Overseers (1787); *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII*, (1803-04), Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor (1804).

<sup>4</sup> *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII*, (1803-04), Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor (1804).

<sup>5</sup> *Reports from Commissioners: vol. xxvi*, (1835), First Report Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales, pp. 2308.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, poor rates were the most important form of rating comprising from 50% to 90% of the local public authorities' revenue. Although parish officers were responsible for the routine administration of rate-funded poor relief, this matter was of much importance in the wider sphere of Ipswich's government. The corporate justices played an important supervisory role in rate administration, and the Great Court provided alternative and supplementary forms of poor relief which could be used to keep rates down.

Although it has been recently argued that there was a general reluctance to trust corporations with rating powers, the justices at Ipswich relied on a long line of statutes to raise what were variously known as the "County", "Bridge" or "Marshallsea" rates.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Langford, *Public Life*, p. 223. The Webbs, however, persuasively disputed eighteenth-century radical claims that the corporations lacked legal authority to impose rates. Webb, *The Manor and the Borough*,

Although the funds so raised were generally applied to the maintenance of highways, bridges or the gaol, this money could be spent in various ways such as on other types of public works or the payment of the coroners' and clerks' fees. The sums raised under this authority were not proportionately large. In the 1740s the total sum expected from borough rates could exceed £300 but more typically targets were set nearer to £100 per annum (see Table 5.2). By the 1790s the Sessions orders often called for £400 but in some years might be as little as £200.

**Table 5.2: Borough Rates 1755-62 and 1791-5**

(sums ordered to be collected for selected years)

<b>1755</b>	<b>£104</b>	<b>1791</b>	<b>£200</b>
<b>1757</b>	<b>£250</b>	<b>1792</b>	<b>£400</b>
<b>1759</b>	<b>£80</b>	<b>1793</b>	<b>£400</b>
<b>1760</b>	<b>£400</b>	<b>1794</b>	<b>£400</b>
<b>1762</b>	<b>£200</b>	<b>1795</b>	<b>£200</b>

Note: All sums are rounded to the nearest £.

Sources: SRO/I, C8/4/9-11, *Sessions Books*

In any case, as Table 5.3 indicates, by the end of the eighteenth century, these sessions ordered rates were unlikely to exceed three percent of the total public revenue. As noted above, the tables show that the income of local public authorities -- the Corporation, parishes, and charities -- was largely derived from rates. Although non-rate derived income was the smaller portion of all revenues, it is very important to understanding the changing character of the Corporation in the eighteenth century.

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vol. ii, p. 703 n.3. Moreover, various statutes established the right of corporations to raise rates in connection with road maintenance: 1 Geo. I c. 48 (1714), 12 Geo. II c. 29 (1739), 13 Geo. II c. 13 (1740) and 7 Geo.III c.42.24 (1767) as well as the statute of Geo.III c. 54 (1784) which was cited by the Webbs.

**Table 5.3: Parish Rates, Charities, and Corporation Income, c. 1800**

		% of est. Revenue Sources	Year
<b>Parish Revenue<sup>1</sup></b>			
Parish Poor Rates	£6,506	53.5	1803
Other Parish Rates	<u>£1,473</u>	<u>12.1</u>	1803
Total	£7,979	65.6	
<b>Charity Revenue<sup>2</sup></b>			
Parish Charities	£300	2.5	1796
Corporation Charities	<u>£2,255</u>	<u>18.5</u>	1814
Total	£2,555	21	
<b>Corporation Income<sup>3</sup></b>			
Real Property Rents	£680	5.6	1796
Sessions Rates	£320	2.6	1791-5 av.
Other	£215	1.8	1796
Coal Dues	£198	1.6	1796
Water Rents	£184	1.5	1796
Market & Other Dues	<u>£28</u>	<u>0.2</u>	1796
Total	£1,625	13.3	
Total of above Revenues	<u>£12,159</u>		

*Note:* All these figures are based on data from 1795 to 1803, except the revenue of the Corporation Charities which is based on data for 1814. Accordingly, that figure may be somewhat inflated relative to the other revenue sources. Other parish rates include church rates and surveyors' rates. Total corporation income is only an estimate as other minor revenues may not appear in the available records.

*Sources:*

<sup>1</sup> *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII*, (1803-04), Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor, 1804.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. XVIb, (1816), Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons; 1787-1788 1218-

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<sup>3</sup> SRO/I: C9/11/200-2, Chamberlains' Accounts; SRO/I: C9/20/121, C9/21/62, Treasurers' Accounts; SRO/I, C8/4/11, Sessions Books.

**Table 5.4: Sources of Non-rate Corporation Revenue, 1721 and 1791**

	1721			
	Chamberlains	Treasurers	Total	%
Real Property Rents	199	162	361	54.2
Licences and Dues	30	76	106	15.9
Water Rents	102		102	15.3
Coal Dues	31		31	4.7
Foreign Fines	18		18	2.7
Freedom Fines	16		16	2.4
Other Fines	1 <sup>5</sup>	7	8	1.2
Other	25		25	3.8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>666</b>	

	1791			
	Chamberlains	Treasurers	Total	%
Real Property Rents	33	539	572	56.1
Licences and Dues	8		8	0.8
Water Rents	179		179	17.6
Coal Dues		157	157	15.4
Foreign Fines			0	0.0
Freedom Fines			0	0.0
Other Fines			0	0.0
Other		103	103	10.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>1019</b>	

note: "others" includes miscellaneous items and entries which cannot be identified.

The rental of real property was by far the Corporation's most important source of non-rate income.<sup>5</sup> As Table 5.4 indicates, the rental of corporation lands, buildings, and butcher's shops comprised more than half of the Corporation's non-rate income in the years 1721 and 1791. The corporation rents were generally for small amounts but there were a few key properties yielding substantial sums. The most important was the Handford Hall mill. In the 1720s its rent was £96 per annum. From the 1760s it rented for £110. The next most valuable properties were two farms owned in the parish of Whitton, just north of the town, which rented in the range of £15 - 17 apiece in the 1720s. During the same decade the Shire Hall and its gaol were rented to the county justices for £10; by the 1760s the rent was £15. The Customs House was rented to the

<sup>5</sup> This was typical of other towns of the period. See Dawson, "Finance", p. 51.

Treasury for £12 per annum in the 1790s.<sup>6</sup> These larger properties were not typical. Most of the rents recorded were for sums of £2 or less on smaller farms and buildings both within and beyond the town. Between 1721 and 1791 the Corporation's overall non-rates income increased by about 300%, while its real property rental income increased by nearly 60%. It does not appear that the Corporation appreciably increased its stock of real property -- most of the properties listed in the records of the 1720s were still noted, with few additions, in the 1835 report of the royal commission on municipal corporations.<sup>7</sup> Money does, however, appear to have been spent on improving existing lands and buildings. Yet it seems that most of the increase in the value this property was attributable to the upward pressure on rents, following the improved economic condition of the town and county after the middle of the century.

After the rents on real property, the rents derived from the supply of fresh water made the greatest contribution to the Corporation's non-rate income. Water rentals only climbed from 15% to nearly 18% of non-rate revenue from the 1720s to the 1790s; although the value of the water rents increased by nearly 57%. The Corporation's virtual monopoly over the supply of piped water was never seriously contested in the eighteenth century, but the essential importance of the commodity and its economic value ensured that the monopoly and its management gave rise to political disputes.<sup>8</sup>

The third leading component of the Corporation's non-rate revenues came from the dues it charged non-freemen landing coal in the port. As Tables 5.5 and 5.6 indicate, after the coal meter had taken his percentage for collecting the revenue, the Corporation netted about £30 per annum in the 1720s. By the 1790s the treasurer received from £150 to nearly £200 annually in coal dues. These sums typically represented about four or five percent of non-rate revenues in the 1720s, and more than 15% in the 1790s. The coal dues, along with market dues, freemen fines and foreign fines were the Corporation's most ancient sources of revenue. Their contribution to the financial

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<sup>6</sup> SRO/I, C9/20/117-118, SRO/I, C9/20/1, C9/22/1, *Ipswich Treasurers' Accounts*.

<sup>7</sup> SRO/I, C9/11/137-40, 168-69, 200-02, *Chamberlains' Accounts*, 1721-5, 1766, 1785, 1790-1796; SRO/I, C9/20/113-121, *Treasurers' Accounts*, 1720-3, 1755-6, 1791-2 ; *RCMC*, p. 2324.

<sup>8</sup> Some property owners had their own springs. A challenge to the Corporation's monopoly was a matter of some dispute in the early nineteenth century. *RCMC*, p. 2322.

resources of the Great Court or borough sessions was, however, by the eighteenth century, comparatively modest. In 1721, the portion of corporate non-rate income provided by these sources was: market dues, 4.5%; foreign fines, 2.6%; and freeman fines, 2.3%. Foreign fines ceased to be collected from the 1730s, while market dues were just 1.5% of non-rate revenue in 1791. The value of freeman fines could fluctuate substantially, but they never exceeded more than 5% of non-rate derived income.

**Table 5.5: Chamberlains' Revenues by Source**

	1721		1722		1755	
	£	%	£	%	£	%
Rents	152	36.1	152	36.4	257	44.1
Butcher Shops	47	11.2	47	11.2	38	6.5
Market Dues	30	7.1	29	6.9	20	3.4
Water Rents	102	24.2	109	26.1	124	21.3
Foreign Fines	18	4.3	11	2.6	--	--
Coal Dues	31	7.4	28	6.7	63	10.8
Freemen Fines	16	3.8	14	3.3	--	--
Other <sup>1</sup>	25	5.9	13	5.5	81	13.9
Penal Fines	1>	0.0	5	1.2	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>421</b>		<b>418</b>		<b>583</b>	

	1756		1791		1792	
	£	%	£	%	£	%
Rents	273	58.6	--	--	--	--
Butcher Shops	--	--	33	15	--	--
Market Dues	--	--	8	3.6	9	4.7
Water Rents	125	26.8	179	81.4	184	95.3
Foreign Fines	--	--	--	--	--	--
Coal Dues	50	10.7	--	--	--	--
Freemen Fines	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other <sup>1</sup>	18	3.9	--	--	--	--
Penal Fines	1>	.1	--	--	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>		<b>220</b>		<b>193</b>	

<sup>1</sup>. Miscellaneous and unspecified receipts

Source: SRO/I: C9/11/137,138,169,200, 201,102, Chamberlains Accounts

**Table 5.6: Treasurers' Revenues by Source**

	1721		1722		1766	
	£	%	£	%	£	%
Licences	76	31	76	28	--	--
Rents	162	66.1	164	60.5	310	54.4
Freedoms	--	--	17	6.3	--	--
Fines	7	2.9	5	1.8	--	--
Coal Dues	--	--	--	--	110	19.3
Chamberlains	--	--	--	--	150	26.3
Other <sup>1</sup>	--	--	9	3.3	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>		<b>271</b>		<b>570</b>	

	1785		1793		1796	
	£	%	£	%	£	%
Licences	--	--	--	--	--	--
Rents	306	54.4	541	60.3	681	69.1
Freedoms	--	--	--	--	--	--
Fines	--	--	1	.1	--	--
Coal Dues	156	21.5	186	20.7	197	20
Chamberlains	--	--	169	18.8	108	11
Other <sup>1</sup>	264	36.4	--	--	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>726</b>		<b>897</b>		<b>986</b>	

1. Miscellaneous and unspecified receipts

Source: SRO/I: C9/20/117-21; C9/21/62; C9/22/1, Treasurer's Accounts

Despite the relatively small contribution these fines and dues made to the Corporation's income, they are nonetheless interesting as they reveal important features about the nature of its governance. In other towns, fines have been seen as important sources of revenue. Freedom fines and fines for the refusing of office have been described as a "primitive wealth tax".<sup>9</sup> In Ipswich, however, the freedom was overwhelmingly granted on the basis of patrimony or service.<sup>10</sup> Such admissions earned valuable fees for the bailiffs and clerks but they did not put much cash in the treasurers' or chamberlains' accounts. When the freedom was sold, it was clearly more a matter of

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, *Hull*, p. 327; F.H. Panton, "The Finances and Government of the City and County of Canterbury in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" in *Archaeologica Cantiana* CIV (1991), pp. 195-6.

<sup>10</sup> In the years 1721-5 nearly 80% of Ipswich freeman admissions were on the basis of patrimony or service. In the period 1755-60 the figure had climbed to 85%, and all the admissions in the years 1791-5 were on this basis. SRO/I, C5/14/7-10; GCB, 1721-95.



the faction in power bolstering its electoral support than attempting to raise funds for the Corporation. Similarly, fining of reluctant officers was not common. Despite a few spectacular examples, such as that of Richard Phillips who, upon his election as bailiff in 1701, paid £100 not to serve, fines were rare and never regularly imposed in such a way as to suggest that they were primarily intended to provide income for the Corporation.<sup>11</sup> The finings of the men chosen to serve as guildholders were notable exceptions; but elections to that office and fines for refusal to “serve” disappear from the records after 1730. Occasionally fines would be imposed on officers for failing to execute their duty. Typical of these was the 10s fine imposed on a constable for failing to serve a summons to a meeting of the Headboroughs’ Court; or the 9s fine of a beadle for “neglect of duty while the Bishop was here”.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of fines were imposed by the Headboroughs’ Court and the justices of the peace. It is difficult to calculate the aggregate value of the headboroughs’ fines because their records do not make clear when fines were assessed and actually collected, as opposed to assessed and then respited upon compliance with a court order. Moreover, the records occasionally indicate that fines were assessed but the actual amount of the fines was not entered. The total value of the fines imposed by the Justices are similarly difficult to calculate because the sessions records lacked running accounts and fines were imposed at petty sessions for which there are no records.

It is significant that the Corporation also earned income from loans and investments.<sup>13</sup> Here again the records do not clearly reveal the extent of such income. The lending cash in the hands of the clavingers was represented in surviving account books for just two years. The money in this fund was to be lent to freemen in need, and was supposed to be interest free. It seems likely that defaults would have made this a declining asset over the long term. Yet other loans may well have been placed in order

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<sup>11</sup> Freedom admissions are discussed more fully at pp. 269-70; Fines for refusal to take office are more fully considered in above pp. 135-6; also, see below pp. 222 for a discussion of the politics of freeman admission.

<sup>12</sup> SRO/I, C7/2/9, *Headboroughs’ Verdict Book*, 31 May 1726; SRO/I, C9/22/1, *Ipswich Treasurers’ Accounts*, 1793.

<sup>13</sup> For the lending activity of other towns in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see: Underdown, *Fire From Heaven*, pp. 113-5; Dawson, “Finance”, p. 63.

to absorb surplus capital and earn interest. Some Great Court orders are too cryptic to be sure if they relate to loans from the clavingers' fund or lending made at interest from the Corporation's general cash holdings. The treasurers' records frequently recorded payments and receipts to individuals but the nature of these transactions were normally not identified. Accordingly, it is impossible to distinguish between loans to the Corporation's debtors and payments to the Corporation's creditors; similarly, the receipt of loan repayments cannot be distinguished from payments made to the Corporation by individuals for various other reasons. But some interest earning loans certainly were made; moreover, individuals were not always the borrowers. In 1797 the Churchwardens and overseers of St. Mary Elms, borrowed £20 for five years at four percent. That this was intended as a loan and not a subsidy is clear from the Corporation's insistence that the Parish secure guarantors who were not freemen.<sup>14</sup>

It is certain that the Corporation was a much greater borrower than lender. The disjointed structure of the Corporation's finances, and the lack of one general account, meant that its borrowing was undertaken by various offices and applied to a wide range of Corporation activity. Thus, a chamberlain's account might go into the red and have to be carried by the officeholder out of his own pocket even though the treasurer, clavingers or even the other chamberlain might have a surplus. The lines between the chamberlains' and treasurers' accounts, the borough sessions' accounts, the parishes' accounts and charities' funds were generally impermeable; seldom were funds from one used to relieve a cash shortage in another.

The Corporation arranged borrowing in a number of ways. The reliance upon officeholders to dig into their own pockets to cover negative balances in their accounts was probably less common than has been observed for other towns in the first decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> While chamberlains seldom lent substantial sums to the Corporation in this way, treasurers frequently had to make expenditures which exceeded £100 out of their own pockets. Officers whose accounts were in deficit at the end of their term could normally expect reimbursement from their successors in the next

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<sup>14</sup> GCB, 8th Sept. 1797.

<sup>15</sup> Triffitt, "Parliamentary Boroughs", pp. 148-52; Dawson, "Finance", p. 63.

accounting period.<sup>16</sup> The Corporation arranged longer term debt of greater value in several other ways. Even after the establishment of the town's first bank in 1744, most borrowing was made from individuals including, from time to time, the town clerk. The principal strategy to raise money involved mortgaging the Handford Hall estate or its mill. As already noted, these were the Corporation's most valuable rental properties. On other occasions, loans might be secured against the value of the town water rentals.<sup>17</sup> The sums borrowed could amount to more than the Corporation's non-rate revenue. In 1754 it was claimed that the Corporation's mortgages and other debts amounted to more than £2,400; and in 1785 the Audit Committee put the total debt at £3,400. From at least the mid-century, the Corporation occasionally found itself making payments on mortgages totalling as much as £3,000.<sup>18</sup> This weight of debt, more than three times the Corporation's annual non-rate income in the early 1790s, fluctuated throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Just how much it changed is, however, unclear because the accounts are not sufficiently complete to ascertain the true financial position. The only other evidence about the state of the Corporation's indebtedness comes from the partisan claims of political rivals. It was asserted that in 1768 the Corporation had cleared the mortgages on its farms (but they must have been re-mortgaged shortly thereafter as large debt was reported sixteen years later). It was also claimed that the debts reported in 1785 had been reduced by £500 by 1791. Certainly, the Corporation's officers generally appear to have been conscious of the need to reduce debt. In the 1720s the Great Court undertook property sales and re-mortgages in order to reduce and restructure its debt. After a reorganisation of the town water rentals yielded greater revenues in 1759, the Great Court ordered that a £600 mortgage

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<sup>16</sup> See Table 5.7. The Great Court frequently ordered that such accounts be settled promptly.

<sup>17</sup> P. Matthews and W. Tuke, *The History of Barclays Bank Ltd.* (London, 1926), pp.145-7; The clerk lent £200 in 1679. See Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 55; William Kilderbee, the town clerk in 1767, had lent the Corporation a total of £1,073 17s 1d by that year. SRO/I, q S Ips. 9), ms. note in "Memoranda Relation to History of Ipswich" (Mss. collection), f. 79; GCB, 17 Oct. 1724.

<sup>18</sup> "Memoranda Relation to History of Ipswich", f. 79; GCB, 8 Sept. 1785.

be paid down with £400 in water rental cash and the balance cleared by taking out a £200 mortgage on Handford Hall.<sup>19</sup>

“Private finance” was another means by which the Corporation financed some of its activities. Thus, the bailiffs John Cornelius and John Sparowe, paid for the reconstruction of a bridge in 1725 with their own money and were then repaid from the Corporation funds. In 1793 the reconstruction of the shambles was undertaken through a deal in which George Gooding got a sixty year lease, at the outset of which he was to tear down the existing building and replace it with a new one at his own expense. He would then operate the facility for the remaining years of the lease and pay the Corporation an annual rent of £20. The Corporation considered a similar re-build and lease scheme under which the Handford Hall mill was to be rebuilt as a large spinning mill employing 200 children.<sup>20</sup> Although this proposal was rejected, it appears to have been a common formula for financing the construction or renovation of expensive Corporation properties.

## 1.2 Expenditure and the Balance of Accounts

The Corporation’s records also allow some analysis of its expenditure. Most items of expenditure in the treasurers’ and chamberlains’ accounts indicated the name of the payees, but rarely gave the reason for payment. Accordingly, the volume of expenditure can be identified from these accounts, but seldom its purpose.<sup>21</sup>

As Table 5.7 indicates, the Corporation’s non-rate accounts, when taken together, normally showed positive balances. These accounts do not, however, reveal the extent of the Corporation’s debt.

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<sup>19</sup> *A Serious Address to The Members of the House of Commons, and Gentlemen Residing in the Counties of Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex* (London, 1790), p. 11; GCB, 16th May 1721, 19th Sept. 1721, 1 Feb. 1722/3; GCB, 8 Sept. 1759 & 31 Oct. 1759.

<sup>20</sup> *Assembly Book*, 9th December 1793; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 183

<sup>21</sup> The details of the parish officers’ expenditure is revealed in their account books. Expenditure on other items, although not sufficiently detailed in the account books for systematic analysis, can be discerned from the orders of the sessions, Assembly, and Great Court. These matters are discussed below.

**Table 5.7: *Treasurers' and Chamberlains' Accounts:  
Summary of Revenue and Expenditure***

**Treasurers' Accounts**

Year	Revenue	Expenditure	Balance
	£	£	£
1721	245	248	-3
1722	271	270	1
1723	312	424	-112
1724	368	414	-46
1766	570	648	-78
1785	726	832	-106
1791	799	764	35
1792	870	862	8
1793	898	930	-32
1796	986	1,045	-59

**Chamberlains' Accounts**

Year	Revenue	Expenditure	Balance
	£	£	£
1721	583	397	186
1722	418	411	7
1723	366	322	44
1725	385	348	37
1755	484	467	17
1756	466	349	117
1791	220	14	206
1792	189	8	181
1796	194	24	170

**Totals Both Accounts**

Year	Revenue	Expenditure	Balance
	£	£	£
1721	666	645	21
1722	689	681	8
1723	678	746	-68
1791	1,019	778	241
1792	1,059	870	189
1796	1,180	1,069	111

*Sources:* SRO/I, C9/20/113-121, C9/21/62, Treasures' Accounts; SRO/I: C9/11/137,138,169,200, 201,102, Chamberlains' Accounts.

Despite the fact that the 1791 totals from the chamberlains' and treasurer's accounts suggest a surplus of £248, contemporaries reported that the accumulated debt of the Corporation exceeded £2,000. As great as this debt was, it appears to have been acquired through a few rather heavy borrowings rather than having been gradually generated to meet chronic gaps between revenue and expenditure. Indeed, the annual

revenue generally showed a modest excess over expenditure. It was extraordinary expenses -- usually the cost of litigation or substantial public works -- which forced periods of heavy borrowing.<sup>22</sup> As great as the cost of this borrowing was, the Corporation was never in danger of bankruptcy. Certainly, there were times of financial difficulty. Periodically the Great Court ordered the clerk or chamberlains to be more assiduous in the collection of debts.<sup>23</sup> Between 1758 and 1760 the Great Court issued a number of orders for the better management of the town water, the coal dues, and money out on loan. These measures were undertaken to relieve the Corporation's relatively large debt, then reported as in excess of £2,000.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the special financial committee set up in 1785 and the adoption of its recommendation for the management of Corporation funds came as the debt exceeded £3,000.<sup>25</sup> But, while debt periodically reached such levels, it appears to have remained manageable. The serious difficulties which the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations reported in 1835 were of a vastly different order. They calculated that the Ipswich Corporation's debt had accelerated from £3,000 in 1808 to £14,300 by 1832. This explosion of municipal corporate debt in the early nineteenth-century accords with studies of other towns.<sup>26</sup> It is difficult to be sure of the precise causes of this inflation. It broadly coincided with more contentious borough politics and wider social and economic difficulties. As a result, the effects of electoral bribery, politically motivated litigation, increased spending on the port, and other public works, all appear to have been factors in the growth of Ipswich's expenditure in the early nineteenth century.

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<sup>22</sup> In addition to the costly *quo warranto* suits with respect to the elections of officeholders, the Corporation was involved in litigation over the town water, the admiralty jurisdiction, the authority of the Improvement Commission. See SRO/I, x1/8/2.5, documents relating to Leicester Martin's dispute with the Corporation; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 122; GCB, 12 Oct. 1796; and See below pp. 223-4, 228.

<sup>23</sup> GCB, 10 April 1725.

<sup>24</sup> GCB, 29 Sept. 1756, 29 Sept. 1757, 28 Feb. 1758, 17 Aug. 1758, 8 Sept. 1758, 6 June 1760, and 8 Aug. 1760.

<sup>25</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1785, 29 Sept. 1785 and 8 June 1786.

<sup>26</sup> Jackson, *Hull*, p.328; Dawson, "Finance", pp. 374-6; *RCMC*, p. 2325.

### 1.3 The Control of Corporation Finance

Despite being an historical accretion of offices, revenue sources and types of expenditure, the eighteenth-century Corporation's financial system was not an outmoded or ineffective relic. As already argued, social, economic and political connection was capable of assuring coherence and direction to the loose collection of offices which were otherwise formally linked only by the fact that the Great Court selected their incumbents and provided periodic direction. Moreover, over the course of the eighteenth century the disparate elements of the Corporation's financial system were drawn together by piecemeal reforms, by the atrophying of certain practices, and by the melding of others.

Both the numbers of accounts and numbers of people responsible for them declined as funds were consolidated and their treasurers' duties merged. In the early eighteenth century, as well as the treasurer and the two chamberlains, there were additional treasurers for each of the nine charities, and one each for foreign fines and water leases, while the clavingers accounted for the lending cash. All of these officers collected, held and disbursed funds from their own accounts. Occasionally, the financial offices of two or more charities might be held by a single individual, but that was not standard practice. This dispersal of Corporation funds may have been thought advantageous on the grounds that it reduced the risk of loss, as well as spreading both the burdens and the benefits of these offices amongst a number of men. It did, however, make auditing a more involved task and limited the flexibility with which the funds from one revenue source could be applied to another category of expenditure. These considerations appear to have been at least part of the grounds for the adoption of changes recommended by the "Accounts, Property and Revenue Committee" in 1786. While the charities kept their own treasurers or rent wardens, the town treasurer was empowered to receive all rents except the water rents, market dues and rents of the butcher shops which were still received by the chamberlains. The chamberlains were required to submit their receipts to the town treasurer quarterly. After 1786,

disbursements were to made solely by the treasurer on receipt of a warrant from the bailiffs or Great Court.<sup>27</sup> This concentration of the Corporation's financial affairs in the hands of the treasurer is likely to have substantially enhanced the political power and personal rewards of that office. Perhaps not surprisingly the first treasurer after the adoption of the Accounts, Property and Revenue Committee's recommendations was also one of its members: the politically powerful William Norris. Norris, who had been treasurer when the committee was established in 1785, remained in that office until 1790. He held it again in 1791, and then was bailiff for four of the ten years between 1793 and 1802.

The power of these financial offices and their susceptibility to abuse was much decried by the municipal commissioners in 1833.<sup>28</sup> It is unlikely, however, that Ipswich was such an "ill-regulated republic" throughout the eighteenth century. The levels of corruption, debt and waste found by the commissioners in the 1830s would have been unsustainable over the course of the eighteenth century. In 1832, the mushrooming debt exceeded ten years' income; and the electoral costs of offices, which vastly exceeded the possible return from them, suggests a system out of control. Certainly, the years 1720 to 1795 saw exploitation of office for personal and political gain -- indeed, it is difficult to see how the system of government could have functioned without those opportunities -- but the exploitation of office appears to have generally been kept within broadly agreed limits. Other than the suits brought against Cooper Gravenor in 1722, and some politically motivated audits of those ejected from the Portmen in 1755 (which produced no evidence of serious financial malfeasance), there is little evidence of systematic, scandalous corruption.<sup>29</sup> It may be that prosecution was difficult and evidence of charges does not survive. It seems more likely, however, that those who dominated the Corporation had reached a tacit consensus on the limits to which office could be exploited. As already noted, the Great Court's audit committees met regularly

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<sup>27</sup> GCB, 8 June 1786. E. J. Dawson notes that other towns establish a chief financial officer earlier. Dawson, "Finance", p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2319-34, 2337-40. The Webbs, following the 1835 Report and relying on other accounts of politics in the 1820s, endorsed this view: Webb, *The Manor and the Borough*, vol. ii, pp.558-68.

<sup>29</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1722; GCB, 29 Oct. 1754.



and identified those whose accounts were late or for which balances were owed.<sup>30</sup> These committees, whose membership normally embraced a majority of the assemblymen and often included other freemen, represented a group of fifty or so individuals who were prominent in the Corporation's affairs. Given the character of the town's politics, corrupt dealings which would have materially damaged the interests of such a group seem unlikely to have gone undetected nor would they have been tolerated. The normally high turn-over of chamberlains and treasurers would have further deterred rapacious exploitation of Corporation finances. Moreover, the control of expenditure was, in part, achieved by the requirement that account holders disburse funds only upon orders of the Great Court. In practice, the chamberlains and treasures made many expenditures without having been ordered to do so. Yet the frequency of such orders and a general prohibition of 1701, against unauthorised expenditure over forty shillings, suggests that it was legally and politically prudent to have the endorsement of the Great Court for the disbursement of larger sums.<sup>31</sup>

It is impossible to determine the extent of patronage and jobbery, or to know its impact on the Corporation's expenditure. Certainly, officeholders and other freemen profited from Corporation spending. As already noted, John Cornelius and John Sparowe, while bailiffs, were contracted to finance and supervise the reconstruction of the crane and common key in 1725. Their tenure in top corporation offices was undeniably central to their getting what must have been a lucrative contract. The Great Court Book provides many other similar examples. In the 1710s and early 1720s, Cooper Gravenor held a long lease of the common quay and a quayside building known as the town house. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, bailiffs and treasurers, such as William Truelove and John Kerridge, used their influence to ensure their bank was one of the Corporation's creditors.<sup>32</sup> Yet it would not seem that

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<sup>30</sup> See above p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> Chamberlains normally held office for a single year while Treasures' typically held that office for between two and three years -- and often not consecutively. Examples of audit committee records include: SRO/I, C9/7/1, "Ipswich Corporation Audit Book", 5 July 1725, 17 Nov. 1726 & 19 July 1731; GCB, 29 Sept. 1701, 29 Sept. 1756, 19 Sept. 1757, 8 June 1786.

<sup>32</sup> GCB, 10 June 1725 & 2 Nov. 1725; SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls..."; GCB, 7 June 1723 & 26 June 1724; *RCMC*, pp.2325-6, 2339.

contemporaries found these forms of jobbery particular objectionable. Given the dominating group's surveillance of one another, this may not have been thought to be unsafe practice. Moreover, such jobbery and private connection did not run through the Corporation's affairs. In the middle of the century, advertisements in the *Ipswich Journal* indicate that leases to Corporation farms would be let to the "highest bidder". Bills for costly bridge repairs undertaken in 1770 and 1786 reveal that none of the contractors had obvious connections with members of the Assembly. The contracts for this work did not prescribe particular sub-contractors or suppliers, and they demanded that materials were to be purchased "at the most reasonable prices". When people connected with the civic leadership were contracted to do work for the Corporation, the terms were normally set out in advance and approved by the Great Court. The terms of these contracts sought to preclude fiddling or other corrupt practice through the rigorous specification of work to be done and materials used.<sup>33</sup> Such terms by themselves did not preclude jobbery, but clearly, they reflect concerns to control its impact. Senior officers were simply not able to have it all their way. While the Corporation's financial self-regulation certainly did not conform to modern standards of public service ethics, or even to eighteenth century ideals, this sort of regulation of contracts, the auditing of accounts, and the relatively high turnover of corporation financial officers went some way to assure that the body did not collapse under a vast weight of corruption and profligacy. Yet the effectiveness of this system of control, like so much else in the Corporation's governance, depended upon the cohesion of its political elite.

#### 1.4 The Corporation Finances and Power

The Corporation's financial system helped configure its politics in several important ways. It has been observed above, that men were attracted to senior offices because of the personal advantages of holding account balances and other benefits which were a

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<sup>33</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 97; for examples see SRO/I, C8/4/10-11, Sessions Book, 2nd Aug. 1770, 28 July 1785, 6 June 1785 and 17 Mar. 1786.

consequence of the system of financial management. These benefits were both the objects of, and resources in, the battles for corporate office.<sup>34</sup> Control over the process of rating, the escalation of the Corporation's debt, and concentration of financial administration in fewer offices, were all processes which became more significant factors in the development of corporate politics in the second half of the eighteenth century.

In Ipswich, as in other towns with large electorates, those in power must have felt pressure to keep the costs of government down.<sup>35</sup> As Table 5.3 indicates, rates were overwhelmingly the greatest proportion of this component of local authority revenue. By 1800 the Corporation's income-earning assets generated perhaps only 20% of all revenue, and it was difficult to increase their returns substantially. Accordingly, discretion with respect to substantial changes in revenues could only be exercised with regard to the levels of the various charter-sanctioned dues and the rates.

Although rates were set, assessed, collected and disbursed by parish officers acting on statutory authority, the Corporation's magistrates, selected by the freemen, exerted considerable control over the entire rating process. Although the justices could not set rates, the approval of two magistrates was needed to validate a rate. They could not refuse a rate because of its value, but only on the grounds that it had not been fairly applied. Consequently, the Ipswich justices were busy each session with individuals appealing against their rates assessments. Typically, the justices granted between twenty-five and thirty abatements or exemptions per year in the 1720s and 1750s.<sup>36</sup> This intervention in parish rates management went much further. Although in 1772 a St. Lawrence churchwarden unsuccessfully challenged the court's right to demand that he produce the parish rate books for inspection, parishes seem to have often desired or, at least needed, the justices' intervention. Occasionally, one year's overseers would dispute the accounts of their predecessors and the sessions would be asked to adjudicate.

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<sup>34</sup> For the importance of such benefits in attracting officeholders, see above pp. 131-44. The political significance of these offices is considered more fully in below p. 231.

<sup>35</sup> Greaves, *Leicester*, p.25.

<sup>36</sup> R. Burn, *The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, 12th edition (London: 1772), vol. III, p. 487; See Table 2.3.

In 1723 a dispute between St. Helen's parish officers and rate payers became so great that the Sessions ordered the bailiffs effectively to take-over the parish's rates to "regulate and settle them". On other occasions, the sessions ordered one or more parishes to raise rates and transfer the funds to the churchwardens and overseers of another parish unable to cover its own poor law expenses. The dependence of the parish officers upon the justices was further underlined in 1791 when the vestry of St. Peter's ordered that the permission of the Sessions be sought for a re-evaluation of the land and houses in the parish.<sup>37</sup>

The Corporation magistrates' influence over rating inevitably had political implications. Control over the rating process was a central feature of the jurisdictional battles fought between the Corporation and the new Improvement Commission established in 1793. Although unable to block the Improvement Commission's establishment, the Corporation's senior officers did ensure that the new body's rates would be based on the Poor Law assessments and rates made under the supervision of the Corporation's justices. In 1797, however, despite strenuous resistance from the assemblymen, the Commissioners dissolved this means of Corporate influence by obtaining an amendment to the Commission's founding statute which allowed the Commissioners to independently make their own assessments and set the value of their rates.<sup>38</sup>

As in other towns, self-interest and political pressure prompted those with influence in the Corporation to keep rates down.<sup>39</sup> The electoral pressure for low rates, coupled with the relative inelasticity of the revenue from the Corporation's income-earning assets, may have helped drive up the Corporation's overall debt. In the years

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<sup>37</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/9-10, Sessions Book, 25 April 1769; 23 Jan. 1772; 2 Aug. 1770; 18 Dec. 1723; 28 Mar. 1726; 27 Mar. 1727; SRO/I, FB101/A2/2, *St. Peter's Ipswich*, Parish Book, 29 July 1791

<sup>38</sup> SRO/I, C6/1/8, Ipswich, Assembly Book, 6 Feb. 1797 and 24 Feb. 1797.

<sup>39</sup> Such pressures were also evident elsewhere: Greaves, *Leicester*, p. 25; Dawson, "Finance", p. 63. It is interesting, though not unproblematic, to compare increases between 1721 and 1791 in the following: Ipswich Corporation non-rate revenues: 52%; St. Mary Tower's, Ipswich, poor rates collected: 133%; Public Income of Great Britain: 210%; and the Schumpeter-Gilboy Price Index (1701-91): 21%. Sources: Tables 5.5 & 5.4; SRO/I, FB91/G2/1, St. Mary Tower Rate Books; B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 387-96 reprinted in C. Cook and J. Stevenson, *British Historical Facts 1688-1760* (London, 1988), p. 223 and C. Cook and J. Stevenson, *British Historical Facts 1760-1830* (London, 1980), p. 186; E.B. Schumpeter, "English Prices and Public Finance, 1660-1822" in *Review of Economic Statistics* (1938) reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 182.

1721 to 1791 this debt does not appear to have exceeded five times the value of annual non-rate income; and it was certainly well below the 14:1 ratio of debt to annual non-rate income reported for 1827. The substantial growth of the Corporation's indebtedness from the late eighteenth century to its dissolution in 1835 was in large measure attributable to needs of political partisans. The pools of Corporate funds upon which patronage links and the perquisites of office depended were more readily filled through official borrowing rather than by unpopular increases of town dues or rates.<sup>40</sup>

The development of such debt depended as much upon supplies of borrowable cash as it did on a contentious politics to consume it. Prior to the establishment of substantial banks in the town, such borrowing appears to have depended upon the presumably more limited resources of individual lenders, of whom little is known. The chronology of institutional banking suggestively coincides with the rise of contentious politics and the substantial expansion of the Corporation's debt. In 1744, a Quaker family founded a bank which was said to be in support of the Portmen and their followers, who were known as the "Yellow" interest. A decade later, complaints were voiced about the Corporation's burgeoning debt, and the Twentyfour were able to have their members elected bailiffs for the first time in fifty years. Supporters of the Twentyfour also founded a bank in 1786 -- a year after another change in factional control of the bailiwick. This was also the year in which the Accounts Committee recommended substantial changes in the management of Corporation funds including the consolidation of accounts in the hands of the town treasurer. Changes in the character of political partisanship, which accelerated from the mid-eighteenth century, accompanied changes in the handling of the Corporation's money and the financial infrastructure of the town.<sup>41</sup>

The gradual changes in Ipswich's financial system during the eighteenth century were closely related to social, economic and political developments. Both the growing supervisory powers of the justices with respect to rates and the coalescing of accounts

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<sup>40</sup> See above p. 249; *RCMC*, pp. 2338-39

<sup>41</sup> The political implications of the Corporation's financial arrangements will be more fully explored in Chapter Seven in relation to the forms and course of political interaction between the various elements of Ipswich society.

around the treasurer suggest important concentrations of power. Although no clear empirical link can be established, as noted in Chapter Four, the advent of professional and financial persons into the senior offices of the Corporation may have imbued its management with something of a modernising ethos of professional organisation and control.<sup>42</sup> But an element of politics is certainly relevant here as well. As the more cohesive elite characterised by the period of Cornelius and Sparowe's ascendancy (1722-54) gave way to times of more contentious, strongly factional politics, the structure of officeholding also changed. While the former period sustained and even required a more diffuse pattern of financial offices for the sharing out of power amongst the members of a cohesive, broadly oligarchic elite, circumstances developed from the middle of the eighteenth century which favoured the concentration of power in a few key offices upon which electoral resources could be focused, and from which patronage could be readily controlled.<sup>43</sup>

## **2. The Corporation and Poor Relief**

The problem of poverty was the greatest issue which persistently faced the town's authorities. It consumed far more money than any other aspect of government, and it imposed the greatest burdens on its officers. Moreover, the problem of the poor was the most pervasive reason for contact between the local authorities and the rest of the community. It was either as ratepayers or recipients of relief that the greater part of the population had their most important, regular contact with the state. The importance of relief to many households, its cost to ratepayers, and its implications for the local economy, made the system of poor relief a matter of profound significance for social and political relations within the community. The resources for dealing with this problem were characteristically diverse, and they reflected a structure of institutions and practices which, like the courts and offices of the Corporation, lacked modern, discrete

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<sup>42</sup> See above 115-121.

<sup>43</sup> This restructuring of elite power through the emergence of a pattern of partisan politics which undermined elite cohesion is the subject of Chapter Six.

bureaucratic integrity. Their organisation and methods blurred the lines between public, private, and corporate interests. The parochial offices which collected and disbursed aid, the offices of the endowed charities, and the participants in voluntary societies were all points of some power within the community. They were, therefore, all of crucial political importance.

## 2.1 Rate-Funded Poor Relief

The poor rates, mandated by the Poor Laws of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, were by far the greatest source of cash for poor relief. As Table 5.3 suggests, these rates accounted for more than 60% of the local authorities' total revenue in the second half of the eighteenth century. Although totals cannot be established precisely, the data in Table 5.1 is suggestive of the relative importance of poor rates. While the parochial and Corporation charities were significant sources of aid, they probably never raised more than perhaps one-third or a half of the total raised by rates. The extent of occasional alms giving beyond donations to the charities cannot be known, but it seems unlikely to have been more than a fraction of the rates' total. Moreover, such charity did not afford the routine sort of provision which made the rates such an important feature of the social landscape.

Further, the rates had a capacity to expand far beyond that shown by other sources of aid. Between 1776 and 1803, rates-funded expenditure by all of Ipswich's parishes together nearly doubled in absolute terms -- an increase of more than fifty percent when adjusted for price inflation. This was against a population increase estimated at 30%.<sup>44</sup> The evidence of St. Mary Tower, in the centre of the town, and St. Clement's, a large parish with urban and rural areas, suggests that between 200% and

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<sup>44</sup> Table 5.1; The Schumpeter-Gilboy Price Index, E.B. Schumpeter, "English Prices and Public Finance, 1660-1822", *Review of Economic Statistics* (1938), reprinted in Cook and Stevenson, *Historical Facts*, p. 182; R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 383.

250% more money was spent in 1803 than was in the 1720s (see Table 5.8) -- yet the town's population probably only grew by about 60%.

**Table 5.8: Poor Rate Spending by Parish**

Year:	1722-6	1766-7	1776	1783-5	1803	Change	Change
	(Av.)	(Av.)		(Av.)		1722-1803	1776-1803
	£	£	£	£	£	%	%
<b>Parish:</b>							
<b>St. Clement</b>	395	473	638	789	1,388	251	118
<b>St. Margaret</b>			473	495	1,224		159
<b>St. Matthew</b>			216	319	679		214
<b>St. Peter</b>		240	280	251	563		101
<b>St. Nicholas</b>			197	228	493		150
<b>St. Mary Tower</b>	147	227	340	187	457	210	34
<b>St. Mary Stoke</b>			253	251	381		51
<b>St. Lawrence</b>			238	239	375		58
<b>St. Mary Key</b>			287	197	248		-14
<b>St. Helen</b>			78	111	198		154
<b>St. Stephen</b>			183	155	187		2
<b>St. Mary Elms</b>			73	98	168		130
<b>Totals</b>			3,256	3,320	6,361		95
<b>Av. per Parish</b>	271	313	271	277	530		
<b>England and Wales</b>			1.5m	2m	4.3m		186

Sources: SRO/I, FB91/G2/1, 2 & 6, St. Mary Tower, Parish Rate Books; SRO/I, FB98/G2/2 & 9, St. Clement's Parish Rate Books; SRO/I, FB101/G2/2, St. Peter's, Parish Rate Books; *First Series of Sessional Papers, IX* (1774-1802), *Returns Concerning Vagrants and Houses of Correction. Reports on the Laws which Concern the Relief and Settlement of the Poor, Fourth Schedule* (1776); *Parliamentary Papers, Returns to Parliament by Overseers* (1787); *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII* (1803-04), *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor* (1804).

It is difficult to assess the extent of poverty in Ipswich in the eighteenth century; however, data from the 1803 overseers' returns to Parliament and the 1801 census can be used to give a general indication of the proportion of the population on relief.<sup>45</sup> As Table 5.9 indicates, the percentage of the population in receipt of regular relief in 1803 varied from 4% to more than 10% in the various parishes, while the figure for the town as a whole was a little more than 9%. When occasional or "casual" relief recipients are



included, the proportion of the population on poor relief rises to 11%. It is difficult to know how typical these figures were for the preceding decades of the eighteenth century. The 1790s and early decades of the nineteenth century were notoriously difficult for the less well-off members of English society, and the numbers of persons receiving relief rose accordingly. However, there are no grounds for assuming that there was some fixed threshold of poverty throughout the eighteenth century at which people received rate-funded relief. Thus, although prices and incomes were in a more favourable relation for the poor in earlier decades, it does not follow that a smaller proportion of the population was on the rates. There are simply too many unknown factors that determined the numbers of people who might receive relief. Yet, although the precise changes are unknown, it seems clear from both the general circumstances of the period and the massive increases in the rates raised, that the problem of poverty was demanding a much greater response after the 1780s.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The problems with the reliability of 1801 census figures should to be acknowledged in this sort of exercise, as noted in S. Porter, *Exploring Urban History* (London, 1990), p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531-1782* (London, 1990), p. 29-34. Between 1790 and 1800 prices in England doubled (Schumpeter-Gilboy Price Index). The price of wheat more than doubled between 1797 and 1800. E.B. Schumpeter, "English Prices and Public Finance, 1660-1822" in *Review of Economic Statistics* (1938); B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 388, both reprinted in C. Cook and J. Stevenson, *British Historical Facts 1760-1830* (London, 1980), p. 182-3.

**Table 5.9: Proportion of the Total Population In Receipt of Parish Aid, 1803**

	Percent of Total Population per Parish on Relief				Population (1801)
	"Permanent"		Permanent	Casual Aid	
	Indoor	Outdoor	Total	All Receipients	
	%	%	%	%	
<b>St. Helen</b>	3.06	7.34	10.4	8.26	327
<b>St. Clement</b>	1.61	10.52	12.13	4.21	2,424
<b>St. Peter</b>	1.52	12.17	13.69	1.83	986
<b>St. Mary Stoke</b>	3.64	9.09	12.73	2.6	385
<b>St. Mary Key</b>	0.99	11.36	12.35	0.37	810
<b>St. Lawrence</b>	1.92	6.82	8.74	1.28	469
<b>St. Nicholas</b>	1.19	5.54	6.73	2.9	758
<b>St. Mary Tower</b>	1.02	7.41	8.43	0	688
<b>St. Margaret</b>	1.82	4.47	6.29	1.09	1,923
<b>St. Stephen</b>	0.95	5.69	6.64	0.47	422
<b>St. Matthew</b>	0.83	3.81	4.64	0.25	1,206
<b>St. Mary Elms</b>	1.34	3.13	4.47	0	447
<b>Total</b>					10,845
<b>Av.</b>	1.53	7.57	9.1	1.97	11.07
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>					14.7

Sources: *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII*, (1803-04), *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor* (1804); 1801 census returns in *VCH, Suffolk*, Vol. I, pp. 694, 686; P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531-1782* (London, 1990), p. 30.

This increase in spending appears to have been made possible both by increases in the number of ratepayers and by higher rates. As already noted, rate-funded expenditure in Ipswich nearly doubled between the early 1780s and 1803. While it is clear that spending rose inexorably over the course of the eighteenth century, the figures in Table 5.9 illustrate how the rate burden varied between parishes. Moreover, as Table 5.8 shows, the rates of increase in poor rates levies were not consistent across the town. For instance, during the second half of the eighteenth century spending in St. Clement's grew by 34%, while St. Peter's increased by 43%. Yet between the periods 1766-7 and 1783-5, St. Clement's expenditure rose by 60%, while St. Peter's was up by only 4%. During the same period St. Mary Tower's expenditure decreased by 17%. The pattern of expenditure growth for these three parishes was also different between the years 1785 and 1803. St. Mary Tower's spending increased by 144%, while St. Peter's rose by 124%, and St. Clement's expanded by a comparatively modest 75%. It is difficult to attribute such variations in expenditure growth to the intrinsic qualities of the respective parishes. St. Clement's was the largest of the three parishes considered here, and it

embraced both highly urbanised as well as rural areas. St. Mary Tower, in the centre of Town, and St. Peter's, a quayside parish, had both been built-up long before the eighteenth century. Accordingly, one might expect the greatest population expansion to occur in St. Clement's. Yet, in a period of rapid population expansion, from 1785-1803, St. Clement's had the lowest increase in poor rate-funded expenditure of the three parishes considered here. Again, however, it is difficult to reach firm conclusions on these matters because it is difficult to identify or assign accurate weightings to the multiplicity of factors which would have created demand for poor rate spending. As a place of new, "green-field" building, St. Clement's population growth might have been attributable to a wealthier sort of people less likely to draw on the poor rates. St. Peter's, however, in a period when proximity to the quayside was less important to wealthier merchants and ship owners, may have seen a relative decline in real property values and an increase in the proportion of its population which needed relief.

**Table 5.10: Average Quarterly Poor Rate Set Per Year** (pence per pound)

	Period A		Period B					Percentage Increase Av. of A to Av. of B
<b>St. Clement</b>	<b>1766</b>	<b>1767</b>	<b>1786</b>	<b>1787</b>	<b>1788</b>	<b>1789</b>	<b>1790</b>	
	12.5	12	16.5	17.25	18.75	21.5	19.5	52%
<b>St. Mary Tower</b>	<b>1766</b>	<b>1767</b>	<b>1791</b>	<b>1792</b>	<b>1793</b>	<b>1794</b>	<b>1795</b>	
	11.25	12.5	13.25	13.25	14.25	14.5	17.8	21%
<b>St. Peter</b>	<b>1766</b>	<b>1767</b>	<b>1793</b>					
	10.75	11.25	13					18%
<b>Price Index</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>147</b>	20%

Sources: SRO/I, FB91/G2/1, 2 & 6, St. Mary Tower, Parish Rate Books; SRO/I, FB98/G2/2 & 9, St. Clement's, Parish Rate Books; SRO/I, FB101/G2/2, St. Peter's, Parish Rate Books; The Schumpeter-Gilboy Price Index, E.B. Schumpeter, "English Prices and Public Finance, 1660-1822", *Review of Economic Statistics* (1938), reprinted in C. Cook and J. Stevenson, *British Historical Facts*, (London, 1980), p. 182.

The doubling of poor rate-funded expenditure between the late 1760s and 1803 was sustained by increases in both the level at which rates were set and the total number of ratepayers. As Table 5.10 suggests, although rate settings could fluctuate by as much as twenty percent in a five year period, the broader trend appears to have been for an

increase in the levels of rates, depending on the parish, from 18% to 52% between 1766-7 and the 1790s. Here again, the variation between parishes was substantial. In contrast with its earlier period of low rate growth, St. Clements saw its rates jump on average by more than 50%. St. Peter's, meanwhile, increased by fewer than 20%. Various factors such as the assiduity with which settlement laws were enforced, the need to make major repairs to the parish workhouse and, of course, periods of high grain prices or trade disruptions, could all force fluctuations in the level at which the rates were set. Not only were rates rising, but the number of ratepayers also increased. A sampling of two parishes (see Table 5.11) suggests that over the course of the century the number of ratepayers increased two- or three-fold. This, coupled with the increased level of rates easily provided the funds for the growth in poor law related expenditure

**Table 5.11: Increase in Numbers of Ratepayers, St. Mary's Tower and St. Clement's**

St. Mary Tower			St. Clement		
	No. of	%		No. of	%
	Ratepayers	Increase		Ratepayers	Increase
1722-25 (Av.)	73		1722,26-27 (Av.)	189	
1764-67 (Av.)	133	86	1766-67 (Av.)	487	158
1791-95 (Av.)	173	30	1786-90 (Av.)	627	29

Sources: SRO/I, FB91/G2/1, 2 & 6, St. Mary Tower, Parish Rate Books; SRO/I, FB98/G2/2 & 9, St. Clement's, Parish Rate Books; SRO/I, FB101/G2/2, St. Peter's, Parish Rate Books.

Although the increases in rates after the 1760s were, in broad terms, consistent with general price inflation (see Table 5.10), fluctuations of as much as twenty percent within five year periods were likely to have provoked concern about poor rate levels in Ipswich, as the escalation of poor rate levels certainly had done elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> Local anxiety about the levels of poor rate spending may have derived from the fact that rate expenditure per capita in most Ipswich parishes was higher than the national average (see Table 5.12).

<sup>47</sup> Slack, *Poor Law*, p. 34.

**Table 5.12: Total and Per Capita Poor Rate  
Expenditure (1803)**

	<b>Total Expenditure £</b>	<b>Expenditure Per Capita (shillings)</b>
<b>St. Mary Stoke</b>	563	19.8
<b>St. Lawrence</b>	381	16.0
<b>St. Mary Tower</b>	493	13.3
<b>St. Nicholas</b>	375	13.0
<b>St. Margaret</b>	1,224	12.7
<b>St. Helen</b>	198	12.1
<b>St. Clement</b>	1,388	11.5
<b>St. Peter</b>	248	11.4
<b>St. Matthew</b>	457	11.3
<b>St. Mary Elms</b>	168	7.5
<b>St. Mary Key</b>	679	6.1
<b>St. Stephen</b>	187	5.9
<b>Total</b>	6,361	
<b>Average</b>		11.7
<b>England &amp; Wales</b>		9.5

Sources: *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII* (1803-4),  
*Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor*  
(1804); P. Slack, *Poor Law*, p. 30.

Whatever their relative position, Ipswich's ratepayers were as likely as taxpayers anywhere to seek lower levies. Moreover, as we have seen, the numbers of ratepayers, and therefore the number of town residents concerned about the levels of local taxation continued to increase rapidly. More than 1,350 individuals can be identified as ratepayers between the years 1755 and 1760. This may have been as much as 65% percent of Ipswich's adult male population in those years, and was twice the number of freemen voting in the town's polls. Clearly there was a large body of people in the town who were interested in the costs and effectiveness of Poor Law administration.

Self-interest and the pressure of other ratepayers ensured that parish officers were keen to keep the demand for rate-funded relief as low as possible. Ipswich's parishes were no exception to the general concern to enforce settlement laws in the interests of keeping rates down. Those settled in parishes within the town were treated no differently than those outside of the Corporate boundaries -- although familiarity amongst the officers of the town's various parishes probably smoothed the provision of

settlement certificates and so eased movement within the town for the poor. There is much evidence of churchwardens and overseers acting assiduously in other ways to keep people off the rates. In addition to the vigorous battles against those who appealed their rates to the sessions, parish officers undertook considerable expense to find people whose actions might result in claims for relief. In 1754 the churchwarden and overseers of St. Mary's Stoke placed an advertisement in the *Ipswich Journal* offering an unspecified reward for the apprehension of George Abbott who had run away abandoning his wife and family "leaving them a charge upon the Parish". The parish officers of St. Mary's Tower similarly placed advertisements seeking information as to the parentage of a child who had been abandoned in the parish.<sup>48</sup> The actions of these officers were not always, however, efforts to find others responsible for potential relief claimants. More proactively, parish officers sought to bind young people as apprentices. Parish officers acted as sureties for cash loans to tradesmen who, in a credit crisis, faced ruin.<sup>49</sup> Support for local traders was obviously preferable to seeing them forced onto rate-funded relief.

## 2.2 Workhouses and Christ's Hospital

Beyond these sorts of activities, the workhouse was the most important aspect of parochial efforts to deal with the poor. The surviving records are not sufficient to establish a very full history of the workhouse in Ipswich, but it is clear that by the eighteenth century each of the twelve parishes entirely within the Corporation boundaries had such an institution. In many parishes it appears that in the late sixteenth or seventeenth century a house was left as a legacy for the benefit of the poor. While these buildings may have been established as almshouses, by the 1730s, some were converted for use as workhouses. Throughout the eighteenth century the town's parish minutes contain records of arrangements to farm workhouses to private operators.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ipswich Journal*, 12 Oct. 1754, 13 March 1756.

<sup>49</sup> Canning, *Gifts and Legacies*, (1747), p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> SRO/I, FB98/G11/1, St. Clement's, Parish Rate Books, 1725-6; *First Series of Sessional Papers, IX*, (1774-1802), "Returns Concerning Vagrants and Houses of Correction. Reports on the Laws which Concern the Relief and Settlement of the Poor, Fourth Schedule" (1777); *Parliamentary Papers* (1816), vol. XVIb, "Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons; 1787-1788"

These records together with later returns to Parliamentary inquiries, allow some insight into the role, in financial terms at least, of the workhouse in the parochial strategies for dealing with the poor. Indoor relief constituted 36% of the total poor relief spending in the town's twelve parishes. While that figure was typical of the proportion of poor rate revenue spent on indoor relief in most Ipswich parishes, it could be as little as 17% or as much as 68% of poor relief spending.<sup>51</sup> In 1803 indoor relief was three times more costly per recipient than outdoor relief. The returns of that year indicate that approximately £13 12s was spent per person in receipt of indoor relief. The comparable figure for those on outdoor relief was £4 12s. The greater cost per recipient of indoor relief was, of course, attributable to the fact that in many instances the entire cost of living of those on indoor relief was met out of the rates. To those expenses, the overheads of the workhouse were added.

Outdoor relief was much more likely to be occasional or intended to supplement low incomes up to a subsistence level. Those in workhouses might be expected to defray the costs of their maintenance through their labour, but this long-held principle of the workhouse seems to have been only occasionally realised. The mean sum spent on putting the poor to work in all of the town's parishes in the years 1783-5 was only £12 1s 8d. Four parishes spent nothing and three more spent less than 5s. Given that the town's workhouses were reported to have accommodation for more than 400 persons in 1776, this seems a rather small outlay for materials and capital needed to put workhouse inmates to profitable labour. It may well be that the development of the local economy was not conducive to schemes for putting the poor to work to support themselves. As at Colchester, the decay of the cloth trade made spinning, once a common workhouse activity, a less useful form of employment.<sup>52</sup>

If, as appears likely for the later eighteenth century at least, the parish workhouses were not principally used as places for the poor to work, then their principal

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pp. 1218-19; Good examples of agreements to farm workhouses can be found at: SRO/I, FB91/62/3St. Mary's Tower, Parish Book, 1731; SRO/I, FB101/G2/2, St. Peter's Ipswich, Parish Book, 1760.

<sup>51</sup> *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII*, (1803-04), "Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor" (1804).

<sup>52</sup> D'Cruz, "Provincial England", p. 111.

function was to provide shelter for the aged and infirm. This would have matched practice elsewhere at this date.<sup>53</sup> There is however no clear evidence as to the identities or conditions of those in the Ipswich parish workhouses. Therefore it cannot be ruled out that the primary purpose of workhouses was to deter those thought to be indigent from going on the rates. The role of the workhouse and its place in the network of authority between the parish, the Corporation and the justices is more difficult to establish given the significance of the Christ's Hospital and of charitable almshouses.

Established by royal charter in 1572, Christ's Hospital was originally intended to serve as both an almshouse for the aged and infirm, and a workhouse for the able-bodied poor, then described as "the lazy Drones of the Commonwealth". Over time, the Hospital and its endowments were used for a variety of purposes. By the eighteenth century it was the site of an almshouse, a school for poor children, whose fees were paid from charitable endowments, a library, an infirmary and a bridewell.<sup>54</sup> Records of its function as a bridewell are, unfortunately, patchy. There is evidence, however, that it functioned as a place of short-term detention for the idle and disorderly. It is not implausible that Christ's Hospital, in its capacity as a bridewell, was used to punish minor offenders and to deter the able bodied from going on the rates. At the same time the parish workhouses were, as Martin Daunton has suggested of workhouses in general, primarily used to lodge the old and infirm.<sup>55</sup>

The parish workhouses and Christ's Hospital were important resources for the governance of the community. In 1803, 170 people, were in receipt of indoor relief. That was about 17% of all those who were regularly assisted by Ipswich's parishes. It has been observed that such relief consumed more than one-third of parochial poor relief spending.<sup>56</sup> As in the administration of the poor rates, the parochial and corporate authorities were more closely linked in the management of the workhouses and Christ's

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<sup>53</sup> Daunton, *Progress*, p. 455.

<sup>54</sup> Redstone, *Ipswich*, p. 70; Kirby, *Suffolk Traveller*, p. 42-43.

<sup>55</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/11, Sessions Book, 1785; Daunton, *Progress*, p. 455. This interpretation of the evidence of Christ's Hospital's function is made in light of J. Innes, "Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells, 1555-1800" in D. Hay and F. Synder (eds.), *Labour, Law and Crime* (London, 1987), pp. 42-115.

<sup>56</sup> *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII* (1803-4), "Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor" (1804).



Hospital than formal institutional organisation might at first suggest. The workhouses, as parish institutions, and Christ's Hospital, as a facility under the control of the Corporation, were all instruments for the relief of the "deserving poor" and the punishment of "the idle and disorderly". In their capacity as supervisors of parish officers, and as a panel of appeal with respect to parochial administration of relief, the justices of the peace had some engagement with the use of the workhouses. As portmen, twentyfourmen, and bailiffs, these same men took a leading role in the direction of Christ's hospital as either its managing officers or in the selection of those officers. Thus, as in the management of corporate finance, the co-ordination of offices and resources which lacked formal institutional relation was achieved through a cohesive governing elite rooted in the senior offices of the Corporation.

### 2.3 The Endowed Charities

Poor Law institutions and practices were augmented by the many charities under the control of the Corporation or the parishes. Because the necessary figures for each charity and parish rating are never available for the same year, it is possible to make only a general estimate that the charities' combined annual revenues amount to about 20% of the value of the poor rates collections in the last years of the eighteenth century (see Table 5.1).<sup>57</sup> No doubt, the charities' revenues fluctuated considerably with the value of the real and paper assets from which their income was derived. Moreover, expenditure on the maintenance of properties, often farms, or the mortgaging of them to raise funds for purposes unrelated to poor relief, meant that they did not reliably supply fixed sums for poor relief. Nonetheless, as Tables 5.13 and 5.14 indicate, the charities provided substantial sums.

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<sup>57</sup> Estimated from figures in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.13: *Parochial Charities as a Percentage of Poor Rate Funded Expenditure (1780s)***

	<b>Total Rate-Funded Expenditure (1783-5 Av. p.a.)</b>	<b>Rate-Funded Expenditure Per Capita<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Charity Revenue Per Annum (1788)</b>	<b>Charity Revenue as % of Rate Funded Expenditure</b>
	£	s	£	%
St. Mary Elms <sup>2</sup>	98	4	42	42.9
St. Peter	251	11	105	41.8
St. Mary Tower	187	5	19	10.2
St. Mary Key	197	5	20	10.2
St. Lawrence	239	10	16	6.7
St. Matthew	319	5	18	5.6
St. Stephen	155	7	7	4.5
St. Margaret	495	5	22	4.5
St. Nicholas	228	6	10	4.4
St. Mary Stoke	251	13	7	2.8
St. Clement	789	7	10	1.3
St. Helen	111	7	0	0.0
Total or Av.	3,320	7	276	8.3
England & Wales		10		

<sup>1</sup> The parish population figures used in these calculations were taken from the 1801 census. The effects of population growth, although modest, are likely to have slightly deflated these figures.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Smith's charity was under the joint control of the ministers of St. Peter and St. Mary Elms. Its yield for the year 1787-8 was £132 19s. In the above table that sum has been divided and is included in the total charity revenue for St. Peter and St. Mary Elms in proportion to their respective rate-funded poor relief expenditure.

Sources: *First Series of Sessional Papers, XIII*, (1803-4), "Abstracts of the Answers and Returns Relative to the Poor" (1804); *Parliamentary Papers* (1816), vol. XVIb, "Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons, 1787-1788" pp. 1218-9.

This money could be used to supply aid which otherwise would have had to be raised by rates. The funds supplied by the parochial charities typically amounted to between 3% and 10% of poor rate funded expenditure in most parishes. St. Peter and St. Mary Elms were extraordinary cases in that they shared in Ann Smith's 1729 endowment of £4,432 for the provision of housing and cash for twelve poor women. By 1788 this charity had

an annual income of £132 19s (See Table 5.12).<sup>58</sup> That sum was nearly four-fifths the amount collected by the rates. This undoubtedly contributed to St Mary Elm's comparatively low rate-funded expenditure per capita.

**Table 5.14: Annual Revenue of Corporation Charities (1814)**

	Income from Land £	Other Investment Income £
Martin's Charity to Poor Persons	130	
Bradstreet's Gift for Poor Quakers	30	
Christ's Hospital	358	7
Cutler's Charity to Poor Persons	6	
Tooley's Charity	797	
Smart's Charity	385	
Tyler's Charity for Educating Boys	74	
Charity School of Boys and Girls	245	101
Charity School	10	
Phillips Charity in Bread for the Poor		
Reynold's Gift to the Poor	13	
Smith's Charity to Poor Women		133

Note: This table does not include Sir Thomas White's Gift, a foundation administered by the Corporation of Bristol. Under the terms of White's legacy, each year, in turn, one of twenty-four specified towns received £104. Ipswich's first turn was in 1597; accordingly, the town was due payments in the eighteenth century in 1712, 1736, 1760, and 1783. See: R. Canning, *Gifts and Legacies...* (1747), pp.73-6. Source: *Reports from Commissioners: vol. vi*, (1820), "Returns of ...Rents and Profits... of any Trust Established for Charitable Purposes", First Report, p. 117 and Second Report, p. 76.

Beyond adding to resources available for poor relief, and thereby helping to keep the rates down, these charities were of great significance in the politics and governance of the community. The Corporation-run charities were particularly important in this respect. The annual yield of the parochial charities was probably less than ten percent of the value of those in the hands of the Corporation. Although half the £274 income from the parochial charities in 1787 was derived from a single charity, the rest of that sum was spread over forty-three others. By contrast, the £2,255 of income from the Corporation's charities in 1814 was derived from just twelve charities. Not only was the Corporation charities' income much greater and concentrated in fewer foundations,

<sup>58</sup> *Parliamentary Papers* (1816), vol. XVIIb, "Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons; 1787-1788" pp. 1218-19.

eight of the parish-based charities were, in any case, administered by officers of the Corporation. Parochial officers, including ministers, controlled only twenty-one of the parochial charities -- the remaining fifteen were in the hands of trustees.<sup>59</sup> Thus, a vast majority of the charitable assets were in the hands of the Corporation. Moreover, the members of the Assembly exercised almost exclusive control over them. The bailiffs routinely served as governors of Christ's Hospital and were wardens of Tooley's foundation. Some charities' terms specified particular roles for members of the Portmen or Twenty-four. Martin's Gift, for example, which provided scholarships to Cambridge or clothes for the poor, gave the Portmen the right to determine the recipients of the charity, but the Twentyfourmen were to have a share in the management of the accounts and decisions about surplus income.<sup>60</sup> Inevitably, the management of the charities was a matter of political contention. The discussion below demonstrates how patterns in the control of the charities reflected the political strength of individuals and factions.<sup>61</sup>

The political importance of the charity offices in the Town's politics derived from the same features which made other Corporation offices politically valuable. Senior Corporation officers, serving as treasurers or renter-wardens of charities, were able to profit from holding their balances. Tooley's Foundation, for example, with annual receipts often exceeding £1,000 by the early nineteenth century, provided a rich opportunity for its treasurer to invest funds for his own profit or to use the charity's funds to help him through a personal cash-flow difficulty. The excesses and losses which resulted from such practices in the 1810s and 1820s were the subject of much complaint in the 1835 report of the commissioners on municipal corporations.<sup>62</sup> The management of the charities also provided politically useful opportunities for patronage and jobbery. Tenancies of valuable properties could be used as rewards for political support. Tradesmen loyal to the charities' governors or trustees were rewarded with contracts for repairs or other work. Christ's Hospital, with its many residents, needed

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<sup>59</sup> *Parliamentary Papers* (1816), vol. XVIIb, "Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons; 1787-1788" pp. 1218-19.

<sup>60</sup> R. Canning, *Gifts and Legacies*, p. 101.

<sup>61</sup> See below, p.94; and above pp. 278-81.

<sup>62</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2330-2332.

provisioning, staffing, and occasional repairs. The smaller almshouses of other charities undoubtedly supplied similar opportunities on a lesser scale. Senior Corporation figures could exploit the patronage of charities in a most blatantly self-serving fashion. Thus, in 1781 William Wollaston, of Finborough Hall, MP for Ipswich, arranged to have his son attend the Grammar School with the fees paid by Tyler's Foundation. At the same meeting, Thomas Hallum, three times a bailiff and a frequent warden of Tooley's Foundation, arranged for his son to receive one of the scholarships to Cambridge. Three years later William Wollaston "the younger" was apprenticed to his father with the £5 fee paid by charitable funds in the control of the Assembly.<sup>63</sup>

The political significance of the charities extended beyond the personal advantages gained by those managing them. The charities were important features of the concentration of power amongst the members of the Assembly. The disposition of charity resources such as places in almshouses, allowances of coal or clothes, and the disbursement of cash to the needy, were matters of some concern to parish officers. If those for whom the parish would have to provide were relieved by a Corporation-controlled charity, the burden on parish rates and the work of parish officers would be lessened. Thus, the senior Corporation officers who controlled the charities were in a position to influence those parish officers.

Control over the parishes was more powerfully effected by the justices of the peace, all of whom, of course, were selected from the Assembly. By statute, the justices had considerable supervisory powers over parish officers in the implementation of the poor laws.<sup>64</sup> These powers have been noted above, where it was evident that the magistrates regularly reversed the orders of parish officers by overturning rates and sustaining appeals.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the JP's roles in the certification, examination and removal processes ensured that the Corporation's senior officers exerted control over settlement throughout the town.<sup>66</sup> The intervention of the bench in parish affairs could,

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<sup>63</sup> SRO/I, C6/1/8, Assembly Book, 29 Sept. 1781, 15 Nov. 1784.

<sup>64</sup> Slack, *Poor Law*, pp. 30, 60-4.

<sup>65</sup> See above p. 91, 189-90.

<sup>66</sup> Nelson, *Justice of the Peace*, pp. 555-6; Burn, *Justice of the Peace*, vol. III, pp. 290-7. Although, as in some urban parishes of Kent, this power may have been invoked less frequently in the later eighteenth

on occasion, go further. Justices occasionally ordered one parish to raise a rate to help support the poor of another. Thus, in 1726, the churchwardens and overseers of St. Mary's Stoke were ordered to collect £3 which was to be transferred to their counterparts in St. Mary's Elms. A year later St. Helen's officers were ordered to provide 40s for the aid of St. Mary's Elms.<sup>67</sup> Sometimes the justices acted more directly. In 1723, after the parish officers and the rate payers of St. Helen's had fallen into an irreconcilable dispute over rating, the Bench ordered three justices to "regulate and settle" the rates themselves. When, in 1786, parish officers in St. Mary's Elms could not agree on a candidate for a vacant place in Smith's Almshouse, the decision was referred to the recorder in accordance with the terms of the benefactor's will.<sup>68</sup> It may be that justices in towns like Ipswich exerted more control over parochial poor relief than did their rural counterparts.<sup>69</sup> Although the statutory basis of magistrates' powers was the same, the Corporation justices may have been able to supervise parish officers more closely because of their close proximity and frequency of contact. Moreover, the particular pattern of political and economic relations in the town may have provided the JPs with more levers or means of informal influence with which to secure the compliance of parochial officers. In any case, it is clear that the senior officers of the Corporation, in their capacities as justices and officers of the large charities, exerted a powerful, concentrated authority over the provision of poor relief within the town.

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century. See N. Landau, "The Regulation of Immigration, Economic Structures and Definitions of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century England" in *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 565-68.

<sup>67</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 28 March 1726, 17 March 1727; this was sanctioned by 43 Eliz. I, c.2.(1601); Burn, *The Justice of the Peace*, pp.496-500.

<sup>68</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/9, Sessions Book, 18 Dec. 1723; *Ipswich Journal*, 5 Aug. 1786.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Slack, however, cites the example of Bristol as a corporation where parochial authorities successfully undermined attempts to diminish their control of poor law administration by the establishment of corporations for the poor. See: Slack, *Poor Law*, p. 46. Although the incorporation of groups of parishes for the running of workhouses was a significant innovation in rural Suffolk, and had been sponsored by men active in Ipswich politics, this measure was not adopted in the town itself. See S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part I: The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927), pp.126-36). Yet it would appear that this was the case in Ipswich not because of insurmountable parochial opposition, but because the sorts of men had who sought to take parish relief in hand by this means in the county already had effective control in the town thanks to their places in the Corporation.

### 3. Economic Regulation

#### 3.1 The Corporation as an Economic Institution

From their establishment the municipal corporations were fundamentally economic institutions. The Webbs persuasively argued that the distinctive nature of the urban economy necessitated the sort of self-government afforded under a corporate charter: the corporation was the organisational instrument of a “community of producers”. Its primary purpose was regulation of the markets and labour in the economically developing medieval town. Other features of the corporation’s government, such as the administration of the civil and criminal law, together with provision of poor relief, however important, were incidental to its founding purposes of the protection and promotion of the economic interests of urban producers.<sup>70</sup> Yet eighteenth-century commentators and subsequent historians have maintained that municipal corporations had become obsolete and were incapable of serving the economic interests of the community. Adam Smith famously denounced their restrictive practices, as did Ipswich’s own historian G.R. Clarke who, in 1830, decried the Corporation’s eighteenth-century economic regulation which he believed retarded the presumed benefits of unregulated free trade. Corfield has argued, however, that there is no correlation between the constitutional arrangements of eighteenth-century towns and their economic development. She suggests that, in addition to the primacy of other factors in urban economies, the great diversity of town constitutions precludes assumptions about the uniform effects of the mere fact of incorporation.<sup>71</sup> Certainly in the case of Ipswich the local economy was too complex and the interventions of the Corporation too variable to allow a simple conclusion that incorporation was in itself a positive or negative factor for growth. But while the effect of the Corporation’s

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<sup>70</sup> Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 365-9.

<sup>71</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. (Oxford, 1993), pp. 117-37; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 89. Corfield, *Impact*, pp. 91-3. Also see: Daunton, *Progress*, 155.

activities on the local economy cannot be quantified, it is possible to see how the quality of the Corporation's engagement with the local economy reflects the wider social and political dynamics of the community.

The Corporation of Ipswich had considerable jurisdiction with respect to the regulation and promotion of the town's economy. On the authority of its medieval charters, the Great Court's by-laws governed the markets, tolls, dues, fines and management of Corporation property. Possession of the Admiralty jurisdiction over the River Orwell past Harwich to the sea, further enhanced the Corporation's power over the local economy. Through the power vested in the justices of the peace, the full range of statute law regulating apprentices, masters and servants, market practices and other matters was in the hands of Corporation officers.<sup>72</sup> It seems clear, however, that by the eighteenth century these rights were neither fully nor always vigorously exercised. Moreover, the guilds, which have been seen as remaining important in the regulation of urban producers in other eighteenth-century towns, were not effective at Ipswich, since the Corporation had, for all practical purposes, taken over the Ipswich guild by 1650. Eighteenth-century elections of the guildholder were merely exercises in selecting hosts for the Corporation Feast, and were discontinued after the 1720s.<sup>73</sup> Michael Reed asserts that the Corporation's regulation and provision for the local economy in the seventeenth century was "inefficient and fitful". The general pattern of decline and decay in Corporate supervision meant that by the end of the seventeenth century Ipswich had "a comparatively open and unregulated economic structure".<sup>74</sup> It is certainly true that the eighteenth-century Corporation's engagement with town's economy was considerably less than has been described for other towns in earlier periods.<sup>75</sup> But the Corporation was not inactive. The principles of free trade were not so pervasive nor the powers of the Corporation so diminished that the Great Court, its officers and the justices were unable or incapable of acting to protect and advance local economic interests.

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<sup>72</sup> Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 87; Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Barry, "Bourgeois Collectivism?", p. 89. .

<sup>74</sup> Reed, "Economic Structure", p. 120.

<sup>75</sup> Clark and Slack, *Towns in Transition*, p. 108; Underdown, *Fire From Heaven*, pp. 245-6.



### 3.2 Freeman Privileges and Apprentice Regulation

The freedom, with its rights and privileges, defined the corporate body. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Great Court continued to exercise its power to fine or to exclude non-freemen who tried to work or sell goods in Ipswich. The administrative arrangements for the imposition of these “foreign fines” suggest that they were as much a revenue measure as an instrument for the protection of the freemen’s trading privileges. More than forty men were annually named to be assessors of the foreign fines, and they, along with the auditors named by the Great Court met on All Saints Day at a special court.<sup>76</sup> Yet the imposition of foreign fines was more than just a revenue measure; in the case of shopkeepers it was also intended to drive off competition for the freemen traders. In 1720, for example, Sarah Browne, a linen draper, despite being a resident of Ipswich and a widow who might conceivably end up on parish relief, was ordered to close her shop and leave her trade or face a twenty shilling fine for each week she remained in business. A similar order was made to John Rudder, a stuffs mercer. Both shopkeepers defied the orders and refused to pay the fines and were eventually sued by the Corporation. The absence of further references to the case suggests that the Corporation won or the parties came to terms. The Corporation continued to battle against unlicensed, non-freemen traders into the 1730s with more such prosecutions and the publishing of proclamations. Fines eventually reached twenty shillings for illegally opening a shop and three shillings for each day of trading. But the effort to suppress non-free trading began to flag. In 1724 the Corporation apparently had doubts about the legal basis of its prosecution of non-free traders, and the bailiffs were ordered to seek the opinion of legal counsel. Moreover, after the publication of the schedule of fines in 1727, there was protest and the rates were reduced by half. After

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<sup>76</sup> Bacon, *Annals*, end sheets. Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 89; for a typical Great Court Order appointing foreign fines assessors see: GCB. 2 Nov. 1721.

about 1730 references to foreign fines rapidly diminished in the records of the Great Court and there were no further orders appointing assessors or a fine court after 1735.<sup>77</sup>

It was not until the early nineteenth century that the Corporation's concern about the competition faced by local shopkeepers from hawkers and itinerant auctioneers was renewed. After receiving a petition in 1816, the bailiffs called a general meeting to consider the problem. It was proposed that "a high duty" be imposed on the licences of non-residents selling goods in the town. Further, a committee was struck to approach the Borough's MPs about assistance from Parliament, and the committee was in communication with other towns facing the same problem. Interestingly, in 1816 the problem was not cast in terms of the interests of the freemen traders. The Corporation was now concerned about the "injury sustained by the resident trader, from the number of Hawkers and other Persons, not being Householders, who resort to this Place for the Sale of Goods". The imposition of a "high duty" upon such non-resident traders was justified on the grounds that they bore "no proportion of the Rates and Taxes" paid by the householder-traders.<sup>78</sup>

The difference between this campaign to protect resident traders and the Corporation's earlier efforts in the 1720s was clear in both the interests involved and the rationale. The term "freeman" did not arise in the notices, newspaper accounts, and other records collected by William Batley, the chair of the 1816 committee. Clearly, the action was taken to assist all resident traders, regardless of their freeman status; it was ratepayers the committee was concerned to protect. This episode shows that by 1816 the Corporation's governance was conceived much more in terms of a resident public, than merely membership of the Corporation. This, of course, was consistent with the weakening of the ancient corporate principles in favour a developing notion of the public interest in the later eighteenth century.<sup>79</sup>

While it may seem that this abandonment of the freemanry as the basis of the Corporation's intervention into the local economy is consistent with a growing ethos of

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<sup>77</sup>GCB, 9 Feb. 1720, 18 Aug. 1727, 19 Feb. 1730 SRO/I, C5/14/7); G.R. Clarke, *History...of Ipswich*, p. 89; GCB, 30 April 1725.

<sup>78</sup>BL Add. MS 25336, Batley, "Collections for the History of Ipswich", ff. 116-118

<sup>79</sup>See above pp. 72-4; and below pp. 287-90.

free trade in this period, it is worth noting that the defence of resident ratepayers was clearly at the expense of an open market. Although the passing of the freemen and the rise of the resident ratepayer as the focus of Corporation concern may represent a shift in the boundaries or identities of the privileged members of the community, it nonetheless remained a community inclined to protect its members from unwanted outside interference.

This shift in the focus of the Corporation's economic protection from the freemen to resident traders was linked to both the politics and the changing economic interests of the town's governing elite. Cooper Gravenor helped sustain his commanding position in Corporation politics in the first twenty years of the eighteenth century by a kind of populism which featured vigorous protection of freemen privileges through the imposition of foreign fines. By 1723, Gravenor had been driven from power by John Cornelius and John Sparowe. Cornelius and Sparowe were men with social and commercial interests extending well beyond the town.<sup>80</sup> Such men, together with those in the increasingly influential shipbuilding and brewing interests gained little by the preservation of freemen privileges. Indeed, they might have welcomed more competition for their local suppliers and relief from higher labour costs sustained by the freemen's privileges. Moreover, increasing the numbers of shopkeepers and traders, whether freemen or not, would have helped lessen the burden of the rates.

By the early eighteenth century, the Corporation's courts were little concerned with regulating labour.<sup>81</sup> Evidence of wage regulation undertaken under the authority of the Statute of Artificers does not survive after 1653. In the first three decades of the eighteenth century the Great Court occasionally issued orders to protect the exclusive rights of freemen to work within the town. But such orders were infrequent and limited in scope. In 1701 the treasurer and chamberlains were instructed to hire only freemen to work on the town's estates except for the labour needed for work on the town marshes. At a Great Court meeting in April 1725 there was concern about the freemen's exclusive

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<sup>80</sup> See above p.115.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Reed suggests that there was little serious general wage regulation of this type during the seventeenth century. M. Reed, "Economic Structure", pp. 120-1

right to transport coal and other goods to and from the common quay. The bailiffs were instructed to investigate the matter, and at the next meeting it was ordered that only inhabitants of the town could be used to unload and transport coal from ships at the common quay. Wages were not to exceed 2s 4d per day and, in order to ensure that the pay bill was not spread too thinly, employers were not to hire more men “than usuall” for the task. Ship’s masters could appeal to the bailiffs for a dispensation if there were insufficient numbers of resident labourers willing to work at the ordered rate. Non-residents could be hired but every chaldron of coals they landed was subject to a three pence fine.<sup>82</sup> Because the significance of these terms cannot be assessed, it is impossible to determine whether the order priced non-resident labour out of the work, or if it imposed a very low ceiling on the wages of resident dockers. It seems likely, however, that both this order and the 1701 order mandating that freemen be employed on town estates, were efforts to secure employment for local men. It is noteworthy that the provisions of the 1725 order distinguish “residents” from “non-residents”, rather than “freemen” from “foreigners”. Rather than preserving the rights of freemen, the Great Court was probably seeking ways to keep people off the town’s parish rates.

Apprenticeship regulation was another conventional means of controlling labour. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of such regulation in eighteenth-century Ipswich. Neither apprentice registry lists nor petty sessions records survive. The available evidence suggests that Ipswich conforms with the picture showing that the decline of apprenticeship accelerated over the course of the eighteenth century. It became of little significance, except for the very poor and for the more lucrative professions and commercial employments.<sup>83</sup> Prosecutions for practising a trade without having served

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<sup>82</sup> GCB, 30 April 1725 and 20 May 1725.

<sup>83</sup> C. Brooks, “Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800” in Barry and Brook, *The Middling Sort*, pp. 52-83; Daunton, *Progress*, pp. 275-7. Robert Shoemaker found that only an average of 24 persons per year were indicted under the Statute of Artificers in Middlesex in the first two decades of the eighteenth century; and none had been convicted since 1677. Shoemaker, *Prosecution*, p. 131. The Webbs have suggested that as “the separation between employers and journeymen became more sharply marked ... [p]rosecutions against non-freemen journeymen became a rare appearance” Webb, *The Manor and the Borough*, vol. ii, pp. 399-400; K.D.M. Snell, summarises the debates over the chronology of apprenticeship decline, and suggests that there was considerable variation by region and industry. While apprenticeship practices had substantially declined in London and the south-east by the early eighteenth century, they endured on into the last decades of the century elsewhere. K.D.M. Snell,

an apprenticeship were not common at the borough sessions. Only six appear in the Sessions Books for the sample years 1721 to 1725, seven in the years 1760 to 1764, and just two in 1791 to 1795. In some instances as many as four years passed without an apprentice matter coming before the sessions.<sup>84</sup>

The prosecutions of three men in 1764 was typical. Abraham Vincent, William Rolfe and Roger Yaxlee appear to have been the victims of a small-scale prosecution wave. They were each indicted for practising the trade of carpentry without having served seven years as an apprentice. Each was required to post bonds of £10 and find sureties posting bonds of £5. At the next sessions they were found not guilty, but the recognisances were likely enough to keep them from carpentry for more than a year.<sup>85</sup> The prosecutions of Thomas Sibborn and Jonathan Harper were less typical but are also revealing. Both men were found guilty in January 1762 of practising the craft of shoemaking without having served an apprenticeship. Both were again found guilty in November 1762. This time the offence was exercising the trade of cordwainer without having served an apprenticeship, and they were each fined £2. They were described as yeomen, and it may be that they were small farmers trying to earn extra income, or “yeoman” may simply have indicated their independent status. Given the infrequency of such prosecutions and the circumstances of these cases, it might be speculated that there was more to these prosecutions than simple enforcement of the Statute of Artificers. Yet any other motives remain obscure. Certainly, this was not a case of the Statute being used to drive away new arrivals who might be trying to establish a right of settlement. Both men were residents of Ipswich, and Harper was a serving petty constable for St. Stephen’s Parish.<sup>86</sup>

Only the town attorneys, four men who enjoyed the exclusive licence to appear before the borough’s petty court, continued to enjoy the Great Court’s protection of occupational privileges. In 1700 some consideration was given to expanding the

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*Annals of the Labouring Poor. Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 228-69.

<sup>84</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/9-11, Sessions Book, 1721-1725, 1760-1764, 1791-1795.

<sup>85</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 7 May 1764.

<sup>86</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 7 Jan. 1762 and 4 Nov. 1762.

number of men so privileged, but the Great Court decided against this. The number of attorneys allowed to appear was not increased until after the dissolution of the Corporation in 1835. The 1835 Municipal Commissioner's report maintained that although only four men were licensed to appear, their names were used by others without their consent "as a matter of course". It is unclear when that practice began, but the office was still thought valuable and elections to succeed to one of four posts were contested until at least 1786. Although the fees these attorneys collected were controlled by the Corporation, the restriction of appearance before the petty court to four individuals meant that the fees derived from its business remained in a few hands.<sup>87</sup>

This preservation of the town attorneys' monopoly on the business of the petty court was, of course, as much a matter of supervision and control of the court as it was a question of upholding professional privilege. Indeed, it is clear that the eighteenth-century Ipswich Corporation, like so many others, no longer used either the charter privileges or ancient apprentice statutes to regulate the local economy. The former, although applied in the early decades of the century, were moribund for the greater part of it; and the latter had been irregularly and infrequently applied since the middle of the seventeenth century. Still, their occasional application throughout the eighteenth century suggests that the Corporation's powers to intervene in the local labour market were not entirely lost, but rather that the political and economic circumstances were such that the local authorities chose not to exercise them. Moreover, it is clear that from the 1730s, when the authorities did choose to exercise those powers they did so in the interests of the wider rate-paying community rather than just the freemen.

### 3.3 Market Regulation

This argument extends to the regulation of the markets and retailing in Ipswich. Michael Reed has written that "[r]etail trading by the end of the [seventeenth] century was entirely free from regulation, a consequence of the almost total preoccupation of the

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<sup>87</sup> GCB, 4 May 1700, 8 Sept. 1786; *RCMC*, p. 2217.

corporation with political and factional squabbling.”<sup>88</sup> There is, however, evidence to suggest that the town’s markets, at least, were not so free from control in the eighteenth century. It is unconvincing to explain this by reference to the prevailing view of the eighteenth-century Corporation as a progressively dysfunctional institution whose decay included an inability to control its markets. Instead, the freeing of markets owed more to changes in regulatory strategies than to a collapse of local authority.

E.P. Thompson has powerfully argued that the ethos of marketing was changing over the course of the eighteenth century in ways which generated considerable social tension. But there was no uniform national chronology for the advent of a political economy based marketing which challenged the pre-existing moral economy.<sup>89</sup> Local circumstances were obviously vital determinates of the nature of market regulation. It has been suggested that East Anglia’s corn dealers, merchants, maltsters and brewers were sources of capital and food essential to the economic development of other parts of the country. These powerful new trading forces were producing a system of agricultural marketing which was weakening old market regulations.<sup>90</sup> The corn dealers, shipbuilders and coastal traders of Ipswich, given their interests, were likely to be unconcerned with, or even hostile to, traditional market practices and controls. Accordingly, neither borough Sessions Books nor the Great Court’s records provide much evidence of close market regulation beyond the collection of tolls and the inspection of produce for sale. Thus, Michael Reed’s portrait of Ipswich’s essentially unsupervised markets in the seventeenth century seems apt for the eighteenth as well. But it is important to note the character of the Corporation’s interventions on those occasions when it did act to regulate the market.

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<sup>88</sup> Reed, “Economic Structure”, p. 123. L.K.J. Glassey asserts that grain market regulation had “more or less lapsed” by end of the 1720s. L.K.J. Glassey, “Local Government” in C. Jones, (ed.), *Britain in the First Age of Party, 1680-1750* (London, 1982), p. 166. Also see: E.G. Dodwell, *One Hundred Years of Quarter Sessions: The Government of Middlesex from 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 169-70. The prosecution of dishonest traders in eighteenth-century markets is revealed in A.D. Leadley, “Some Villians of the Eighteenth-Century Market Place” in J. Rule (ed.), *Outside the Law: Studies in Crime and Order 1650-1850* Exeter Papers in Economic History, No. 15 (Exeter, 1982), pp. 21-34.

<sup>89</sup> This argument is most specifically developed in connection with grain marketing by E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century” in idem, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991; reprint, Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 189-200 (references are to the reprinted edition).

<sup>90</sup> Dauntton, *Progress*, pp. 323-5.

The most important of these interventions were the efforts to control prices in times of dearth. Although market regulation was normally lax, in times of crisis steps were taken to exert control or influence supply and prices. Even in years of grain shortages, indictments for forestalling were comparatively light; however, the issuing of recognizances, such as the binding over of Bridget Thompson for forestalling in April 1759, were more common, and corn buyers appear to have been routinely licensed.<sup>91</sup> Even in times of good supply, the Corporation's governance was never entirely absent. Market officers with various responsibilities were annually appointed throughout the eighteenth century. Occasional orders from the Great Court directed them both as to revenue collection and the inspection of trader's goods or measures.<sup>92</sup> The 1835 report of municipal commissioners suggests that these offices were largely nominal and, in notes composed in the first decades of the nineteenth century, William Bately suggested that the activities of these officers had lapsed because the chamberlains no longer received their collections. But certainly as late as 1786 the chamberlains were receiving the dues and fines levied by the Corporation's various searchers, flesh wardens and market clerks.<sup>93</sup> Clearly, much of this intervention in the town's markets was for purposes of revenue collection; but that does not diminish the argument that, at least until very late in the eighteenth century, the Corporation was capable, and on occasion willing, to intervene. That it did not routinely do so suggests that freer markets were perceived to be in the interests of those with influence in town affairs.

The Corporation also played an important role in the town's commercial life through the operation of its other courts. The right to hold borough sessions and the convenient presence of the town's justice's meant that disorder in the markets and violations of statutes regulating trade and labour could be dealt with relatively quickly. Moreover, the same sort of discretion which historians have noted as being so important in the administration of the criminal law could, in some measure, be exercised in the

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<sup>91</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 17 April, 1758; SRO/I, B106/1/4 [1] & [2], Licences of Corn Buyers; and B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1971), pp.486-7.

<sup>92</sup> These appointments were normally listed the minutes of Great Court meetings held on or about the 29 September each year.

<sup>93</sup> RCMC, p. 2304; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 107; GCB, 8 Sept. 1785.



prosecution of regulatory offences.<sup>94</sup> With their more frequent meetings and cognisance over civil matters, the other borough courts were more important than the sessions for routine aspects of Ipswich's commercial life. In the absence of relevant records it is impossible to assess the activities of the ancient Court of Pie-Powder or the Court of the Clerk of the Market, which had jurisdiction over markets and fairs. Probably much of the business of these courts was gradually taken over by the Petty Court or Court of Small Pleas. As the principal venue for debt settlement, typically meeting twice weekly and presided over by the bailiffs, the Petty Court was an obvious forum for the prosecution of minor regulatory violations and the settlement of commercial disputes. Through this jurisdiction the bailiffs exercised much discretion in settling commercial matters.

### 3.4 The Defence of Local Interests

The Corporation was significant in the local economy beyond providing judicial supervision of markets and engaging in intermittent regulation of labour. Although it was no longer the central agency of an "association of producers", the eighteenth-century Corporation did occasionally act vigorously to defend and advance economic interests in the town. Certainly, the attempts to attract investment and prompt new industries which were desperately undertaken in the second half of the seventeenth century were not to be repeated.<sup>95</sup> Those sometimes costly failures to arrest the effects of the town's declining cloth trade may have deterred later Assemblies from promoting such schemes. Moreover, as Ipswich's economy recovered after the 1720s, intervention may no longer have seemed so necessary. In 1792 the Assembly responded coolly when an entrepreneur from London proposed leasing the Hanford Mill so that he could demolish it and construct a new, larger spinning mill. The terms of the deal, including the employment of 200 children between the ages of eight and fifteen, did not seem

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<sup>94</sup> See p. 93 for the sources of the justices' discretionary powers. Also: D. Hay, "Property, Authority and the Criminal Law" in D. Hay, P. Linebaugh and E.P. Thompson, eds., *Albion's Fatal Tree* (London, 1975); King, "Decision-Makers, pp.25-58 "; Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 269-71, 586-7.

<sup>95</sup> Reed, "Economic Structure", pp. 125-6.

either feasible or desirable.<sup>96</sup> Rather than undertake this sort of investment, the eighteenth-century Corporation's promotion of the local economy often took the form of obstructing the economic development aspirations of neighbouring communities. Thus, the Corporation fought several successful legal battles with the Corporation of Harwich for the admiral's jurisdiction of the River Orwell out to the open sea. At stake were supervisory powers over a valuable fishery and navigation on the Orwell, to say nothing of the entitlement to various dues.<sup>97</sup>

The Corporation was frequently motivated to act to preserve the position of the port. Situated at a sharp bend in the fresh water River Gipping where it becomes the salt water River Orwell, Ipswich's port had long been subject to silting. Sixteenth-century merchant-benefactors had left funds for dredging the river, but these were seldom sufficient to keep the port accessible to large ships. Accordingly, the Corporation kept a barge for dredging the River which, in the later eighteenth century, was under the command of a portman or twentyfourman. Despite these efforts, silting continued to reduce low and, eventually, high-tide access to the common quay. In 1797 the Newcastle engineer, William Chapman, was hired to study the problem. His unprecedented proposal for a massive sea-lock across the River Orwell was true to the era's growing spirit of heroic engineering, but it was too much for the Corporation's merchants and attorneys. Finally, in 1805, a group of subscribers obtained statutory authority for the establishment of a river commission which was independent of the Corporation. The new body's autonomy, however, did not ensure that it would deal with the problems of the river any more effectively than the Corporation might have. Twenty-five years would pass before the commission was able to raise sufficient funds and complete a dredging scheme which was much more modest than Chapman's 1797 proposed sea-lock.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 183.

<sup>97</sup> SROI, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 31 July 1721; G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>98</sup> Bishop, *Ipswich*, pp. 134-7; GCB, 18 August 1786; Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on the Records of the Ipswich Port Authority. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1984), p. i.

In addition to its battles with the forces of nature, the Corporation fought attempts by would-be competitors to steal the port's business. Interests based in Stowmarket and the county hoped that by making the River Gipping navigable twelve miles up-stream from Ipswich, the trade of Stowmarket would flourish given its location in the middle of the county. When a bill went before the House of Commons in 1719 the Corporation of Ipswich petitioned for its rejection. Fear for the loss of trade and damage to the fresh water fishery of the River Gipping were cited as grounds for its rejection. The bill failed and it was not until 1790 that an Act was obtained permitting the establishment of a body to undertake the work. William Batley, who was Ipswich town clerk at the time, later wrote that the Act "passed with little opposition from the Ipswich Inhabitants". It is worth noting that William Lynch, who was one of the bailiffs and an influential figure in the town's politics, was vested with the manor of Stowmarket including its fairs and markets. Lynch's self interest was likely to lead him to favour the project. In any case, it is likely that by the last years of the eighteenth century those with influence in the Great Court were unthreatened by the establishment of a narrow waterway passing by Ipswich into the heart of the county. The town's political elite was not concerned about losing the business of landing coal and other goods which would then go by road to Stowmarket, Bury St. Edmund's and elsewhere. Their interests were linked to the much higher volume business of exporting agricultural produce down the river to London and beyond. For that reason the Stowmarket navigation scheme and the revitalisation of the port of Ipswich were likely to have been compatible. Moreover, both projects presented investment opportunities for the town's bankers and others who held capital from the region's agricultural profits.<sup>99</sup>

The Corporation frequently acted to support commercial confidence and the town's middling businesses. The ancient practice of lending Corporation funds to freemen was always important in sustaining credit networks. At Ipswich these funds were largely drawn from bequests left by successful merchants. It is not possible to determine the exact size of the lending cash fund which was kept by the clavingers,

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<sup>99</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections", f. 169; 30 Geo. III c.57 (1790); Kirby, *Suffolk Traveller*, pp. 215-16.

whose records survive for very few years. Its value in 1804 was thought to be about £2,228, although the total fluctuated from year to year depending on the number of defaults in any given period. In the fiscal year 1755, loans worth a total of £355 were made to fifteen persons. Typical terms were £25 for seven or ten years.<sup>100</sup> Beyond these loans the Corporation's leadership also assisted the trading community in other ways such as lobbying on behalf of townsmen. In the 1720s, for example, the bailiffs, MPs, recorder and several portmen wrote to the Secretary of State seeking assistance for Captain William Tyler who had lost his ship and cargo on the coast of Brittany.<sup>101</sup> The use of the lending cash fund and interventions on behalf of men like Captain Tyler were undoubtedly part of the exercise of patronage which was an important feature of the freemen's social and political lives. Moreover, such support from the Corporation also reinforced confidence in credit networks in a cash-short economy.

### 3.5 The Character of the Corporation's Engagement with the Local Economy

Such interventions were not, of course, routine, but taken with the use of the lending cash and the efforts to protect local interests with respect to the port and navigation, it is clear that the Corporation was not moribund as an instrument of local economic interests. These activities with respect to the town's economy inevitably reflected particular interests. The occasional and selective character of its interventions were not a matter of some sort of free-trading policy, but rather were a consequence of the limited capacity of the Corporation to act given the political unwillingness to enlarge the revenue and personnel arrangements which further investment or regulation would have required. For those with influence in the Assembly and Great Court there was no need for on-going Corporation activity other than the maintenance of the courts which assured order, a degree of confidence in the markets, and easy settlement of commercial

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<sup>100</sup> *RCMC*, 2333; *Orders of Court Relating to the Clavingers* (SROI, C1/2/21). Unfortunately, complete records do not exist for other years. 1755 was a year of following contentious elections and much political controversy. It can not be ruled out that many of these loans were made to "pay" election debts, and so the records of this year are not typical.

<sup>101</sup> PRO, State Papers Domestic 35/16, f.18.

disputes. The efforts to preserve freeman privileges prior to the 1720s were prompted by the period of economic decline. That the attempts to licence labour and trading after the 1720s diminished suggests that those with political influence were themselves no longer dependent on trading within the town, nor did their political support in the Great Court depend on such local merchants. The protection of the dockers in 1725, or of the local shopkeepers in 1816, was cast in terms not of freeman privileges but the interests of residents versus non-residents. The concern was less for the particular rights of members of the Corporation than for providing employment to keep people off of poor relief and/or ensuring they could remain as ratepayers. Thus, the changing structure of the economy and the arrangements for poor relief combined to dissolve the significance of the corporate body as a distinct centre of economic interest. From the point of view of the Corporation leadership, whatever the freemen's political significance as voters they lacked homogeneity in economic terms; and in the absence of a discernible collective interest, they were indistinguishable from other ratepayers or potential relief recipients. Accordingly, Corporation economic activities take little special cognisance of the freemen after 1730. This marked the final passing of the long decaying notion of the freemen as a discrete economic community which the Corporation existed to serve.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the vital areas of managing its finances, administering poor relief, and intervention in the local economy, the eighteenth-century Corporation of Ipswich possessed considerable resources and was capable of effective action. Yet even though it was not the dysfunctional, corrupt regime of the 1835 municipal commissioners' report, did not exhibit much of the Webbs' ideal type of the government of a "community of producers" closely engaged in various facets of public life. Indeed, the Corporation was far from being a central institution for the organisation of business ventures or the control of labour and trading. On the other hand, the Corporation's regulation of the local economy was never so weak as might have satisfied free market advocates in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>102</sup> The Corporation did not try to control or direct the economy; rather, it provided services and infrastructure to facilitate trade. Thus, its officers and courts acted to assure the continued functioning of the town's markets. The port and river were maintained as far as available technology and the finances of the Corporation would allow. The lending cash fund was used to assist local merchants and bolster confidence in local credit networks. While the Corporation no longer attempted to foster new industries, as it had done in the seventeenth-century, its officers did lobby the central government on behalf of local merchants or when the commercial and financial interests of Ipswich clashed with those of other towns.<sup>103</sup> Yet, however much these activities assured the central place of the eighteenth-century Corporation in the life of the community, this period saw the passing of the last vestiges of the Corporation as an instrument through which the freemen could co-ordinate their monopoly of the town's central economic activity.

Changes in the management of financial affairs further reflected the eighteenth-century completion of the long shift away from the ancient corporate principles embodied in the notion of the "community of producers". It was observed above that

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<sup>102</sup> A. Randal and A. Charlesworth, (eds.), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Liverpool, 1996), pp. 1-5, 9-10.

<sup>103</sup> Reed, "Economic Structure", pp. 125-6.

financial responsibilities in the early eighteenth century were dispersed amongst the various clavingers, treasurers, and chamberlains in order to spread the burdens and benefits of officeholding while at the same time diffusing the risk to the Corporation funds because of an officer's bankruptcy, the misappropriation of his accounts, or other loss. This feature and the annual election of officers reflected a system which, in theory, afforded a collective management of common interests. In practice, it worked well for a cohesive elite which sought to share power and responsibilities amongst its members. It is significant that periods when elite cohesion was lost, and there was serious contention for office, saw the exploitation of these offices and a surge in the levels of the Corporation's debt. The years before 1722 and the mid-1750s were periods of great political contention and low elite cohesion. From the 1750s, and especially from the 1768 elections, the corporate debt rapidly grew and became a regular political issue. Moreover, it was during this period that there emerges a distinctive concentration of financial management in the hands of the town treasurer. When the 1785 finance committee's report, recommended the concentration of corporate financial functions in the office of the treasurer and the reduction of the chamberlains and other accounts holders to the treasurer's functionaries, long practised corporate principles of management finally gave way to a more centralised system.

The problem of the poor, and the management of the resources to deal with them, were among the most important factors changing the nature of the eighteenth-century Corporation. Poor relief was undoubtedly the most significant task facing the local authorities. Not only did it absorb by far the greatest proportion of revenue and expenditure, it seems likely to have engaged more administrative time than any other single issue. As the scale of the problem developed over the course of the eighteenth century, it helped force an important shift in the character of local governance. Although the right to vote for all the senior offices made the freemen a central feature of Corporation's politics, they were increasingly, from the 1730s onwards, no longer the focus of Corporation policy. Not only were foreign fines and other defences of freemen privileges neglected from this time, the Corporation's regulation of trade or intervention

on behalf of local interests was geared to the protection of residents rather than just freemen. This was because the governors had a powerful interest in protecting ratepayers and making the funding of poor relief system work, whatever the special claims of freemen might have been. Thus, the greatest problems of governance, the fundamental matters of relieving the poor and preserving order, set the agenda and defined, in a sense, the real constituency of the governors despite the formal political status of the freemen. Social issues and circumstances were thus decisive in setting the focus of government. The community, not just the freemanry had to become the central concern of the governing elite. This is not to say that the non-freemen had real political rights or influence, but they were an important consideration in setting of the agenda of government whether they were ratepayers or recipients. Poor relief and the related problem of public order was a greater concern for the local authorities than the management of trade or other issues which entailed a distinction between the claims of the freemen and those not admitted to membership of the Corporation.

This situation underscored a tension in the town's government which developed over the course of the eighteenth century between what might be called the corporate principle and the public interest. It has been noted how the structure of both participation in the Corporation and management of its affairs reflected a co-optive, self-governing institution whose members had, in theory at least, some shared assets (e.g.. the common quay, various revenue earning properties, Crown appointed privileges etc.) as well as common commercial interests which necessitated a corporate structure for their management. Yet at the same time, as a condition imposed by the Crown in return for this measure of self government, the Corporation was obliged to act in the public interest as the agent of the Crown; hence the jurisdiction of the borough sessions and admirals' courts, along with the right to collect dues and revenues from the public at large. All three of the activities examined here, the management of Corporation finances, the provision of poor relief, and the regulation of the local economy, suggested ways in which the corporate principle was being eroded or challenged by the problems of government during the eighteenth century. The changing place of the Corporation in



the town's scheme of government and the challenges to the corporate principle which informed the character of its regime, was very much linked to the subject of the next chapter: the course of politics.

## CHAPTER SIX: PATTERNS OF POLITICS

Modern studies of the politics of eighteenth-century provincial towns have generally been conditioned by the desire to understand national politics through the study of particular localities. Whether towns are seen as merely sources of members of parliament or, as in more recent work, the sites of popular political engagement with national issues, such work overlooks the full extent of urban politics.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, historians risk misunderstanding towns' reception of and contribution to national politics. As important as parliamentary contests were, it must be recognised that from 1716 they normally occurred every seven years, while in corporations like Ipswich the bailiffs and many other officers were selected annually. These were elections for officers whose duties had direct impact on most members of the community: because these officers acted as justices of the peace, treasurers, chamberlains, court servants and others who assessed and collected taxes, arbitrated personal disputes and took the lead in regulating the local economy. Thus, the politics of municipal selection and election bore directly upon a wider sense of politics relating to social order and the control of property.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter considers the politics of eighteenth century Ipswich in these broader terms. Parliamentary contests and the partisan struggles amongst the local elite and middling sorts feature large in this account because the source material is richest for them. Yet while the significance of this sphere of politics is undeniable, it is also important to see how such action engaged the wider community and, equally, how the political action of those outside the elites and middling sorts impacted on the Corporation.

The pattern of politics in eighteenth-century Ipswich was not simple. It was not merely a matter of a long slide into the increasingly contentious, corrupt electoral

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<sup>1</sup> Three important recent examples are: N. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989); K. Wilson, *The Sense of the People. Politics: Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-85* (Cambridge, 1995) and Gauci, *Great Yarmouth*.

<sup>2</sup> Also see K. Wrightson, "The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England" in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.) *The Experience of Authority* (London, 1996), esp. p. 12.

battles of the early nineteenth century. Eighteenth century Ipswich experienced four distinct patterns of politics. While there were strands of continuity running through them all, they were not simply progressive steps along the path to the “ill-regulated republic” the municipal commissioners wrote of in 1835. These four periods of politics are distinguished by differences in the way the power of the ruling elite was constructed and the nature of the engagement of the wider community in the processes of corporate politics. These periods exhibit a considerable range of possible forms of politics within the Corporation’s unchanging constitutional framework. Moreover, each period reveals how changing social and cultural circumstances enmeshed with the dynamics of faction to shape the character of politics. It will be seen that the of contentious politics of the periods 1703-23, 1754-68, and years after the 1780s on into the nineteenth century, differed significantly. Each of these period has distinct characteristics relating to patterns of factional divisions, the basis of appeals to the freemen voters, and the impact of electoral rivalry on the governance of the Corporation.

### **1. 1703-23: Party, Populism and the Career of Cooper Gravenor**

For most of the first quarter of the eighteenth century the politics of the Corporation of Ipswich was dominated, or rather, pre-occupied with Cooper Gravenor. Despite his critic’s charges, Gravenor did not succeed in setting himself up as the “boss” of the Corporation, but for twenty-years he was a more skilful political manager than his rivals; accordingly his career and methods reflected much about the nature of politics in this period.

Gravenor was first elected bailiff in 1702. While he might have been considered nominally the “junior bailiff” -- not having held the office before -- Gravenor used his new office aggressively. The other, “senior bailiff” was Richard Phillips, whose lack of enthusiasm for the job was reflected in the fact that he paid a fine of £100 in 1701 for refusing to serve after elected.<sup>3</sup> Gravenor’s political strength and his willingness to take

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<sup>3</sup>Phillips appears to have been the only person in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to have paid a fine to avoid serving. See GCB, 8 Sept. 1701.

on the business of town government was reflected in the fact that he served four consecutive terms from 1702, despite local custom and bylaws to the contrary.<sup>4</sup> Between the years 1703 and 1722 he was bailiff twelve times. His career at the top began with an ambitious agenda. After a period of fierce participation in the “rage of party”, the Corporation appears to have been keen to lower the political temperature and remedy the damage past battles had inflicted on its finances. One of Gravenor’s critics recalled that, initially,

Mr. G\_\_\_\_\_r [Gravenor] procured himself to be elected one of the bailiffs of the Corporation for the reasons following -- First to free them of some troublesome officers and healing some unhappy divisions amongst them -- Secondly to gett em out of Debts and making em a flourishing Corporation -- Thirdly to Improve the town Estates and revenues ...<sup>5</sup>

Conciliation and accommodation do not, however, appear to have figured in Gravenor’s strategy for restoring peace and prosperity to the Corporation. At a Great Court meeting held in August 1703, as one observer put it, to “heal the Divisions amongst us”, Gravenor turned out “severall of the four and twentymen pretending they were not duly elected into that office.” When one portman and a twentyfourman objected, Gravenor had an order passed that they should be fined. At a subsequent meeting he further sought to impose discipline on the Assembly by ordering that portmen “not wearing their gowns and neglecting to attend His Worship [i.e. Gravenor] should be fined 13/ and 4d for every default pursuant to this order”. Those failing to attend Great Court meetings were to be fined 40s. Appreciating that such action might provoke law suits, and mindful that litigation was often simply another form of politics, Gravenor secured a resolution from the Great Court indemnifying him “at the Town Charge for anything done at this or any other court.” It was complained that Gravenor got the Great Court to impose fines on several Assemblymen who variously did not attend its meetings, appeared out of livery, or uttered rude speech or other “indecent behavior to his

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<sup>4</sup> This rule was occasionally broken in the seventeenth century. See above p. 84. In 1719 a statute, 9 Anne c.20 prohibited borough returning officers, in Ipswich the bailiffs, from holding office in consecutive years.

<sup>5</sup> BL, Harl. MS 6839, “A Journal of Mr. Gravenor’s Proceedings during his First Four Years Bayliswick of this Town” f.259.

Worship” -- action which one observer found deeply ironic given Gravenor’s own behavior to previous bailiffs.<sup>6</sup>

Gravenor audaciously sought to consolidate his power in 1704 with the removal of the town clerk, Richard Puplett, and the recorder, Charles Whitaker. After the bailiffs, these were the most important administrative offices in the Corporation; moreover, because these posts could be held for many years at a time, their incumbents were potentially very powerful. Too little is known of Puplett and Whitaker to be sure of their factional alignments in relation to Gravenor, although they are written sympathetically of by a commentator whose Tory, country inclinations suggests they would have been at odds with the Whiggish Gravenor.<sup>7</sup> At the Great Court of 8 September 1704 Gravenor charged that Puplett had not been duly elected as town clerk and demanded that a poll be held to confirm or eject him from office. On the same day Gravenor also attacked Whittaker charging neglect of office and failure to convene the borough sessions as requested by the bailiffs, who in the year in question had been, of course, Cooper Gravenor and his compliant partner Thomas Day. Gravenor clearly had the whole matter well planned. The attack on Puplett and Whitaker came at the same meeting at which the coming year’s bailiffs and other corporate officers were to be selected. As a serving bailiff, elected in September 1703, Gravenor was technically not eligible to stand again because of the rule against consecutive terms. Puplett and Whitaker, as clerk and recorder, may have objected to Gravenor’s candidacy; but the bailiff was easily able to secure resolutions ejecting his opponents from office: 104 voters supported Puplett, while 146 voted for his removal; 94 supported Whittaker but 147 were against him. Whittaker, perhaps attempting to marshal evidence for subsequent litigation, demanded a new poll, but again he lost 79 to 147.<sup>8</sup> These numbers suggest that Gravenor was managing a fairly solid block of voters while the support for Whitaker and Puplett ebbed away with each successive poll.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid. For the importance of politically motivated litigation in towns see P.D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England’s Towns, 1650-1730* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>7</sup>“A Journal of Mr. Gravenor’s Proceedings”.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. See also SRO/I, K15/2 [Devereaux Edgar (ed.) ?], unpublished manuscript, “A Collection of Many Polls Taken Upon Different Occasions...in Electing Burgesses to Serve in Parliament for the Said Corporation Choosing Bailiffs, Recorder, Honorary Freemen, Schoolmaster, Town Home keeper”.

After these events, and his election to four consecutive terms as bailiff between 1702 and 1705, Gravenor appears to have grown so confident of his power that he was prepared to provoke conflicts with both the gentry in the town and the country. His ability to challenge such men successfully was indicative of both his personal political strength and the autonomy of the town within the county community. It seems that at one point Gravenor enjoyed good relations with such locally important men as Leicester Martin and Devereux Edgar. Martin, the son of a Worcester gentleman whose estate had been sequestered and diminished under the Commonwealth for his Royalist military service, married the sole heiress of Viscount Hereford and thereby came into possession of Christchurch Manor. The manor was important both because Christchurch Mansion, its park and adjacent lands lay within the northern boundary of the Corporation, and because much of the town's water supply came from wells on land leased from Martin. Devereux Edgar lived in the large Red House in Ipswich and was well connected with the county gentry. Both men were on the county commission of the peace and, along with its other members, held Gravenor to be "intirely in the Gent[lemen's] favor & interest."<sup>9</sup> Edgar supported Gravenor's campaign to eject the town clerk, Richard Puplett in 1704; and having removed Charles Whitaker as recorder in the same year, Gravenor supported Leicester Martin for the post. By 1707, however, Gravenor's ambitions appear to have extended beyond getting along with East Suffolk's Tory gentlemen. Indeed, that year, in a by-election for one of the borough's seats, he withdrew his support for Sir William Barker, a native of Ipswich, and instead backed William Churchill, disparagingly described by Devereux Edgar as a "forreigner and Cortier Originally a Stationer in London". Barker had the support of "al the Gen[tlemen] & most of Ch[urch]: freem[an]", but narrowly lost the poll by 182 to 187. Edgar ascribed the defeat to Gravenor who had

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<sup>9</sup> SRO/I, q S 9, M.A. Copinger, *The Manors of Suffolk. Notes on Their History and Devolution*, 6 vols., (Privately Printed, 1909); SRO/I, x1/8/2.5, Ms. Documents relating to Leicester Martin's dispute with the Corporation over dues for manors in Ipswich; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 315; SRO/I, HA247/5/4, "Entry Book of Devereux Edgar, J.P., 1700-16", available as SRO/I, q S 347.96, S.R. Schofield, typed transcription of "Entry Book of Devereux Edgar, J.P., 1700-16" f.179.

for hopes & thro' promises of Places offers of Profitt turned as Zealously on the other side not withstanding he had promised a Yere before with & in Company of abt 20; psons of Note att Sr Wm Barkers house att a Treat to be for him with all his power & interest. In this Conjunction Gr.....r [Gravenor] left the Gent & their Interest & joyned the discontented [i.e. the Whigs], Turning out Men wch he formly putt in & joyned with the Dissenters.<sup>10</sup>

Edgar noted that Gravenor had been able to mobilise a great number of the town's mariners as well as the non-conformists to support Churchill and thereby win the election.

The following year Gravenor's growing influence and the animosity between the bailiff and the local gentry were evident in a jurisdictional battle which resulted in the removal of Edgar, Martin and several country gentlemen from the Suffolk commission of peace. In 1708 the land tax and militia commissioners for Suffolk appointed Devereux Edgar as their chairman. Gravenor, his fellow bailiff, Truth Norris, and several other portmen and town worthies were sworn as militia commissioners for Ipswich. In the absence of Edgar, Martin and several other county justices, Gravenor and the Ipswich commissioners held a meeting on 4 March 1708 at which they deemed several men suitable for turning over to the Army's recruiting officers. Edgar, as chairman of the county militia commission, took great exception to both the fact and the manner of Gravenor's action. At a meeting five days later, Edgar informed Gravenor that he lacked the authority to hold commission meetings and commit men to the recruiting officers. It was charged that Gravenor had acted irregularly in confining men who had been refused by the recruiting officers or were hired servants. Moreover, Gravenor was said to have illegally ordered parish officers to operate outside of their own parishes for the purposes of finding likely recruits to bring before the commissioners. Edgar accused Gravenor of granting the freedom to some persons simply so that they could avoid impressment -- and also vote for Gravenor in the Corporation's coming elections. One deponent in the matter claimed that after complaining to Gravenor about the protection of impressable men by granting them the freedom, the bailiff replied: "that he had 5 or L6 [pounds] a man for makeing such

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. ff.179-80.

ffreemen wch was more yn he had for all the Gents being made free".<sup>11</sup> When asked to produce freemen lists with dates of admission to confirm this claim, Gravenor refused to do so. Finally, Edgar, Martin and the other justices overturned the town commissioners' rulings and the sixteen detained men were released.

In the course of this meeting, Gravenor and Edgar exchanged heated words. Gravenor later claimed that on this occasion, before a large public meeting attended by Corporation and parochial officers, Edgar and the county justices humiliated him and the other borough justices by denying their authority and denouncing their actions "in such a furious huffin manner as you cannot imagine". Gravenor later wrote that "I was called Lyar Blockhead Jackanapes & such like[,] pulled by the Hatt, telling me I was noe Bayliff there. All this in the prsence of the Officers as aforesaid with much more abusive language to tedious to inct." Gravenor concluded his account of the day by stating that "...if Bayliffs of Corporations whoe are said to Reprsent the Queen....be treated in such a barbarous Manner wth out Releife, I protest I shall as soon choose to carry a Musket in fflanders as be a Bayliff of Ipswich".<sup>12</sup> Nothing would have suited Edgar and Martin better. They later claimed, with the support of witnesses' affidavits, that they acted very civilly and that they spoke "noe Scandalous or Actionable words".<sup>13</sup>

After the meeting Gravenor wrote to William Thompson, his political ally and the town's recorder. The enraged bailiff recounted the event and supplied the affidavits of other portmen and the town clerk, who all supported his position. Thompson put these before Robert Walpole, who had recently been appointed Secretary at War.<sup>14</sup> Walpole put the matter before the Queen and the Council where it was decided to remove Edgar, Martin and three other county justices from the Suffolk bench. A condemnation of the county justices' actions and their proscription were published on the first page of the *Gazette*.<sup>15</sup> Gravenor appears to have been as surprised by this result

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. f. 260.

<sup>12</sup> Bodlean Library, Rawl. B428, "Affidaitis Conc. the Proceedings of the Justices att Ipswich relat. to Recruits." (no date).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., ff. 244 & 271.

<sup>14</sup> Cholmondeley (Houghton) Mss., Correspondence, 592, Wm. Thompson to Sir Robert Walpole, 17 Mar. 1708/9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., f. 238.



as Edgar was furious. Gravenor allegedly said that he had not imagined that his appeal to the government would result in the gentlemen's loss of their places on the County bench, and that he was sorry for some of the gentlemen. Whether this was sincere regret, posturing, or simply that Gravenor was loosing his nerve, cannot be known. Certainly, Edgar did not accept the Council's decision. Both Suffolk MPs, Sir Robert Davers and Sir Thomas Hanmer swung into action to rehabilitate the five ousted county magistrates. Both sides collected further affidavits from witnesses to the events, and counsel was retained for hearings which were finally held before the Attorney General in April 1709.

Martin and Edgar maintained that Gravenor was the villain of the piece. The other borough commissioners whose affidavits supported Gravenor were either intimidated or his dupes. The Attorney General was told that the other bailiff, Truth Norris, "... confest he knew nothing of wt was conteyned in his Affidt that he was att best a Man of very mean understanding, but when he made the said Affidt was supannuated & Childish". It was further claimed that Gravenor had hectored the town clerk for three hours for a false affidavit which, if given another chance, the clerk in good conscious could not submit again.<sup>16</sup> Gravenor answered some of the claims against him: he denied admitting freemen simply to help men avoid impressment, pointing out that it was only upon votes of the Great Court that freemen could be made; and he claimed that Martin and another of the county commissioners agreed that it was right to incarcerate men awaiting the recruiting officers. Gravenor explained that the borough commissioners met without their county counterparts only after the latter had been given notice and refused to attend on two previous occasions. Gravenor claimed the he feared being in breach of the recruiting statute if he did not soon hold militia commission meetings.<sup>17</sup>

Social standing and patronage networks inevitably counted for much in this contest. Gravenor noted that, in releasing twelve of the sixteen men originally found fit for military service by the town commissioners, Edgar and the county commissioners

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., ff. 274 & 259.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., f. 267

chose only those who were their friends or clients. Gravenor further claimed that, although the county justices had been advised of the meetings and were in Ipswich on the appropriate days, they refused to come. The defence to this seems to have been that Gravenor and Norris were “men of meann Condition only Magistrates of a Corporation”. The implication was that it was not their place to summons gentlemen justices.<sup>18</sup>

In April 1709 the Attorney General passed the matter on to the Council, but it was more than year before Lord Somers, President of the Council, was instructed to deal with the matter. He ordered that the five justices be restored to the Suffolk commission of the peace. Leicester Martin refused to be re-sworn, but Devereux Edgar seems to have been pleased to resume his duties, as he put it, “to the joy of the county”. His entry book describes a triumphal return to office: as Edgar and another of the restored justices rode from Ipswich to a meeting at Stowmarket they were met by the county’s high sheriff, 300 men on horse and “... the streets being strown with fflowers and & green leaves...”.<sup>19</sup> But if this was a victory for Devereux Edgar, it was not a defeat for Cooper Gravenor who was re-elected bailiff for six of the following eleven years.

In the course of the struggle Gravenor never lost his inclination to irritate the gentry. During the May 1708 election it appeared that, without the necessity of a poll, Leicester Martin and his brother-in-law, Viscount Hereford, were going to be selected as Suffolk’s MPs. Devereux Edgar, one of Martin’s allies, reported that Gravenor mischievously sought to mock Martin’s easy entry into parliament. Keen to diminish Gravenor’s reputation in the wake of the recruiting commission dispute, Edgar claimed that Gravenor encouraged one of his former apprentices, a man named Moses, to announce his candidacy in opposition to Martin. Moses demanded a poll and the county sheriff obliged. Edgar estimated Martin’s support at about 1,500 across the county; Moses managed to get four voters to announce their support for him at the poll. Edgar claimed these four were Quakers, and that Moses was “Schandalous in his life and Con’sation”. Moses was said to have appeared at Martin’s victory celebration at the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., ff. 267 & 275

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., ff. 294-95.

White Horse Inn and begged forgiveness, which he was given in exchange for revealing that Gravenor was behind the prank.<sup>20</sup>

Gravenor's style of politics ensured that he had powerful enemies and his personal conduct made him a controversial figure. The assertions before the Attorney General that he was merely a mean corporation bailiff were mild compared to those levelled in a manuscript account of his first four years at the top of Corporation politics. It was charged that early in his career he had been a surveyor in the Ipswich parish of St. Lawrence where he established a reputation as a prankster and slept with his neighbour's wife, who was "a well known Quaker". It was further claimed that Gravenor embezzled parish funds while serving as surveyor. Such ill-gotten gains were the means by which he raised his financial and social position and so was able to marry "a good women of property whose death he hastened". It was also charged that, upon this women's death, Gravenor cheated her brother out of his rightful portion of the estate. Gravenor was also alleged to have similarly cheated his step-son by his second wife after her death, and to have threatened to murder his third wife unless she used her influence with her father in such a way so as to cheat her brother out of his portion of their father's estate. It is impossible to establish the truth of such claims, but it is clear that Gravenor's enemies were willing use the premature deaths of his wives to spread damaging stories about him. Certainly the publicly known facts of Gravenor's life provided rich material onto which his opponents could embroider embarrassing details and impute immoral and criminal motives. At one point during his second marriage Gravenor is alleged to have impregnated one of his servants and then attempted to have her wrongfully convicted of theft by having a constable plant some of his property among her belongings. The constable, however, exposed Gravenor's scheme at the girl's trial. Charles Whitaker, the town recorder, who presided at the trial, ordered Gravenor to provide for the servant's child. It was later claimed that Gravenor's subsequent instigation of Whitaker's removal from the office of recorder in 1704 was the bailiff's revenge for this humiliation before the borough sessions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Entry Book of Devereux Edgar", ff. 180-81.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., f. 259.

The attempts of Gravenor's High Church and Tory opponents to undermine his public position with such doubtlessly easy attacks on his character had little effect. Gravenor had considerable political strength in the community which endured after his break with men like Devereux Edgar, Leicester Martin and the county MPs. In the 1704 campaigns against the sitting town clerk and recorder Gravenor's resolution for their removal enjoyed half again as many votes as his opponents could muster. In the bailiwick election of 1708, the year of Gravenor's battle with Edgar and Martin over the recruiting commission and a year after he switched sides from the Tory Sir John Barker to the Court candidate William Thompson, Gravenor still managed to win with 14% more votes than his opponent. From that point Gravenor's electoral strength grew so that he was elected bailiff in 1718 on a 62% margin over his opponent.<sup>22</sup>

Gravenor's ability to command a following among the freemen was based upon several factors. His alignment with the Court Whigs after 1707 ensured that he was connected to the national political grouping to which the town's many dissenters were normally attached. Prior to the Septennial Act (1716) the frequency of parliamentary elections made for more consistent patterns of support across corporation and parliamentary politics. Thus, it seems likely that the dissenter support he mobilised as an agent for the court Whigs William Churchill and William Thompson, was also available to himself and his friends in the Corporation's elections. Certainly, Gravenor's opponents were keen to denounce his connections with Ipswich's Quakers and other nonconformists as evidence of his dubious loyalty to Church and State.<sup>23</sup>

As so much of the evidence for the politics of the first twenty-five years of the eighteenth century was produced by Gravenor's opponents, it is not easy to assess the nature of his support. Clearly, however, he could mobilise a substantial number of the active freemen. One of his critics wrote that "by his constant treating the mob made them so much his own, that he is constanly chosen Bayliff."<sup>24</sup>It is difficult to estimate

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<sup>22</sup> SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls"

<sup>23</sup> The affidavits produced in connection with the dispute amongst the recruiting commissioners have several such references: see "Entry Book of Devereux Edgar", 179-81, and BL, Harl. MS 6839, "A Journal of Mr. Gravenor's Proceedings During His First Four Years Bayliswick of this Town", f.259.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., f. 259.

his wealth and patronage resources in the absence of an inventory with his will. He appears to have arrived in Ipswich shortly after completing an apprenticeship as an apothecary, but it is uncertain that he practised that trade long. The dowries and estates of his three wives, all of whom he outlived, would have given him some sort of capital base but its extent is not known. It is charged that he profited from misappropriation of parish and Corporation funds, and took the whole £50 of the bailiffs' salary for himself, contrary to the custom of dividing it between the two officeholders.<sup>25</sup> On his death, Gravenor left a sizeable estate of malting offices, yards, gardens, a farm beyond the Corporation boundaries, and several rental properties in the town.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Gravenor's services to the Court Whig MPs for the Borough, William Thompson and William Churchill, paid off in 1716 with his appointment as collector of customs for the port of Ipswich - a post which augmented his income and provided important patronage opportunities.<sup>27</sup> But for all this Gravenor did not stand out in his degree of wealth. It seems likely that several of his political rivals possessed similar pools of assets, and the financial resources of some of his country opponents must surely have been greater. It was charged that Gravenor had embezzled charity funds, but this accusation survives in only one document and was never pressed publicly. Whatever advantage Gravenor might have taken of the funds in his possession, it seems unlikely to have been substantially greater than that gained by other bailiffs and charity officers. Accordingly, their value as a political war chest was probably no greater to Gravenor than to any of his rivals who, knowing the value of town funds, scrutinised his financial management carefully. Undoubtedly Gravenor freely dispensed the considerable patronage available to a bailiff and justice of the peace. He also treated in the customary ways during pre-election periods, but there is little evidence that his activities were extraordinary in this regard or that they accounted for his peculiar political success.

Gravenor stood out from his rivals in that his power largely depended on his strong following amongst the freemen and his connections with the government.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> SRO/I, IC/AA1/164/76, The Will of Cooper Gravenor, Dec. 1732.

<sup>27</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Treasury Books*, vol. 30.2, 1716, p. 576.

Gravenor's tenure as bailiff saw rigorous enforcement of the freemen's rights, especially the fining of foreign traders. It is difficult to assess the levels of freeman admissions under the various bailiffs in this period; but Gravenor's terms in office certainly drew comment -- largely from his enemies -- about freemen admissions. His practice of admitting freemen so that they could avoid impressment undoubtedly created some voters whose gratitude was shown at the polls.<sup>28</sup> Yet as Nicholas Rogers has observed, mass admissions of freemen for the purposes of winning particular elections was not a reliable long-term political strategy. The future votes of freemen so admitted could not be counted upon without some further inducement.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, to create new freemen at Ipswich Gravenor would already need to have the support of a majority of the Great Court. The creation of additional freemen was at best a short-term strategy, and one which was available to various political leaders in the eighteenth century. As such, it does not explain Gravenor's long period of political ascendance.

As a local maltster, warehouse and commercial property owner with interests in the docks, Gravenor could build a more powerful network of freemen than urban gentlemen like Devereux Edgar or Charles Whitaker. While it might be anachronistic to characterise Gravenor as a populist, his identity as a whiggish, trading freeman willing to accommodate dissenters undoubtedly had much more appeal with Ipswich's townsmen than did the landed Tory, High Churchman and their solicitors in the town.

Gravenor's aggressive political style and changing circumstances eventually, however, led to his fall. Many of Gravenor's victories were at the heavy expense of others. As previously noted, the jurisdictional dispute over the authority of the town's recruiting commissioners resulted in Edgar, Martin and three other county justices being removed from the bench for three years. Other cases also indicated that, when Gravenor did not get his way, he tried to destroy his opponents. In 1711, for example, three portmen boycotted a meeting of the Great Court in order to frustrate Gravenor's intention to make a number of new freemen. After losing an appeal to the House of Commons on the validity of those admissions in 1714, Gravenor prompted the Great

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<sup>28</sup> "Entry Book of Devereux Edgar", f. 251.

<sup>29</sup> Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, pp. 287-8.

Court to pass a resolution stripping the three boycotting portmen of their offices. A contemporary characterised the conflict thus: "...Old Gravenor was a Boisteroius Governing Man and there [sic][i.e. the three ejected portmen] being only Tradesmen without Friends to back them Submitted to their discharge".<sup>30</sup> The infliction of heavy defeats upon his opponents not only permanently alienated important interests in the community, they may also have made others uneasy. After ten years at the top, the broad base of Gravenor's support amongst the freemen started to erode, and he did not command the undivided loyalty of either the Portmen or the Twentyfour.

Gravenor's rough politics and style of governance may have raised anxiety not least because it often resulted in expensive litigation. The 1704 removals of the town clerk and the recorder led to litigation that dragged on for years. By April 1707 Charles Whitaker, the recorder, obtained a writ of mandamus requiring that he be restored to office. Gravenor responded with a new resolution for Whittaker's ejection and the election of William Thompson instead. Whitaker died the following month, before he could resume the legal battle, but the Corporation had nonetheless had already spent more than £300 in the affair.<sup>31</sup>

Gravenor provoked other, more costly litigation for the Corporation. It had to mortgage Handford Hall in 1706 to raise £600 to defend a suit against Samuel Caley, who sought damages following Gravenor's order that rent due to the Corporation be recovered by a forced entry of the Town House of which Caley was the lessee. The Corporation's eventual bill after the courts found in Caley's favour was reported to be in excess of £800.<sup>32</sup> In 1707 several townsmen including Richard Puplett, the clerk Gravenor had removed from office three years before, brought an action in the Court of Chancery against the Corporation, Gravenor, and Joseph Clarke, in relation to the building of the Shire Hall. Handford Hall had to be mortgaged again for another £1,000 to meet the anticipated legal costs. Another enemy of Gravenor brought suits in Chancery against the Corporation in 1714. Leicester Martin, as lord of Christchurch

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<sup>30</sup> SRO/I, HD 490/1, Collection of Ms. documents in a book entitled "Private and Proof Portraits".

<sup>31</sup> John Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 125; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 72-6; "Mr. Gravenor's Proceedings."

<sup>32</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, 76; "Mr. Gravenor's Proceedings", f. 259.

Manor, was owed rents on the Town Hall and for access to springs on the manor. Under Gravenor's guidance the Corporation's uncompromising position ensured another protracted legal battle.<sup>33</sup>

Gravenor's gruff style in dealing with a substantial merchant like Samuel Caley, and his history of sour relations with important, well-connected men like Puplett, Whitaker and Martin did not make doing the Corporation's business easy. Indeed, this litigation, together with election expenditure, imposed a great burden on the Corporation. By May 1721 the burden had become so great that Gravenor obtained the Great Court's authorisation to sell its principal income-earning asset, Handford Hall. A purchaser was found who agreed to pay £2,000 for the manor, and Gravenor obtained authorisation to apply the funds to pay off the Corporation's mortgages held by Frances Coleman, one of the portmen who appears to have been a stalwart Gravenor ally<sup>34</sup>. Coleman and Gravenor were also permitted to take some "proper discharge" or fee for their parts in the deal. Before the money and deeds were due to change hands on the 1 September 1721, however, the sale was cancelled. It may be that Gravenor's political support grew fatally weak at this point because, contrary to his apparent interest, the Corporation suddenly abandoned his scheme and paid one of its agents £50 for securing a release from the sale so that Handford Hall could be retained.<sup>35</sup>

Gravenor's declining political power was further demonstrated several weeks later. On the 29 September 1721, at a Great Court which was poorly attended by the portmen, Gravenor managed to have an order passed discharging John Marlow from the office of bailiff, to which he had been duly elected three weeks previously, and fining him for non-performance of duties. Gravenor had himself sworn in Marlow's place claiming that otherwise the Corporation would not have had two bailiffs and the charter would have been in danger of dissolution. Gravenor did not however, have the support to make this arrangement stand. The Great Court re-convened on 10 October 1721 with

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<sup>33</sup> SRO/I: x1/8/2.5, Documents relating to Leicester Martin's dispute with the Corporation over dues for manors in Ipswich.

<sup>34</sup> Both men voted the same way in county Parliamentary elections prior to Gravenor's fall from power, and they were frequently elected together or alternately in the years 1709-19.

<sup>35</sup> GCB, 16 May 1721; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 86.



seven portmen in attendance including Marlow who was prepared to assume the office of bailiff. The discharge and fine imposed on Marlow, as well as the election of Gravenor, were all overturned. Gravenor, perhaps worried that his opponents were willing to prosecute him under either statute law or newly enforced Corporate bylaws, protested that he had only acted to ensure legal continuity of the Corporation and the survival of its Charter. He was obliged to sign a statement that he acknowledged the illegality of his assumption of office as well as the impropriety of fining and discharging Marlow. But, probably as part of a compromise with Marlow and the other portmen, Gravenor's official defence for his action was noted and he was not prosecuted.<sup>36</sup>

The following year, when Gravenor could legitimately stand for bailiff again, his political influence rapidly began to wane. Eight men including Gravenor were nominated for the bailiwick in early September 1722. Only four stood when the poll was taken. John Cornelius and John Sparowe were elected with 315 and 255 votes respectively; Gravenor polled 246 and his former partner in Corporation finance, Francis Colman, received only 34 votes. The day before the poll 68 new freemen had been admitted -- one less than the number of votes by which Cornelius defeated Gravenor. It seems clear Gravenor had lost control of the Great Court and the vetting of new freemen. The former bailiff was very soon to feel the effects of his loss of power. In December 1722 his son, also a resident of St. Clement parish, appealed against his poor rate assessment and was denied -- it was the only denial recorded in the parish that year.<sup>37</sup> But Gravenor's loss of influence in the Great Court was to become more costly. In June 1723 the new bailiffs John Cornelius and John Sparowe set about settling accounts for the years of Gravenor's domination of the town's affairs. After Gravenor had the Great Court cancel Samuel Caley's lease of the town quay, crane and warehouse or "Town House," and Caley was forcibly removed from those premises in 1706 (resulting in a law suit costing the Corporation £800), Gravenor took over the lease himself. It was calculated that by 1723 Gravenor owed the Corporation £650 as he had not paid the rent in thirteen years. That sum, together with other Corporation funds

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<sup>36</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1721; 29 Sept. 1721; and 18 Oct. 1721.

<sup>37</sup> GCB, 7 Sept. 1721; Sessions Book, 13 Dec. 1722.

Gravenor was alleged to be holding, and the return of the Corporation's charters, court books and other records in his possession, were all the objects of a suit brought against Gravenor by the Corporation. In 1724 Gravenor counter-sued the Corporation for money he claimed to have spent on its behalf. Chancery proceedings dragged on for another two years before the parties settled out of court. In the end Gravenor paid the Corporation £200 and arranged for his old ally, William Thompson to drop his claims against the Corporation for his recorder's salary due from years when Gravenor was bailiff. In return, the Corporation agreed to indemnify Gravenor against suites brought by merchants who paid him Town House dues during the period of his illegal lease (1706-23).<sup>38</sup>

Gravenor stood again for bailiff in September 1723 but was defeated by an even greater margin than the previous year.<sup>39</sup> Insult was added to the other injuries when, a few weeks later, the Great Court passed an uncommon resolution that "the thanks of the Court be given to the present Mr. Bayliffs [Cornelius and Sparowe] for the good service they have done to this Corporation During their Bayliwick this last year." Perhaps most difficult of all for Gravenor was the granting of honorary freemen admission to his old nemesis, Devereux Edgar.<sup>40</sup> Thereafter Gravenor does not figure in the town's politics. Interestingly, at the poll for county MPs in 1727, he voted with many of his old opponents to support Jermyn Davers, heir to Devereux Edgar's most powerful ally in the recruiting commission dispute, and Sir William Barker, the man whom Gravenor had double-crossed in 1707 to ensure the victory of William Churchill, the Court candidate. It may be that in the last decade of his life Cooper Gravenor preferred to support the county gentlemen with whom he first entered politics rather than the new town leadership which had overthrown him.

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<sup>38</sup> SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls"; GCB, 7 June 1723, 26 June 1724.

<sup>39</sup> SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls." The margin of defeat jumped from nine to forty-nine with about five hundred freemen voting.

<sup>40</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1723 & 29 Sept. 1723.

## 2. The Rule of the Portmen: 1724-54

Gravenor's fall from power signalled a restructuring of both elite politics in the Assembly, and of the way the assemblymen engaged the rest of the freemen and the wider community. Gravenor's politics had divided the Portmen. He had arranged for the ejection of three of his fellow members of that body who had defied him in 1711. Gravenor needed the support of other portmen, such as Francis Colman, who served with him as bailiff; yet his final defeat at the polls was at the hands of the portmen John Cornelius and John Sparowe. Gravenor's support seems to have cut across the portmen, twentyfour and freemanry in a way that would not be duplicated again in the eighteenth century. Cornelius and Sparowe established a cohesive coalition which normally embraced all of the portmen while the Twentyfour eventually became the base of their opponents.<sup>41</sup>

The alliance of Sparowe and Cornelius was not obvious from the outset. There were grounds for widespread dissatisfaction with Gravenor throughout the community and, initially at least, six men intended to run against Gravenor and his partner in 1722. Sparowe and Cornelius were not likely to have come forward as allies on the same ticket. Sparowe came from an ancient Ipswich merchant family possessing a grand, Jacobean mansion in the commercial centre of the town. The family had a royalist heritage from the civil wars and one of Sparowe's relations followed James II into exile. Cornelius's background is more difficult to determine; like Cooper Gravenor he may have been something of a self-made man who had no deep roots in the community. Indeed, in the 1722 bailiffs poll Cornelius voted for Gravenor, while Gravenor and his stalwarts supported Cornelius. Sparowe, however, drew the votes of Gravenor's enemies amongst the town and country gentry such as Devereux Edgar and Orlando Bridgeman.<sup>42</sup> Yet there is little evidence that Sparowe and Cornelius did not work

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<sup>41</sup> By 1741 all the portmen were voting for the same parliamentary candidates, while the opponents of those candidates were supported by all but one of the twentyfour. In 1754 only one member of each of these bodies broke ranks with their fellows and supported the candidates for bailiffs of the other group. See *The Poll for Members of Parliament for the Borough of Ipswich...1741* (Ipswich, 1741); *The Poll for Bailives of Ipswich...1754* (Ipswich, 1754).

<sup>42</sup> Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 33; SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls...".

together harmoniously in the first year in which they shared the bailiwick. Both men were vigorous in the exercise of their offices and in carrying the Great Court to sue Gravenor over the Town House, which suggests a like-mindedness on the biggest question in elite politics of the day.<sup>43</sup>

While they may not have intended a long-term alliance upon becoming bailiffs in 1722, Cornelius and Sparowe so managed the Corporation's politics that for all but seven of the next thirty-eight years one or other of them was a bailiff. Throughout this period the portmen were a cohesive political block. Even former Gravenor supporters such as Francis Coleman, Henry Nash and Thomas Starling were reconciled and began to take terms as bailiffs from 1725. We can only speculate at these men's motives, but it maybe that the litigation and expensive contests which Gravenor's style of politics provoked was finally seen by all the senior officers as undermining the Corporation's finances and, ultimately, threatening both their personal interests in the Corporation and their standing in local society. Gravenor's popularity with the freemanry was an obstacle to neutralising his political power. Thus, to achieve his defeat it was necessary for his opponents to admit 68 new freemen on the day before the elections for bailiffs in 1722; and to ensure their hold on power the portmen admitted a further 60 freemen in the following year.<sup>44</sup>

The portmen's position was further strengthened by the support they enjoyed, initially at least, from much of the urban gentry and some of the powerful country gentlemen in the neighbourhood. Leicester Martin, Devereux Edgar and the other members of the county bench who Gravenor had so antagonised, were clearly supportive of Sparowe and, by extension, Cornelius, in their project of ridding the town of the old bailiff. This may have been partly a matter of revenge against their old opponent, but it is likely to have also owed something to the religious orientation of Sparowe and Cornelius. Where Gravenor had been most vigorous in cultivating the dissenters, the new bailiffs were more moderate in matters of religion. It appears they still sought the support of nonconformist freemen, but the portmen were not seen as

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<sup>43</sup> See Table 3.1, p. 89; SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls..."; GCB, 7 June 1723.

<sup>44</sup> For the wider pattern of freeman admissions, see Table 7.4, 269

dominated by the dissenters nor unduly oriented to their interest. At the same time they were hardly High Church enthusiasts. William Curtis, vicar of Dovercourt and curate of Harwich, was asked to preach a sermon at St. Mary le Tower on the coronation day of 1727 which, when published, he dedicated to Cornelius and his co-bailiff that year, John Steward. Curtis was scathing of Roman Catholicism and wary of deviance from the Church of England, but he spread the message of tolerance in matters of practice while maintaining vigilance against conspiracies against the Church. The enemies of the Church were to be confounded but not attacked: scripture did not "...justify a bloody Mind, and uphold an Inclination to Cruelty and Revenge, contrary to the Genius and Spirit of true Religion...". Curtis caught the tone of moderation which was so consistent with the politics of the portmen's regime after Gravenor:

Thanks be to God, the People are better principled now than to be led by ill-grounded Clamours against Popery where it is not: by the Progress and Advancement of the CHARITY SCHOOLS, they are taught on which side the real Danger lies, can give Reason for the Hope that is in them, and sing praises to God with understanding.<sup>45</sup>

The urgent need to protect the Corporation's finances, to restore some degree of political peace, and to wreak vengeance on a long-time opponent was the basis of the coalition which brought Sparowe and Cornelius to power, but it could not be the foundation of a durable alliance. It was not long before the Portmen were at odds with Gravenor's old foes amongst the urban gentry and their friends in the country. Those conflicts were largely over the selection of the borough's parliamentary members. In this the portmen, led by Sparowe and Cornelius, differed little from Gravenor: they supported government-backed candidates because such MPs could most effectively act in the Corporation's interests, and because they were conduits for patronage which the portmen were eager to exploit. The portmen sought influential representatives in their running jurisdictional battles with the government borough of Harwich and in the effort to obstruct the Stowmarket navigation scheme backed by some county gentlemen. William Thompson had shown the potential power of an influential borough MP in

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<sup>45</sup> William Curtis, *The Security and Triumph of True Religion and Piety... A Sermon Preached Before the Corp. of Ipswich...* (1727), pp. 8, 38.

1707 when five members of the county bench were purged after their confrontation with Gravenor. As in other boroughs which returned government supporters, the bailiffs of Ipswich enjoyed offices in the revenue services. Like Gravenor before them, Sparowe and Cornelius held customs jobs, as did other townsmen who supported the portmen.<sup>46</sup> The selection of parliamentary members who could function in this way was central to the regime established by the portmen after 1723. Gravenor had recognised the importance of defending the borough's interests and sought access to government patronage through the election of ministry MPs. Yet Gravenor built his support in such a way that it cut across the "political classes" of Ipswich society, drawing support from the portmen, twentyfour and the freemanry at large; but also by alienating elements in each of those groups. Sparowe and Cornelius, however, tried to unite the Portmen so as to concentrate its power to control the Great Court and the Corporation's affairs.

To ensure that neither Gravenor nor some heir to his methods would undermine the restored cohesiveness and power of the portmen, Sparowe and Cornelius sought to diminish the place of the freemen. The Portmen's leaders clearly sought to reduce the number of occasions on which their control of corporate business would depend upon the support of a majority of the Great Court. In 1724, before the complete solidarity of the portmen had been achieved, Thomas Starling, a recent supporter of Gravenor complained of attempts by "...certain Gentlemen now upon the Bench to take away the Freemen's votes in elections...".<sup>47</sup> The reference seems to be to Cornelius and Sparowe since the other JPs were, like Starling, recent allies of Gravenor. Even if the charge was fiction, there at least seems to have been sensitivity to the freemen's role in the Corporation's government. As discussed above, the number of Great Courts held and their volumes of business diminished substantially between the 1720s and 1750s.<sup>48</sup> In 1747 a report on the state of the charities identified the infrequency of Great Court meetings as a factor behind the poor auditing of the charities' accounts. The report,

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<sup>46</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Treasury Books*, vol. 30.2, 1716, p. 576; W.A. Copinger, *Suffolk Records and Manuscripts*, vol. 3, (London and Manchester, 1904-07), pp.281-2; *A Supplement to the Poll for Members of Parliament for the Borough of Ipswich...1741* (Ipswich, 1741).

<sup>47</sup> GCB, 25 April 1724.

<sup>48</sup> See: Chapter Two, Table 2.1

published by its author's after the Corporation leadership abolished the committee and tried to suppress its findings, called for a set number of Great Court meetings per year.<sup>49</sup> In light of the growing statutory power of the justices of the peace, four of whom were selected from the portmen whilst the other two were the bailiffs, it is clear that there was an important concentration of power in the hands of the portmen.<sup>50</sup>

The portmen, especially in the mid-eighteenth century when they exclusively held the bailiwick, were able to profit as individuals from their offices. The perquisites, jobbery and advantages of managing the Corporation's funds, charities and public works reinforced their collective control over the Corporation's affairs and was of considerable personal advantage to them. That the portmen were of broadly common social and economic identities meant that this control of the Corporation had important implications for wider power relations within the community. Sparowe and Cornelius' settling of the coal loaders wages and terms of employment in 1725 made clear how the town's merchants were served by the portmen in these years.<sup>51</sup> Yet, while the portmen were a self-electing body wielding great control over the Corporation in service of their own interests, it is important to recognise the limits to their power. Despite the concentration of authority in the hands of the justices and the effort to diminish the role of the Great Court, the portmen still had to cultivate good relations with the wider body of freemen. The bailiffs remained officers elected by the Great Court and the possibility of twentyfourmen or any other freeman standing for office was very real. Therefore, however cohesive the portmen had managed to become, they could not afford to alienate a majority of the freemen. Moreover, the freemen election of bailiffs had the potential to create tension amongst those senior officers since a rogue portman with enough of a popular following could threaten the solidarity which emerged under Sparowe and Cornelius. Further, the business of government depended on an array of officers such as beadles, sergeants at mace, petty constables, overseers and surveyors who received modest formal cash remuneration. Good personal relations between these men and the

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<sup>49</sup>R. Canning, *Account of the Gifts and Legacies*, pp. 88, 90.

<sup>50</sup> See above p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> See above pp. 196, 205.

senior officers were essential to the corporate elite's assertion of public authority. Certainly, it would be wrong to deny there were economic rewards -- of varying magnitudes -- to such offices; but it seems unlikely that the retention of these was normally the principal motive for the execution of duties to the satisfaction of one's superiors. In short, the portmen could not govern by patronage alone.

The sympathies of co-religionists, economic common interest, shared political views, personal ties and respect, all helped align the portmen with the lesser officers of the Corporation and, indeed, with the wider freemanry. In Ipswich, as has been observed elsewhere, various public events, civic ritual and ceremony gave substance to a political culture which, for much of the century, helped sustain the portmen's regime.<sup>52</sup> Meetings of the Great Court and election periods, with their ceremony, demonstrations, treating and offerings of patronage by civic leaders, were important moments of a freeman's participation in the political process. Leaders, based in the Portmen and Twentyfour, depended on such occasions to win or affirm the freemen support upon which control of the Corporation ultimately depended.

In the years 1722-31 the portmen's control of the bailiwick appears to have been untroubled, and the selection of MPs was easily managed. In 1726 William Thompson, one of the sitting MPs and the town's recorder, was re-selected without a contest after his appointment as Attorney General necessitated his standing again. In 1727, Thompson and another government supporter, Francis Negus, were easily re-elected, each with nearly twice the vote total of a lone challenger.<sup>53</sup> Three years later, however, the unity of the town's politics appeared to be weakening. At a by-election in 1730 a Tory country gentlemen, Philip Broke, was returned with a 50 vote margin at a poll attended by about one-fifth fewer freemen than was typical of the period. Although Negus wrote to Walpole warning that Broke's election signaled a serious threat to the government's position at Ipswich, William Wollaston, a government supporter, faced no

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<sup>52</sup> Borsay, "All the Town's a Stage", pp. 228-258.

<sup>53</sup> There are no poll books for bailiffs for this period and the GCB does not indicate there were serious electoral challenges to the portmen's candidates; R. Sedgwick (ed.), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1715-54*, vol. 1 (London, 1970), p. 325.



contest as he assumed the seat vacated by Negus's death in January 1733.<sup>54</sup> At the general election the following year, the government candidates Wollaston and Samuel Kent were challenged by Edward Vernon and Philip Colman. In the wake of the excise crisis there was some shift in support, but the portmen remained united behind the government-backed candidates. Kent and Wollaston respectively polled 308 and 296 votes, while Vernon got 215 votes and Colman 195.<sup>55</sup>

Admiral Vernon's emergence as a leading critic of the government after his victory at Porto Bello in 1739 and his subsequent electoral strength at Ipswich, reveals much about the borough's politics in this period. The huge electoral impact of Vernon's popularity is well documented.<sup>56</sup> At Ipswich, in 1741, he polled almost 130 more votes than any other candidate and was supported by nearly ninety-eight percent of the voters.

**Table 6.1: *Distribution of Electoral Support, 1741***

No. of Voters Supporting:			% of Voters Supporting:	
Vernon & Kent	289	53.82 %	Vernon	98%
Vernon & Ward	218	40.60 %	Kent	55%
Vernon	20	3.72 %	Ward	44%
Kent & Ward	5	0.93 %		
Kent	4	0.74 %		
Ward	1	0.19 %		

Total Number of V637

Source: *The Poll for Members of Parliament... Ipswich....1741* (Ipswich, 1741)

The enthusiasm for his candidacy was tremendous. Six months before the poll, a subscription was taken in the country as well as the town to fund the celebrations of Vernon's birthday in November 1740. The reports of the ensuing festivities were by far the most lengthy items of local news to appear in the *Ipswich Journal* since its founding.

<sup>54</sup> Cambridge University Library, Cholmondeley (Houghton) Mss., corresp, 1748, Sir Frances Negus to Sir Robert Walpole, 18 Aug. 1730.

<sup>55</sup> Sedgwick (ed.), *Commons, 1715-54*, vol. 1, p. 325.

<sup>56</sup> See: N. Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, pp. 235-40; K. Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian England: The Case of Admiral Vernon" *Past and Present* 121 (1988), pp. 74-109; G. Jordan and N. Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England" in *Journal of British Studies* (28) 1989, pp. 201-24.

The birthday celebrations involved much feasting, bonfires, fireworks and a ball. The *Journal* reported that “the whole thing was carried on with the greatest unanimity and Joy, and with all possible Demonstrations of Gratitude to that Brave Man...”. The event was used as a launch for Vernon’s campaign for a borough seat. The paper’s reports were followed by two laudatory poems and a notice that there would be a nomination meeting which freemen were urged to attend. At the foot of the announcement it was noted that: “N.B. The Poll will be printed”.<sup>57</sup>

This warning was given for good reason. Hostility to Vernon’s interest could be dangerous. Legal action, threats of violence or loss of trade may have variously motivated the proprietor of the Red Lion, a Colchester inn, to place an advertisement in the *Ipswich Journal* indicating that he had sworn before John Sparowe, then an Ipswich magistrate, that an effigy of Admiral Vernon had not been burned on Vernon’s birthday by anyone at the Red Lion. The innkeeper denied that he “either there or at any other Time, did anything in Derision of the said Admiral or his proceedings”. At Ipswich two establishments were renamed “The Admiral’s Head Inn” and “The Portobello Inn”<sup>58</sup> In the face of such passions for Vernon the portmen elite faced a difficult political problem.

The portmen’s strategy had been to support government parliamentary candidates in order to secure the allocation of revenue service jobs and maintain strong connections within the government. Accordingly, an oppositional candidate like Vernon would normally have been vigorously resisted and, initially, Sparowe and Cornelius opposed Vernon’s candidacy in favour of Samuel Kent and Knox Ward, a local gentleman. Yet as Vernon’s campaign gained momentum, the portmen dumped Ward and offered their support to the Admiral. After the poll, a Vernon supporter claimed that such offers were rejected “as it would be an affront to him [Vernon]... to be joined with an obsequious Attendant on his Honour”. The writer gleefully added:

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<sup>57</sup> *Ipswich Journal*, 24 Oct. 1740; 8 Nov. 1740; and 15 Nov. 1740.

<sup>58</sup> *Ipswich Journal*, 2 May 1741; L. P. Thompson, *Old Inns of Suffolk* (Ipswich, 1947), p.22.

We are diverting ourselves with the awkward Grimace which the Borough Jobbers put on to be pleased with the Admiral's Success, but notwithstanding their Known Efforts against him, have Assurance to claim some Share in the Merit of choosing him.<sup>59</sup>

The electoral politics of the Great Court meant that Cornelius and Sparowe could not afford to get on the wrong side of the freemanry. Yet it is important not to see Vernon's success as simply an oppositional candidate smashing through the politics of a borough normally inclined to the government. Rogers has argued that in 1740-1 Vernon became the focal point of widespread popular disaffection amongst middling voters with the Walpolean regime.<sup>60</sup> This was certainly true nationally and at Ipswich as well, but the nature of the enthusiasm for Vernon merits closer examination. It is possible, at Ipswich at least, to over-estimate the importance of Vernon's oppositional stance in securing his election. After all, Vernon had lost by an appreciable margin in the 1734 election on a similar opposition platform when the government position was severely undermined by the excise bill controversy and Walpole's unwillingness to stand up to Spain -- a matter of some concern in towns with shipping and trading interests.

What made the difference, of course, was the popular perception of Vernon as a naval hero after Porto Bello. It would seem that votes for Vernon were affirmations of what he had done and the national self-image that it allowed people to indulge. Few freemen were intent upon turning out the government as less than 4% voted only for Vernon.<sup>61</sup> Vernon was returned with Samuel Kent, a government supporter and, from 1739, a wealthy placeman who was Distiller to the Royal Court.<sup>62</sup> Kent obtained a comfortable seventy-four vote margin, and more than half the voters supporting Vernon also backed Kent. Thus, while there was great enthusiasm for Vernon, the majority of freemen were also willing to vote for the government candidate supported by the portmen. It seems that they appreciated the benefits of the government connection, or at least the portmen's influence was greater than any disaffection with central government policy.

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<sup>59</sup> *London Evening News*, 9 May 1741, reprinted in *Ipswich Journal*, 16 May 1741

<sup>60</sup> Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, pp. 237-40.

<sup>61</sup> See Table 6.2.

<sup>62</sup> Sedgwick (ed.), *Commons 1715-54*, vol. 2, p. 291.

At the next poll, 1747, Kent and Vernon were unopposed. Unwilling to take the political risks of challenging Vernon and content with one government member, the portmen accepted this disposition of the borough's seats. Vernon, a true independent, never linked himself with any other oppositional candidate who, riding the coattails of the Admiral's popularity, might win the other borough seat. Satisfied to get himself into parliament, Vernon was unwilling to engage in costly electoral fights with the Corporation-backed government candidates. Certainly from the 1741 election campaign it is clear that Vernon's career at Ipswich signalled a change in the dynamics of the town's politics. His popular, personal appeal provided a political base for challenges to the portmen governors which initiated a new period of political contention.

### **3. 1754-67 A New Politics of Contention**

Admiral Vernon had a great impact on Ipswich politics despite being little interested in its affairs, other than its capacity to return him to Parliament. He rarely intervened in Corporation matters, and the issues which fired his passions on the national political stage had few real implications for the Corporation. But the nature of his appeal to the electorate and the awkward efforts the portmen had to make to accommodate him, despite their inclinations, created new openings for those wishing to challenge the portmen's domination. Whether sincerely or cynically, those attached to Vernon -- claiming to be in his interest -- had an appeal to the freemanry which would have been otherwise difficult to create from the ordinary stuff of Corporation politics. Vernon was, in a sense, the occasion for freemen outside the Portmen to rally and have confidence that the Sparowe and Cornelius regime might be toppled. Underpinning politics at this level were, of course, important social, cultural and economic changes in the community, including the rise of professional men and bankers to higher corporate

office, the growth and diversification of the local economy, and the developments in both the town's and national political culture.<sup>63</sup>

The portmen helped precipitate this process in 1754 when they sought to break the arrangement over the borough seats and run another government sympathiser with Samuel Kent against Edward Vernon. Perhaps believing that Vernon's moment had passed, and that their new candidate's deep pockets would carry the day, the portmen urged Sir Richard Lloyd to stand. Vernon seems to have been worried because his supporters were urged to vote only for him since their second votes might provide the margin his opponents needed to win. But, as the poll approached, despite having spent perhaps £3,000, Lloyd did not believe he would win and so withdrew. The *Ipswich Journal* reported "The very great and almost universal joy which Mr. Vernon's success occasion'd, is a clear and public proof of the uncommon share he has of the Esteem and Affections of his Neighbours."<sup>64</sup> Their opponents saw the portmen's attack on Vernon as folly: the followers of Sparowe

... had baffled every Attempt that had been made upon them for *thirty-two* Years together, and all that Time had been entrenching and strengthening themselves by every Art that modern Inventions in political Fortification could suggest. With these Advantages, if they had not imprudently enter'd into the Measures of a vain *Knight Errantry*, and ventured unprovok'd to try their Strength with Admiral Vernon, their Fortress had been impregnable to every other Force; but nothing could withstand the Torrent of that Gentleman's deserved Popularity.<sup>65</sup>

The failure to unseat Vernon revealed the extent of the portmen's weakness by 1754. Indeed, the botched attack on the admiral appears to have fatally undermined their influence over the freemen as the portmen were unable to withstand their opponents at the next electoral battle: the contest for the bailiwick in September 1754. After a fierce

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<sup>63</sup> For the development of the local economy see above pp. 26-37. For the advent of the professions see above pp. 114-21. Important discussions of these changes in eighteenth-century political culture include: Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*; Wilson, *Sense of the People*.

<sup>64</sup> BL Add. MS 32735, Newcastle Mss., Hardwicke to Newcastle, 24 April 1754, ff. 178-9, quoted in L. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*. 2nd ed. (London, 1965), p. 110 n. 2; *Ipswich Journal*, 6, 20 April 1754.

<sup>65</sup> *A Collection of Papers Relating to the Election of Bailiffs of Ipswich on the 8th of September 1754* (Ipswich?, 1754), p. 1-2.

election, during which one man was killed as a mob tried to break its way into one of the portmen's homes, two twentyfour men were elected for the first time in the century.<sup>66</sup>

Thomas Richardson and John Gravenor, whose father Cooper Gravenor had figured so largely in town affairs more than thirty years before, were elected by a substantial 125 vote margin in a poll attended by 599 freemen. The poll reflected the highly factionalised state of town politics: there were no plumpers, that is voters for just one candidate. Only one freeman split his votes between the factions, only one twentyfourman voted for the portmen candidates, Humphry Rant and William Hammond, and just one portman voted for Richardson and Gravenor.<sup>67</sup> In their eagerness to assume office and capitalise on their victory, Richardson and Gravenor took the unprecedented step of having themselves sworn-in by the coroners at the Great Court at which they were elected. This was contrary to custom which held that new bailiffs were to be sworn by their immediate predecessors at a meeting two weeks after the election.<sup>68</sup> By being sworn immediately Richardson and Gravenor deprived the outgoing bailiffs of two last weeks in office in which they could get their accounts in order and dispense minor bits of patronage. But the political environment of this period was not conducive to a smooth transfer of power. There was a substantial turn-over in most Corporate offices including, within the year, that of the town clerk.

Despite their margin of victory and the apparently hard lines of their support, the new bailiffs were keen to admit more freemen upon whose votes they could rely. This matter of freemen admissions was central to the contention between the factions during this period. Aware of Richardson and Gravenor's intentions to flood the freemanry with men upon whose votes they could rely, the portmen took the only action available to obstruct this strategy: they boycotted the meetings of the Great Court maintaining that no legal Court, nor freeman admissions, could take place in the absence of the portmen. This strategy provoked lengthy legal battles about the status of the portmen and their

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<sup>66</sup> *A Collection of Papers Relating to the Election of Bailiffs...*, pp. 4-5, 13-17, 26-7.

<sup>67</sup> *The Poll for the Bailives of Ipswich, Taken Sept. 8, 1754.* (Ipswich, 1754).

<sup>68</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1754.

place in the constitution. Although their position was vindicated in the long run, this strategy resulted in their removal from the Portmen by a vote of the Richardson/Gravenor controlled Great Court. The only portman to retain his office was James Wilder, who was also the only member of that body to vote for Richardson and Gravenor. As the sole remaining portmen, Wilder felt himself entitled to select the replacements for his ejected colleagues. All eleven of the new portmen were chosen from Richardson and Gravenor's supporters in the Twentyfour.<sup>69</sup> With control of the Portmen, Twentyfour and Great Court, Richardson and Gravenor were able to admit 127 new freemen in June 1755 -- by far the largest single admission in the eighteenth century.

The ejection from the portmen and the swamping of the freemanry with hostile voters was a political disaster for Sparowe and his allies. Since they were no longer portmen they could not be appointed justices and were thereby deprived of that important source of prestige, influence and patronage. The freemen admissions ensured that they would not recapture the bailiwick or control the business of the Great Court again for another thirteen years. Richardson and Gravenor further put the former portmen on the defensive when the Great Court ordered that a committee be struck to investigate the Corporations accounts and the state of its records.<sup>70</sup>

Under such conditions, the former portmen could only fight back in two ways. One was by criticising Richardson and Gravenor's associations with Vernon and his country gentlemen allies. This "True Blue" interest was portrayed as threatening to the town and its real freemen, by which they meant those enfranchised before the mass admissions of 1755. The language of corruption and the critique based on the subversion of legitimate rights was now employed by its former targets. One Sparoweite handbill declared that the new men running the Corporation were writing books against Bribery "even whilst they were openly practising it". It was observed that before they were the bailiffs, these men spoke loudly against the abuse of power,

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<sup>69</sup> SRO/I, HD 490/1, Collection of Ms. documents in a book entitled "Private and Proof Portraits"; GCB, 16 Oct. 1755.

<sup>70</sup> GCB, 29 Oct. 1754.

yet their freemen admissions were a terrible example of it. A threat against the town and its inhabitants was the inevitable result of this action. "True freemen" were warned that:

...some future Day, when your [i.e. the freemen's] RIGHTS and PROPERTIES are design'd ONCE MORE, to be divided amongst such another TROOP OF FOREIGN TRUE BLUES, if such another can be found within FOUR COUNTIES [e.g.. Camb., Norfolk, Suff., and Essex]. And when this is the Case, can you possibly think these Men FRIENDS, either to LIBERTY in General, or to you in particular? -- no it is impossible.<sup>71</sup>

Recognising the appeal of Vernon and his national political affiliations -- which Richardson and Gravenor were quick to exploit -- the former portmen tried to change the patterns of political identification with a *de rigueur* appeal to end party-based factionalism and recognise that the real threat to townsmen came from landed society:

Let the Name of Whig and Tory, be no more heard amongst us: But let us all join with unanimity and Courage; in Opposition to these BETRAYERS OF OUR RIGHTS.... The veteran Troops [ie. the old freemen led by the former portmen], thus join'd, have it still in their Power to convince their Enemies, not only of the Danger of making FREEMEN, but of the Vanity of attempting it, without a legal COURT for that Purpose; if We will but unite on the next Occasion, We shall see this new-rais'd, motley REGIMENT OF BARONETS, ESQUIRES, FARMERS, and DEVINES, disbanded and with INFAMY and DISGRACE, as TROOPS irregularly raised.<sup>72</sup>

As this passage suggests, the second, ultimately more effective way of retrieving the former portmen's position was, not through the solidarity of the freemen at the polls, but rather in the central law courts. The portmen's ejection prompted two crucial suits in King's Bench. The first was an action for *quo warranto* in relation to Richardson's claim to the office of portman. It was successfully argued that because the ejections of Sparowe and the other portmen in 1755 had been illegal -- the Great Court not having grounds for their removal -- there was no legitimate vacancy in the Portmen for

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<sup>71</sup> SRO/I, fS 324, A Collection of Printed Political Squibs and Papers Relating the County of Suffolk and the Borough of Ipswich from 1736 to 1840. (Collected by Thomas Baldock Ross), f. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. For a more general discussion of the rights of freemen in political rhetoric of the late eighteenth century, see R. Sweet, "Freemen and Independence in English Borough Politics, c. 1770-1830", *Past and Present* 161 (1999), pp. 84-115.



Richardson to fill. Having established this position in a King's Bench judgement of 1758, it was clear that all James Wilder's other "appointments" to the Portmen were also invalid. Accordingly, Richardson, Gravenor and all their allies except Wilder resigned as portmen in May 1758.<sup>73</sup> This did not reverse the Sparowe faction's defeat of 1754 because the majority of the freemen were still supporters of Richardson and Gravenor. But the restored portmen could again dominate the sessions bench since they held four of its six places, and they once again held important charity offices. A second victory in the central courts later allowed the portmen to recover the bailiwick. In 1767 a ruling was obtained in Chancery that the 127 freeman admissions in June 1755 were illegal. Accordingly, at a Great Court held in September of 1767, those persons were disenfranchised and, despite their previous rhetoric against the evil of mass freeman admissions, the newly ascendant portmen made sure of their return to power with the admission of forty-eight.<sup>74</sup>

#### **4. 1768-97: Elections, Factions, and Corruption**

After the return of the bailiwick to the portmen in 1767, the politics of the borough took on a new and more persistently partisan character. Faction had always been an important feature of Corporation politics, but its organisation and methods were, in the last three decades of the century, particularly corrosive of the corporate process of government. Because the Corporation's charter-based constitution was fundamentally ill-suited to the type of vociferous party conflict which emerged in this period, new forms of political organisation developed as did pressures for new institutions of governance.

The identification of Corporate factions by the colours "Blue" and the rival "Yellow" or "Orange" seems to have stemmed from at least the early seventeenth century. Their importance in party identification seems to have varied over time, and the ideological positions for which they were symbols is difficult to discern. In the

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<sup>73</sup> GCB, 2 May 1758.

<sup>74</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1767; G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p.104.

period after Vernon, when contention between factions became increasingly polarised between the Portmen and the Twentyfourmen, the use of these colours to distinguish political alignments became more frequent, and a rich, if inconsistent and historically dubious rhetoric was frequently employed to extol the virtues and legacies of “True Blue” principles and the depraved corruption of “the Yellow Interest” or vice versa.<sup>75</sup> Over the course of the eighteenth century, the shifting association of these colours with various candidates who might be linked to particular national issues or local interests has meant that historians cannot attach any enduring political significance or identity to them.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, “the Blue candidate” cannot safely be assumed to be a Tory; and the “Yellow” a Whig. But in Ipswich terms, it can be generally said that the Blue were generally the Twentyfour and their supporters, and the Yellow the Portmen and their supporters. The increasingly vigorous use of these colours to distinguish these groups reflects the hardening of lines of political conflict between the Portmen and Twentyfour once they had become more or less equal power bases after 1754.

After the portmen took control of the bailiwick in 1767 religion became a more politically divisive issue than it had been since the first quarter of the century. In the 1750s there had been occasional conformists in the Twentyfour, but from at least 1768 that body was clearly hostile to non-churchmen as officeholders. Proponents of the Blue interest bemoaned the prospect of portmen bailiffs who were dissenters. In 1835, the municipal commissioners observed that the Twentyfour partisanly excluded dissenters.<sup>77</sup> As portmen, dissenters enjoyed considerable success in Corporation politics.<sup>78</sup> William Clarke was bailiff four times in the 1770s, and in 1779 he was joined by Joseph Clarke, making both bailiffs dissenters. While religious affiliations may have been an issue for

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<sup>75</sup> For examples, see T. Green, *Euphrasy or Political Eyebright: Written in the Year 1768* (1768); and Anon., *A Serious Address to the Members of the House of Commons, and Gentlemen Residing in the Counties of Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex* (London, 1790).

<sup>76</sup> Sedgwick (ed.), *History of Parliament*, vol. 2 p. 380; L. Namier and J. Brooke (eds.), *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, vol. 2 (London, 1964), p. 372.

<sup>77</sup> Assembly Book, 2 July 1756; Green, *Euphrasy*, pp. 21-23; RCMC, p. 2297.

<sup>78</sup> For a general discussion of the role of Dissenters in the politics of corporations of similar sizes and constitutions as Ipswich see: J.E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1990), especially, pp. 75-76. The renewed importance of religion in borough politics in the later eighteenth century has also been observed in other towns. See J. A. Phillips, *Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England: Plumpers, Splitters, and Straights* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 159-68.

some assemblymen, and provided a point on which to appeal to the prejudices of some of the freemen, the dissenters' ascent to power hardly provoked a local crisis. When William and Joseph Clarke became bailiffs, the other senior officers adhered to the custom of attending the bailiffs' church, although in this case it meant going to chapel. It was later observed, that the Corporate leadership attended the chapel "with their usual formalities; but the maces were not allowed to be carried further than the door, as the place was not dedicated to religious worship, according to the doctrines of the established church".<sup>79</sup> Grudging acceptance of the place of dissenters in the Corporation's politics suggests that, while religion fired the animosities of pamphlet writers and whipped up passions at polling time, it was not a matter which affected the course of town government. Thomas Green's prominent series of pamphlets or newsletters on religion and politics in Ipswich in the late 1760s railed more against the members and clergy of the Church of England, who were politically allied with nonconformists, than against the dissenters themselves. He accused dissenters of corrupting some of the Church's ministers, and he complained of many ministers:

To see them constantly join the Dissenters in party matters, always, and in all places speaking favorably of their cause whatever it be; and to hear them on the Sunday following reading prayers, and preaching in the Church, are tokens of so motley a character, that their parishioners may fairly be allowed to doubt of their principles in religious, or whether indeed they have any religion or principles at all.<sup>80</sup>

As Paul Langford has suggested, such polemics were motivated by the fears of a vocal minority that religious affiliation was becoming a less important consideration in the town's politics.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 248.

<sup>80</sup> Green, *Euphrasy*, p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Langford, *Public Life*, p. 96. The situation at Ipswich appears to have been similar to Colchester where Shani D'Cruz found that religion had an important bearing on political affiliation and as a "wider social organizer"; nonetheless, this "divide was far from absolute and an important amount of social, business, trade, administrative and political connections still operated across religious boundaries." D'Cruz, "Provincial England", pp. 38-39. Frank O'Gorman's general observations on the gravity of religious divisions in borough politics overstates the case for Ipswich. His assertion that religious issues became more important in local politics late in the eighteenth century is borne out at Ipswich. F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties. The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 359-368. A similar argument is made by Phillips, *Electoral Behavior*, pp. 159-68.

The feature of the increasingly partisan character of this period which did bear on these matters was patronage. The nature of patronage was changing in this period in ways which had important implications for the structure of politics. None of the three selections of parliamentary representatives after 1741 and before 1768 required polls; but all six of the elections from 1768 to the end of the century involved polls attended by at least 590 freemen.<sup>82</sup> Not only were there more occasions and people to patronise, but the nature of patrons was changing as well. It has already been noted that the personnel of government was changing with the advent of more professional men and financiers in senior corporate office.<sup>83</sup> The patronage resources of such men differed from those of merchants, maltsters or mariners. The town's traders and small manufacturer's could secure political loyalty through the offering of jobs, services or goods on favourable terms, or by purchasing from those whose support was sought. These networks of dependence had durability and might spread through the community of freemen more widely. Bankers and solicitors could normally only offer such patronage in a more limited way, but their cash resources might, in some instances, have been greater. For them, treating and bribery became more significant forms of securing political support.

The scale of election expenses and the growing importance of urban-based professional men in politics was clearly evident in the controversial contest for the town's two parliamentary seats in 1784. In that year the Yellow interest, whose leaders included the bailiffs John Spooner and Peter Clarke, rejected the Blues' offer to split the two borough seats. Against the Blue candidate, William Middleton, the Yellows supported John Cator and William Wollaston, the only incumbent. Since 1768 Wollaston had successfully fought three elections in the Yellow interest. A local gentlemen whose estate lay about twelve miles north of Ipswich, and whose father had been an Ipswich MP in the 1730s, Wollaston had a strong attachment to the Portmen

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<sup>82</sup> L. Namier & J. Brooke, (eds.), *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754-90*, vol. 2, (London, 1964) p. 380. It should be noted that there were two polls in 1784 because of candidates disqualification, but only the first of these is referred to here.

<sup>83</sup> See above pp. 114-121.

and the Yellow interest.<sup>84</sup> The Yellow's campaign was managed by Emerson Cornwall who was a partner of John Spooner in one of the town's banks. Cornwall estimated that the election expenses might run as high as £2,000. Wollaston, who was out of the country and acted through his brother, Rev. Dr. Frederick Wollaston, was prepared to spend only £300, but Cator was willing to put up the remaining £1,700 which was deposited at Spooner and Cornwall's bank. In the course of canvassing, it became clear to Frederick Wollaston that it was not likely that both his brother and Cator would out poll Middleton. At a meeting with Cornwall, Spooner, and Cator, Wollaston asked whether his brother or Cator would be supported if Middleton topped the poll. It was made clear that Cator's money had counted for more than Wollaston's past association with the Yellows and the Corporation. Accordingly, Wollaston announced the withdrawal of his brother's candidacy.<sup>85</sup> A pamphlet writer for the Blues gloated:

[Wollaston was] supported with the utmost vigor so long as there was no interruption in the stream of his bounty; yet as soon as there was a probability this might fail in a considerable degree, those eagle-eyed politicians who are never blind to what they imagine may be conducive to their *own interest*, immediately and without ceremony rejected the man who had for many years been the object of their idolatry ... There by affording a instructive lesson to all future candidates for *their support*, that *bleeding freely and perpetually is the sole means of securing their invariable attention and regard...*<sup>86</sup>

It was estimated that between 1768 and 1784, William Wollaston had spent nearly £40,000 on his political career at Ipswich.<sup>87</sup>

In a surprising turn of events, the evening before the poll, Charles Alexander Crickitt, a banker with interests in Chelmsford, Colchester, and Ipswich, announced his candidacy, thereby depriving Middleton and Cator uncontested victories. Under the

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<sup>84</sup> L. Namier and J. Brooke, *House of Commons, 1754-90*, vol. 2, p. 381; J. Kirby, *Suffolk Traveller*, p. 210.

<sup>85</sup> *A Serious Address to The Members of the House of Commons, and Gentlemen Residing in the Counties of Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex*. (London, 1790), pp. 13-15; *Universal British Directory for Trade, Commerce and Manufacture...* (London, 1790-98), iii, pp. 420-23; T. Oldfield, *An Entire and Complete History, Political and Personal of the Boroughs of Great Britain*, 3 vols, (London, 1792), vol 2, pp. 514-27.

<sup>86</sup> *A Serious Address*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

circumstances it is not surprising Crickitt received only seven votes compared to Middleton's 460 and Cator's 296. But subsequent events revealed Crickitt's strategy to be more shrewd and economical. The banker Cornwall had estimated Wollaston and Cator would spend £2,000 to win the election because Cator was a virtual unknown to the freemen and Wollaston's popularity had clearly waned. Accordingly, the Yellows spent the money on a costly round of local treating, transporting non-resident freemen to the town to vote, and bribery. Crickitt petitioned the House of Commons with allegations of Cator's bribery. The election was set aside. Cator, perhaps unable to fund another campaign, did not stand at the by-election, and Crickitt, proclaiming the Yellow interest, convincingly defeated his opponent 353 to 185. However, Crickitt's affiliation with the Yellows seems to have been nominal and fleeting: his bank was a rival to Cornwall and Spooner's. It is unlikely he had attained senior office just to share the Corporation's business with his competitors. In 1785 Crickett was made a member of the Twentyfour.<sup>88</sup>

The importance of raising and dispersing large amounts of cash at elections was reflected in the rise of persistent political clubs from the 1780s.<sup>89</sup> Both the portmen and the twentyfour were active in political clubs. One of the more important of these was the "Samaritan" or "Loyal Ark Mason Society" which was active from at least 1790. It was ostensibly founded as a friendly society to provide for illness, unemployment, etc., but it also had a rule in its charter that members would support a fellow member's candidacy for Parliament if he was nominated by a majority of the Club's twelve, self-electing governors.<sup>90</sup> The Club also assisted the portmen's candidates for the bailiwick in this way. By the early nineteenth century one of these clubs, possibly the twentyfourmen's, evolved into the notorious Wellington Club whose exclusive and declared function was to deliver a majority of freeman votes for the maximum amount

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.; *Universal British Directory*... , iii, 420-23; SRO/I, C2/11, "Alphabetical list of Freemen admitted, 1722-1822".

<sup>89</sup> In the early nineteenth century there was some recollection of clubs as early as 1725. But there is little other evidence of them; and such as there is suggests that they were primarily social clubs whose membership crossed political divisions. J. Ford, *A Suffolk Garland* (Ipswich, 1818), pp. 180-182. O' Gorman, *Voters*..., pp. 332, and on clubs more generally, pp. 323-34.

<sup>90</sup> BL. Add. MS 25334, Batley, "Collections", ff. 12-13.

of cash, which would then be disbursed amongst the freemen with, presumably, a bonus to the Club's principal officers. When the portmen and twentyfour agreed not have a contest for an office, the Wellington Club is said have sought a candidate to provoke a round of treating and bribery.<sup>91</sup>

Yet the Wellington Club in the 1820s was not characteristic of Ipswich politics between the 1760s and 1790s. The costs of elections are difficult to verify, but the reported £3,000 spent by Sir Richard Lloyd before he abandoned his challenge to Vernon in 1754, the £8,000 Edward Cruttenden spent to finish last in 1768, and the £2,000 estimated as needed by John Cator and William Wollaston in 1784, make it difficult to argue for an obvious trend in electoral costs or corruption.<sup>92</sup> But while electoral contests grew more frequent and more costly, it should not be assumed that politics was overwhelmingly corrupt. As O'Gorman has argued, elections clearly involved treating and some bribery which was undoubtedly influential, but it cannot be argued that, in towns with electorates the size of Ipswich, elections became simply matters of one faction out-bidding the other for the electorate's support. Such a view under-estimates other principles of affiliation and popular cognisance and interest in issues of substance. Moreover, it ignores the impracticality of producing enough cash to provide sufficient bribes to the nearly 600 voters who, by the 1780s, might participate in the parliamentary elections and the more frequent Corporation contests.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the costly, contentious politics in boroughs the size of Ipswich in the later eighteenth century was seen by some contemporaries as restraining corruption and increasing the accountability of elected officers. "Eureunetes", in a fierce criticism of the municipal corporations in 1787, held that it was the smaller corporations without large electorates which were "the greatest sinks of corruption". The officers and representatives of the boroughs with larger electorates were seen as less able to dominate their electorates.<sup>94</sup> Gerard Vanneck, a local gentleman, refused to stand for Parliament at Ipswich in 1790

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<sup>91</sup> *RCMC*, pp. 2298-99; Webb, *Manor and the Borough*, pp. 562-57.

<sup>92</sup> BL Add. MS 32735, Newcastle Mss., Hardwicke to Newcastle, 24 April 1754, ff. 178-9, cited in Namier, *Structure of Politics*, p. 110 n.2; Namier and Brooke, *History of Parliament*, vol. 2, p. 381.

<sup>93</sup> O' Gorman, *Voters*, pp. 158-164; H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 43-4.

<sup>94</sup> [Ereunetes], "Reflections", p. 105.

“because he found the politics of that place would render him liable to receive instructions”.<sup>95</sup> G.R. Clarke defended the character of Ipswich’s politics, asserting that:

we do not coincide with those exceedingly meek-spirited politicians who contend that party spirit has been the ruin of the town; on the contrary, we are convinced that the nicety of the balance has tended to excite emulation -- that the town has improved and flourished, and will continue to improve and flourish under its strong and stimulating influence. It arouses in the mind of every man, a sense of his own rights; it keeps the place from stagnating into careless indifference respecting justice and liberty, and we are bold to assert, that a great deal more good than harm arises from the legitimate and appropriate direction of the spirit of party.

Writing during the costly, contentious electoral battles of the 1820s, even Clarke admitted, however, that there were times when the vast sums spent on electioneering might be better used for public works such as the completion of the new town hall.<sup>96</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

National issues, however important, had to fit into the local terrain of corporate politics. This political landscape was shaped by the Corporation’s constitution, the character of the local leadership, and the particular issues and circumstances which demanded corporate action or which made who held office a matter of importance. The elections of members of parliament were undoubtedly major political events in the town, but the outcomes of those contests depended on much more than the Whig or Tory, ministry or opposition, tags of the candidates.

As there were no significant changes to the Corporation’s constitution over the course of the eighteenth century, the shifting character of the town’s politics has been examined through four periods which exhibit distinctive patterns of contention and political organisation. While the patterns of what might be called elite politics have provided the basic framework for this study of Corporation’s politics, it is clear that the wider community, and the freemen in particular, were central to the political process.

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<sup>95</sup> Namier and Brooke, *House of Commons, 1754-90*, vol. 2, p. 372.

<sup>96</sup> G.R. Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 172.



The fact that all the senior offices and many lesser ones were subject to election by the freeman, together with the size of the active freemanry, ranging from 300 to 700 voters over the course of the century, meant that Corporation politics turned on the ability of leaders to assert influence in the Great Court or respond to the prevailing sentiments there.

Earlier in the discussion it was observed that, because the Corporation's constitution spread authority amongst various annually elected offices whose jurisdictional limits and relations were not formally defined, contention both between and for offices could undermine the effectiveness of local government.<sup>97</sup> Ipswich's constitution provided a system of officeholding which worked well for a cohesive elite. Yet at the same time, the constitution could undermine that cohesion by providing for a relatively large freemen electorate, whose power to select each of the senior Corporation officers had the potential to produce much contention. In the early decades of the eighteenth century the partisan politics characterised by the ascent of Cooper Gravenor revealed the weakness of the system. Corporation debt grew as electoral battles and litigation pitted aspirant officeholders against Gravenor and his allies. Following his defeat and the ascent of a portmen dominated governing elite in 1722, electoral competition waned, as did concerns about Corporation indebtedness. After 1739, with the advent of Admiral Vernon, electoral battles resumed for both the parliamentary seats and senior Corporation offices. But this renewal of contention was different from that of Cooper Gravenor's day in two important respects. Firstly, Vernon's popularity as a naval hero and patriotic critic of the central government introduced a basis of appeal to the freemen which had not been evident in Ipswich politics since before the ascent of Gravenor. On the basis of this appeal it became possible to challenge the portmen's political strength which had relied upon personal connection, social affiliation and patronage. Secondly, the renewal of political contention after the long period of portmen domination differed from the Cooper Gravenor decades in that it was founded on divisions between the Portmen and the Twentyfour. Cooper Gravenor drew support

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<sup>97</sup> See above pp. 106-7.

(and criticism) from both bodies, but after 1754 factions began to coalesce around the two components of the Assembly. Since the Portmen supplied four of the seven justices, and the Twentyfourmen provided the twelve high constables, hostility between these groups made smooth administration difficult. From the 1760s, as contention persisted and the factions hardened, the Corporation's debt mounted as elections became more costly and the pressures grew to exploit offices politically. By the end of the century the costs of elections and, perhaps, the expectation of the exploitation of office, drove the Corporation's debt yet higher. The costs of acquiring office prompted enduring political clubs for the management of voters and finance, and the town's bankers became central figures in its political life. The defeat of William Wollaston in 1784 revealed how the management of finance had become central to politics.

Throughout the century the freemanry played a vital role in the Corporation's politics. The growing number of voters and their importance in the selection of officeholders was obviously a central factor in the escalating costs of elections. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to see the Corporation's elections merely as votes auctions, and the freemanry as utterly venal. The success of Vernon's patriotic appeal in the face of what must of have been the formidable patronage and influence of the portmen who dominated the Corporation's senior offices, makes clear that the town's electorate was animated by other issues. Moreover, although money undoubtedly created influence, even in the 1780s and 1790s, when the ancient Corporation was rapidly moving towards the sorts of corrupt politics described by the municipal commissioners and the Webbs, there were other matters influencing voters' choices. For instance, high grain prices and the popular disorder they threatened, disputes over establishing an improvement commission, the proposed Stowmarket navigation, and the renewal of major Corporation assets like the shambles and the Handford mill, would have all excited much local interest, and so the measures proposed and the men to be responsible for them were important issues for resident freemen voters.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: PARTICIPATION AND DIVERSIFICATION**

To assess more fully the character of the government of eighteenth-century Ipswich, this chapter considers how different segments of the town's society participated in its politics and governance. Through an understanding how various elements of the society participated and in what different ways, it is possible to see more clearly what were the aims and capabilities of the Corporation, and also how public authority and political power was distributed through the Corporation and the wider community. The previous discussion has already examined the recruitment of officeholders from several occupational types and across Ipswich's wealth strata in order to show how the characteristics of the Corporation and parish personnel affected local government. This chapter takes a wider view of the question of participation. Groups which can be variously distinguished in terms of social identity or legal status are examined in relation to their ability to pursue their particular interests through the types of offices they held or the forms of political interaction available to them. Changes in this wider participation had important implications for the Corporation's own role as the pre-eminent institution of local authority.

### **1. Social Identities and Participation**

As already noted, the governing elite which monopolised the senior offices of the Corporation was not composed of the richest men in town, although these officers were certainly amongst the more prosperous members of the community.<sup>1</sup> It was also seen that the lesser offices were held by range of individuals whose personal wealth rankings within the community varied considerably. Wealth, of course, was not the only determinant of participation in governance and politics. Not unexpectedly, gender and age characteristics were other important factors.

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<sup>1</sup> See above pp. 111-3.

Although women were not granted the freedom, they were certainly required to pay rates on properties they owned within the town. As Table 7.1 suggests, in the middle years of the eighteenth century, a significant number of women were ratepayers. That there was no perceived link between rate paying and entitlement to participate in government is evident in the patterns of officeholding, and was consistent with the general principles of corporate government. Although there was no explicit prohibition against women becoming freemen and holding any of the senior offices of the Corporation, in practice they never did so.

**Table 7.1: Female Rate Payers, 1755-60**

<b>Rates Paid</b>	<b>No. of Female Ratepayers</b>	<b>% of all Female Ratepayers</b>	<b>Total No. of All Ratepayers</b>	<b>Females as a % of All Ratepayers</b>
<b>0-£3 19s</b>	102	51.2	604	16.9
<b>£4-£8 19s</b>	50	24.9	336	14.5
<b>£9-£16 19s</b>	36	17.6	208	17.3
<b>£17-£49 19s</b>	16	7.8	155	10.3
<b>£50+</b>	1	0.5	49	2.0

*Sources:* see Chapter Four, note 10.

Women did, however, hold some other offices. Occasionally, women served as overseers. Anne Sparkes, a wealthy widow who held a lease on the Corporation's Stoke Mill worth £53 per annum, was an overseer in the parish of St. Peter's in the 1720s. The parish's records suggest that she was personally active as an overseer and kept her own accounts. The Municipal Commissioners reported that from 1825 to the date of their report, 1833, the town gaoler had been a woman. She was the widow of the former gaoler, but clearly held the office permanently in her own right.<sup>2</sup> Shani D'Cruz has suggested that in Colchester women were occasionally involved as brokers in administrative matters, sometimes representing third parties in their dealings with parish

<sup>2</sup> SRO/I, FB101/A1/3, St. Peters Parish, Overseers' Accounts; SRO/I, C9/11/138 Chamberlains' Accounts, 1722. Other accounts of the activities of female overseers include: *East Anglian Magazine*, vol. i, 1885-6, pp. 309, 320; Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 108; RCMC, p. 2301. Another instance of a female gaoler was reported in the Shropshire Quarter Sessions papers for July 1716. Offley Wakeman, *Shropshire County Records* (Shrewsbury, 1901), vol. ii, p. 26.

overseers.<sup>3</sup> It is conceivable that a wealthy woman like Anne Sparkes, who was able to obtain a valuable lease of Corporation property, was able to exert some influence in administrations and politics. Unfortunately, the surviving records do not provide much evidence of such informal roles at Ipswich. On the other hand, although specifically identified as the instigators in only one market disturbance, it seems likely that women in Ipswich, as elsewhere, were active in this wider sense of political action throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Age was a much less definite determinant of participation in the town's governance, but it seems clear that most men joining the Portmen or Twentyfour were over thirty years old. John Sparowe's thirteen terms as bailiff were served at various points between his thirty-third and sixty-fourth birthdays -- an age range which appears to have been typical for that office.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that few men could afford the time and expense of higher office before their own careers or businesses were well established. Accordingly, there is little evidence of men in their twenties being very active in the higher offices. Lionel Tollemache, the fourth Earl Dysart, became high steward in 1729 at the age of twenty-one; but, of course, as a landed aristocrat, his living was already made and the appointment followed the death of his father in a period when the stewardship was effectively a hereditary right of the Earls Dysart. The third Earl and former high steward had died two years previously, when Lionel was only nineteen. That the Corporation waited until he was twenty-one may suggest some notion of sufficient maturity for office. Age was explicitly held in law not to be grounds for the removal of corporation officers. When considering the removal of a seventy year old Gloucester alderman on account of his age, the courts held that "...this is no cause to

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<sup>3</sup> D'Cruz, "Provincial England", p. 79. For the Webbs' discussion of the roles of women in corporations and statutory authorities see: Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, pp. 448, 452, 474, 480.

<sup>4</sup> BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections..."; E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), reprinted in idem, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991; reprint, Harmondsworth, 1993), pp. 233-4; J. Rule, *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* (Harlow, Essex, 1992), p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> Sparowe family letters and genealogical documents in the possession of Mr. G. Colchester, London; GCB, 1721 to 1753. This compares with findings for Essex jurors over a similar period: P.J.R. King, "Illiterate Plebeians, Easily Misled": Jury Composition, Experience, and Behaviour in Essex, 1735-1815" in Cockburn and Green, *Twelve Good Men and True*, p. 262.

remove him; for some Men at that Age have good Parts and Understanding."<sup>6</sup> The Great Court did, however, grant petitions to resign from the Twentyfour without having to pay a fine on account of "the age and infirmity" of the officeholder. The political rhetoric which survives in pamphlets and newspapers does not suggest age was much of an issue amongst the qualities thought important for officeholders. Good judgement, independence, connection to the town, and experience were characteristics of greater importance.<sup>7</sup>

Religious affiliation was another factor which bore upon an individual's ability to participate in the politics and governance of the town. Nonconformists had been active in Ipswich since the early 1660s with the first chapel built in 1700 and others following throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> In the absence of adequate lists of dissenting congregations, it has not been possible to establish comprehensively the religious adherence of the Corporation's various officers and political leaders.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, evidence of nonconformist officeholding and political activity must be gleaned from occasional comments by contemporaries in letters and pamphlets, the evidence of wills, and other documents.<sup>10</sup> Under the Corporation Act (1661), persons who had not taken communion under the rites of the Church of England in the year prior to their election, could not legally hold municipal corporation offices.<sup>11</sup> Yet the practice of occasional conformity, the less than rigorous enforcement of the Corporation Act, and, from 1727, the passage of frequent Indemnity Acts meant that dissenters were able to hold office and participate in corporation politics.<sup>12</sup> In 1756 a member of the Twentyfour objected that some of the recent appointments to that body

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<sup>6</sup> Hazard's Case, An Alderman of Gloucester. 2 Rol. Abridg. 476 quoted in: *The Law of Corporation*, p. 328.

<sup>7</sup> GCB, 17Oct. 1724; 29 Sept. 1758.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 242-8; Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> SRO/I, FK3/1/1, Tacket Street Congregation, Church Book, which covers the period 1792-1832; SRO/I, FK2/1/1, Baptist Registers, and SRO/I, FK2/2/2, Baptist Minute Books, span 1775-1801; SRO/I, FK4/1/2/1-2, St. Nicholas Street Unitarian/Presbyterian Meeting, Register of Baptisms.

<sup>10</sup> The records of Ipswich's eighteenth-century nonconformist congregations tend to survive from only the last decades of the century. See: SRO/I, FK3/1/11. The other source types are cited as they are referred to below.

<sup>11</sup> 13 Car. II, st. 2, c.1 (1661); For the early implementation of the Act and its general failure to exclude dissenters from corporations see P. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns, 1650-1730* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 85-105, 124-31.

<sup>12</sup> Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*, pp. 84-5; Corfield, *Impact...*, p. 154.

were invalid because the new men had not taken the Sacrament in the previous year, but the matter came to nothing.<sup>13</sup> In practice the Corporation Act was not much of a barrier to participation in Corporation affairs for many Protestant nonconformists. Since Church of England clergymen never became justices at Ipswich in the eighteenth century and the bench was dominated by portmen who normally counted dissenters among their allies, it is not surprising that there was little evidence of the harassment of dissenters and frequently no obstruction of their participation in politics and government.

Political contention and factional alignment along religious lines, which may have restricted dissenter participation in government in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was a less important factor after the 1720s when dissenters became bailiffs, assemblymen, and held other important posts. This is not to assert that tensions based on religious affiliations were insignificant: as already noted, throughout the eighteenth century some pamphleteers' political invective occasionally appealed to religious prejudices. Moreover, the potential for religious divisions to interfere with the ordinary course of governance was evident in the 1712 accusation that a dissenting overseer of St. Peter's parish had threatened to destroy a woman's settlement certificate unless she stopped attending Church of England services and returned to the overseer's dissenting congregation. Yet this sort of political appeal or disruption of the process of administration on the basis of religious affiliation very rarely appears in the records.<sup>14</sup> The acceptance of nonconformist participation was best exemplified in the adoption of an important civic ritual. The parading of the assemblymen and the civic maces to the St. Nicholas Street Chapel in 1779, when both bailiffs were dissenters, rather than, as usual, to the "Corporation Church", St. Mary Tower, reflected the acceptance of dissenters' participation in town government. That the maces were not allowed past the Chapel doors, however, showed that religious sensitivities remained important.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Assembly Book, 2 July 1756.

<sup>14</sup> Devereux Edgar, "Entry Book", f. 345.

<sup>15</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 248; and see above 228-9, 242-3.

In the 1790s, amidst national proposals for the repeal of restrictions on Catholics and non-conformists and anxieties for social order, it was observed that “[d]ifferences in *religious* and *political* principles run in greater extremes in the County of *Suffolk*, than they have been known to do for near half a Century past.”<sup>16</sup> Yet the same observer doubted the real political vehemence of such sentiment. With some dismay he suggested that Suffolk MP, Sir John Rous, had lost more popularity amongst the voters for his support for a new tax on light carts than he had ever gained by his opposition to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. The Wider Community and the Process of Government**

After gender, the most important distinction with respect to participation in the town’s politics and government was membership of the Corporation. All of the town’s inhabitants were subject to the authority of the Corporation’s justices, were potentially eligible for its charities’ relief, and might even be employed by the Corporation, but the freemen’s enjoyment of specific economic privileges and the right to participate in the deliberations and votes of the Great Court, clearly set them apart in terms of opportunities to participate in the town’s government. Beyond the senior offices which were the preserve of the assemblymen, offices or jobs in the Corporation were normally not subject to a legal requirement that the holder be a freemen. In practice, however, such posts usually went to freemen who could offer their Great Court votes in support of members of the Corporate elite. Thus, in 1754, when the twentyfourmen John Gravenor and Thomas Richardson ended the long reign of portmen-bailiffs, there was a particularly high turnover of lesser officers such as sergeants at mace, beadles and market officials -- all of whom had voted for the new bailiffs.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *A Critical Review of the Ipswich Journal; or Candid Remarks on the Disputes Both Religious and Politic Which Occur in That Paper, For the Month of Janurary, 1790* (Ipswich, 1790), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, For February 1790, p.10

<sup>18</sup> GCB, 29 Sept.1754; SRO/I., S. Ips.352.004, *The Poll for the Bailives of Ipswich, Taken Sept. 8, 1754* (Ipswich, 1754); and see pp. 237-41.



Officeholding, even of the lesser offices, was clearly the most important means of participation in government and politics. Such opportunities for the exercise of some measure of authority and association with the Corporate elite were potentially numerous. In addition to the thirty-six portmen and twentyfourmen, there were between forty and fifty other posts held by those outside the Assembly. In addition, the town's twelve parishes provided a further ninety parochial offices which were important elements of governance. Altogether this made for a potential of about 180 offices before the establishment of the statutory *ad hoc* commissions after 1793.<sup>19</sup> The number of offices and jobs that related to local government varied over time; and the possibility of multiple officeholders means that it is difficult to be precise about the numbers of people who were formally involved in conducting the business of government. Nonetheless, assuming that about 160 people were normally holding parochial and corporate offices at any given time, it can be estimated that, in 1700, this was the equivalent of about 32% of the freemanry. Even after a period of population growth, the equivalent to perhaps 21% of the freemen, or six percent of the adult male population of Ipswich, were officeholders or in the employ of the Corporation and the parishes by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Although a quarter to a one third of the freemen or some six to eight percent of the adult male population could potentially hold some sort of official post in any given year, the extent of participation in the governance of the Town was restricted by the level of turnover in these offices. It has been noted that consecutive or frequent terms in a particular office or cluster of offices narrowed the number of persons who might obtain a senior office in the Corporation.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, many of the lesser offices were retained for substantial terms. By the early decades of the eighteenth century the distribution of these offices was no longer subject to what the Webbs have called the

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<sup>19</sup> D' Cruz has identified approximately 280 official positions in eighteenth century Colchester. D'Cruz, "The Middling Sort", p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> GCB, 29 Sept. 1754; *Sessions Book*, 25 April 1768; *RCMC*, pp. 2292, 2299-2304; Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, pp. 60-1. It should again be noted that not all those holding Corporation, and especially, parish offices were necessarily freemen.

<sup>21</sup> See above pp. 142-44.

system of obligatory service maintained by the rotation of offices.<sup>22</sup> Half of the petty constables serving in 1727 were still in office five years later; and nearly one-third of petty constables retained their offices for at least five years from 1754 and 1791.<sup>23</sup> The sergeants at mace also held office for long terms: all four men serving in 1754 were still in office ten years later. Similar patterns of service can be traced in the 1720s and 1730s.<sup>24</sup> In some instances a job could be a virtual life appointment which might pass from father to son, as in the case of George and William Jobson who were water bailiffs from at least 1753 through to the late 1790s.<sup>25</sup> The beadles, various market supervision officers and dues collectors were also appointed for indefinite terms “at the pleasure of this Corporation”. The infrequency of these appointments suggests that these jobs were held for extensive periods. These appointments do not appear to have been moments of significant political contention until the second half the eighteenth century. After James Bridge’s appointment as town crier in 1723 the office was not contested until his retirement in 1759. He survived the purge of office by the new twentyfourmen bailiffs in 1754 despite having voted for their opponents. Lesser offices like the crier or waterbailiff did not usually go to a vote, except in a period of particular contention such as the early 1790s, when the strength of the factions in the Great Court was nearly in balance. For the most of the eighteenth century, offices other than those held by assemblymen normally passed uncontested and were typically held for periods of five or more years. The balance of their benefits and burdens to the officeholder ensured that there were always candidates who would seek to retain these jobs, but such posts seldom provoked the sorts of electoral battles fought over the parliamentary seats or bailiffs’ offices.<sup>26</sup>

Parochial offices did not follow this pattern. Unsurprisingly, the burdens of the overseer’s office ensured that the office was passed on each year. In the large, expanding parish of St. Clement’s the offices of warden and overseer were never held

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<sup>22</sup> Webb, *Statutory Authorities*, p.361-5; Webb, *The Manor and the Borough*, vol.ii, pp. 125-26.

<sup>23</sup> See Table 4.2, p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> Sessions Rolls, 1721-1734, 1753-1764

<sup>25</sup> During a period of fierce party contention, William Jobson lost the job for two years, 1790-1, but was re-elected from 1792. GCB, 29 Oct. 1754, 29 Sept. 1790, 29 Sept. 1791, 8 Sept. 1792.

<sup>26</sup> For the incentives to hold office see above pp. 131-44.

by any person more than once during the periods sampled in the 1720s, 1750s, and 1780s. In the smaller, wealthier and less administratively onerous parish of St. Peter's, churchwardens tended to serve two-year terms, while overseers got away with a single term. Occasionally, men who became surveyors appeared more willing to hold the post several times. Thomas Wilder was surveyor of St. Peter's four out of the five years 1720-24; two others served three successive years in that period. However, paid offices such as sexton, vestry clerk and parish clerk were held for longer periods comparable to many corporation offices.<sup>27</sup> Aside from the overseers and churchwardens, posts under the corporation tended to be held for more lengthy periods.

The official contacts amongst corporate and parochial officers over these periods were likely to have produced a body of people familiar with one another and who, despite the divisions arising out of Corporation politics, nonetheless had a distinctive place in the community. There was not quite a governing class, but certainly a discrete element of the community had a particular interest in the administration of Corporation and parochial affairs.

Naturally, the experience of government provided by these various parish and lesser corporate offices differed. The men who served as beadles or crane porters, despite holding corporation posts, did not wield much authority nor were they to exercise much discretion in the performance of their duties. Yet overseers, petty constables and market supervision officers, for example, had to show much judgement in their functions, as the points of contact between the more prosperous people who dominated the institutions of public authority and the other members of the community whom they sought to govern. Such offices were the vital mediating positions through which much of the power relations of the community were negotiated.<sup>28</sup> Historians of crime have identified the grand and petty (trial) juries as being particularly important in this role. In his argument that the administration of the criminal law engaged a wide

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<sup>27</sup> SRO/I, FB98/G2/2,6,7&14, St. Clement's, Parish Rate Books, 1722-1728, 1754-1758 & 1786-1791; SRO/I, FB101/G2/2&2, St. Peter's, Parish Rate Books, 1720-1726 & 1777-1794.

<sup>28</sup> These problems have been explored in: K. Wrightson, "Two Concepts of Law" in J. Brewer, and J. Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1980) and J.R. Kent, *The English Village Constable, 1580-1642* (Oxford, 1982).

spectrum of society, King has noted that petty juries “were drawn predominately from either the middling group or below”. Beattie has similarly suggested that the grand jurors of the county quarter sessions were men of middling social rank whose role, both in the criminal trial process and in dealing with administrative matters by presentment, made them “the one authentic and legitimate voice of country opinion”.<sup>29</sup> The importance of the borough sessions at Ipswich made jury service a significant occasion for members of the wider community to participate in the process of government. Jurors did not have to be freemen; in 1755, for example, more than 70% of those called for petty jury duty and more than 60% of those called for grand jury selection were not listed as freemen voters in the previous year’s poll.<sup>30</sup> Thus, freemen were, as a group, slightly over-represented on juries, given that they constituted an estimated one-quarter of the Town’s adult male population.

Certainly, the most wealthy members of the community did not participate in the business of the sessions in this way. Jury duty was clearly an important activity which could be undertaken by townsmen of modest means who might otherwise not hold a significant corporate or parochial office. The sessions heard all but capital offences, and the sums of money and practical significance of the highway rates and works promoted by presentments made at the sessions, meant that the jurors had a crucial role in some of the central activities of government. Various historians have noted the potential for conflict between the bench and jurors.<sup>31</sup> Such tensions are difficult to detect in the records of the Ipswich sessions, but the potential for disagreement on important issues needs to be acknowledged here.

While this independence of juries meant that a wide spectrum of people beyond the corporate elite had an impact on important matters, it is necessary to note the limits of this participation in the community’s governance. In the first place, jury service did

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<sup>29</sup> King, “Illiterate Plebeians”, pp. 263-74; idem, “Decision-Makers”, p. 51; Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, pp. 320-3.

<sup>30</sup> *The Law of Corporation*, p. 80; SRO/I., S. Ips.352.004, *The Poll for the Bailives of Ipswich, Taken Sept. 8, 1754*. (Ipswich, 1754); Sessions Book, 2 July 1755.

<sup>31</sup> P.J.R. King, “Crime, Law and Society in Essex, 1740-1820”, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, (Univ. of Cambridge, 1982), pp. 321-33; idem, “Gleaners, Farmers and the Failure of Legal Sanctions in England, 1750-1850” in *Past and Present* 125, p. 138; T.H. Green, *Verdict According to Conscience: Perspectives on the English Criminal Trial Jury, 1200-1800* (Chicago, 1985); Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*.

not provide many individuals with the chance to participate in the sessions' business. As noted above, there were typically only one or two jury trials per year at Ipswich in the 1720s and 1750s; and by the early 1790s, there were usually four trials per year.<sup>32</sup> Twenty-four or thirty-six people might be called to serve on juries in most years. That was hardly comparable to the nearly 150 men who attended Great Court meetings in a typical year in the 1750s (see Table 7.2). Moreover, Ipswich's borough sessions normally met only twice a year. In the later eighteenth century, as the justices handled more matters in petty or other special sessions, eighteen months could pass between the convening of full sessions at which juries would be assembled. The grand jurors' responsibilities for making presentments for roads rapidly diminished after the establishment of the Paving Commission in 1793. Thus, while the population of the town grew, the numbers of juries remained static and their responsibilities declined. Compared with other offices, there was a very high turn-over of both grand and petty jurors. As Table 7.2 indicates, nearly ninety percent of petty jurors served only once within the five-year spans that have been sampled. The frequency of grand jury service was slightly higher, but with more than 99% of jurors serving no more than twice, it is clear that juries were not cohesive bodies or dominated by groups of men for whom this was an regular means of participation in town government.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Table 2.3, pp. 64.

<sup>33</sup> This frequency of service is comparable to that found by among the Essex Assize petty juries prior to 1784. From that year onwards almost all those who served on an Assize jury could expect to be called again three years later. No such practice of rotating juries was, however, instituted at Ipswich. King, "Illiterate Plebeians...", pp. 284-7.

**Table 7.2: Frequency of Jury Service**

<b>Grand Jurors</b>			
	<b>1721-23</b>	<b>1755-59</b>	<b>1791-95</b>
<b>No. of Times Served</b>			
1	61.8%	71%	75.9%
2	27.3%	27.4%	24.1%
3	5.5%	1.6%	---
4	5.5%	---	---
<b>Total No. of Jurors</b>	55	62	54
<b>Total No. of Selections</b>	85	81	67
<b>Petty Jurors</b>			
	<b>1721-23</b>		<b>1791-95</b>
<b>No. of Times Served</b>			
1	87.8%		88.9%
2	10.8%		11.1%
3	1.4%		---
<b>Total No. of Jurors</b>	74		54
<b>Total No. of Selections</b>	84		60

Source: Sessions Books, 1721-95, Sessions Rolls, 1721-95

The high turn-over of jurors is not, perhaps, surprising given both contemporary legal thinking on the composition of juries and the burdens that the office imposed. Statute forbade the imposition of jury duty on anyone within two years of previous service on a county jury.<sup>34</sup> While the statute's provisions do not seem to have applied to incorporated towns, it is clear that recurrent jury service was thought neither fair nor prudent. Jury duty meant an individual was drawn away from work without the sorts of remuneration which were available in other forms of corporation service. Moreover, jurors were required to make public judgements which could be unpopular or likely to antagonise at least some members of the community. Their presentments could trigger parish, highway, and marshalsea rate increases or require the Corporation to spend its

<sup>34</sup> Burn, *Justice of the Peace*, vol. 2, pp. 485-6. In Yorkshire, perhaps owing to distances jurors might have to travel and the adequate numbers of men qualified for service, fours had to pass before reappointment, while in Rutland, presumably for the opposite reasons, only one-year intervals were required.

funds on costly public works. Rendering judgements in criminal trials which resulted in fines, imprisonment, or even transportation, was an unpleasant business if the community was divided over the guilt or acceptable punishment of the accused.<sup>35</sup> Fines for avoidance of jury duty were not common but particular sessions may have been known to be dealing with unpopular business. Thus, in 1739 ten men were fined five shillings each for failing to appear for jury duty after they had been empanelled.<sup>36</sup>

Through jury duty a wide range of the rate-paying population was involved in settling some of the most important matters of local government. Jury duty was thus significant as a form of participation in government which was not dominated by the corporate elite. Yet, their modest numbers, the infrequency of activity and the high turn-over of jurors meant they did not constitute a powerful element of town government. Their significance lies more as another occasion, like the Great Court and the holding of lesser corporation and parochial offices, when the process of government depended on men outside the corporate elite, and so required that the elite take cognisance of wider interests.

Through officeholding, people representing a wide range of social and economic identities were able to participate in various aspects of the town's governance. Yet, it should be acknowledged that this sort of participation was limited by the fixed number of offices and the domination of more powerful offices by wealthy townsmen. Long terms of office in many of the posts open to men of modest means, together with the infrequency of sessions meetings involving juries, further restricted the numbers of occasions on which townsmen could participate in government. Moreover, officeholding was dominated by members of the Corporation. This owed something to customary notions that the freemanry comprised the propertied members of the community to whom management could be safely entrusted. More importantly, however, non-freemen were less likely to get jobs when the exchange of offices for electoral support was a central feature of the political system. Despite these limitations,

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<sup>35</sup> For an account of eighteenth-century complaints of the burdens of jury duty, see Langford, *Public Life*, p. 280.

<sup>36</sup> Sessions Book, 20 Aug. 1739.

corporate and parochial offices, together with jury duty, provided numerous opportunities for people representing a wide spectrum of social and economic identities to participate in some measure to the community's government.

### **3. The Political Participation of the Wider Community**

It was through political action, rather than officeholding, that the greatest number of people were engaged with the Corporation and other institutions of public authority. Membership in the Corporation sharply distinguished the forms of political participation within the town. Nonetheless, political action and engagement with the Corporation was not exclusive to the freemen.

#### **3.1 The Freemen**

The freemen were regarded as the only persons with the legitimate right to participate in Corporation affairs. This meant entitlement to attend the Great Court and vote in its elections for the Corporation officers, including the town's two Members of Parliament. As has been observed, the Great Court's role in the determination or validation of a very wide range of corporation business gave the freedom its political significance.<sup>37</sup> In the absence of suitable records is not possible to be certain of the number of freemen who might theoretically have exercised these rights in a given year. The Great Court Book and various poll books do suggest, however, that there were about 500 active freemen in the early eighteenth century, rising to more than 700 by the 1790s. Of course, the freemen voters in parliamentary elections, and even those for the bailiffs, were not all Ipswich residents. It was reported that 158 of the 297 voters supporting one parliamentary candidate in 1784 were not resident in Ipswich. More than half of these non-resident voters came from more than fifteen miles to vote, and fifty-six had come from more than sixty miles away. The candidate, John Cator, himself a stranger to Ipswich, was accused of widely bribing and treating voters, and was said to be much

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<sup>37</sup> See above pp. 49-54; SRO/I, HD 490/1, Private letter of Humphrey Rant, 1755? in a collection of Ms. documents in a book entitled "Private and Proof Portraits".



more heavily dependent upon non-resident support than were the other candidates. By 1833 non-resident voters were an even much bigger factor in the town's elections. The municipal commissioners reported that only 349 of 1,130 freemen were residents of Ipswich. Non-resident voters were widely held to be generally uninterested in the politics or affiliations of the candidates, and were essentially selling their votes in the rounds of treating, bribery and other forms of patronage which became more important in the last decades of Corporation's existence.<sup>38</sup> Contests for offices other than the bailiffs or members of parliament, and votes on resolutions before the Great Court were much less likely to unleash the costly campaigns which drew non-resident or otherwise uninterested voters to the polls. Such local contests suggest that there may have been only 160 to 270 politically active freemen in the 1720s, and perhaps between 150 and 360 in the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>39</sup> Even such votes, however, were uncommon instances of high levels of freeman participation in the Corporation's business. As Table 7.3 suggests, less than a quarter of the ordinary freemen (i.e. not members of the Assembly) who were residents of Ipswich attended meetings of the Great Court in the 1720s. This proportion is estimated to have fallen to about ten percent by the 1790s. Moreover, not only did attendance fall, meetings were held less frequently. Thus, during the eighteenth century, the Great Court became less significant as a means of freeman participation in Corporation affairs.

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<sup>38</sup> *Universal British Directory...*, iii, p. 422; Namier and Brook, *History of Parliament...*, vol. 2, p. 381; *RCMC*, p. 2338.

<sup>39</sup> SRO/I, K15/2, "A Collection of many polls taken upon different occasions...in electing Burgesses to serve in Parliament for the said Corporation choosing Bailiffs, Recorder, Honorary Freemen, Schoolmaster, Town home keeper" [Devereaux Edgar (ed.) ?], unpublished manuscript; SRO/I, S Ips.352.004, *The Poll for the Bailives of Ipswich, Taken Sept. 8, 1754*. (Ipswich, 1754); IHR, BC.25, *The Poll For Members of Parliament for the Borough of Ipswich; Taken March 16, 1768* (Ipswich, 1768); and IHR., BC.25, *The Poll for the Bailiffs and Town Clerk, September 8th, 1790* (Ipswich, 1790). Amongst the occasions which did not involve much venal incentive to vote were: a vote on a resolution to repossess the Town House; and the elections of treasurer (1722), guildholders (1722), common cryer (1759, 1785, 1790) and guides of Christ's Hospital (790): GCB, 7 June 1723; "A Collection of many polls..."; GCB, 29 Jan. 1759, 29 Sept. 1785, 29 Sept. 1790.

**Table 7.3: Attendance of Ordinary Freemen at Meetings of the Great Court\***

	1721-25	1756-60	1791-95
<b>No. of Meetings</b>	47	21	15
<b>Greatest Attendance</b>	118	61	48
<b>Lowest Attendance</b>	16	20	28
<b>Average Attendance</b>	49	37	39
<b>Attendances x Meetings</b>	2303	777	585
<b>Average Attendance as a % of Active Resident Freemen†</b>	22%	14%	10%

\* Freemen excluding members of the Portmen and Twentyfour

† Estimates of the number of active resident freemen are based on data from poll books

Source: SRO/I, C5/14/8-10, Great Court Book.

It is difficult to assess the significance of these levels of attendance at ordinary meetings of the Great Court. Problems in recruiting corporate personnel in some towns may have been linked to low attendance at common council meetings.<sup>40</sup> In eighteenth-century Ipswich, the Great Court was no longer enforcing obligatory service: most offices had sufficient remuneration or other benefits so that it was unnecessary to pluck freemen from amongst those at the Great Court. A more likely explanation for the small proportion of freemen attending is that few people were normally interested in the range of the quotidian business. Aside from elections and important resolutions with community-wide impact, most freemen only occasionally felt that the Court's business affected their interests. As meetings became less frequent and volumes of business dropped, freemen were increasingly disinclined to attend the Great Court: its agendas included fewer matters of great importance and thus the social and prestige value of attendance diminished. The long-term decline of the Great Court and the freemen's participation in its deliberations was reflected in the observation of a town historian who, in 1830, lamented that in the mid-seventeenth century freemen were fined two shillings and six pence for not attending the Great Court, while in the early nineteenth-

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<sup>40</sup> G. Jackson, *Hull*, pp. 326-7; Gauci, *Yarmouth*, pp. 26-32.

century some were paid that much to do so.<sup>41</sup> In the seventeenth century, fining non-attendees had prompted a substantial number of people to attend who were then recruited for Corporation business. In the early nineteenth century, the paying of some freemen to appear suggests a more venal process intended to ensure quorate sessions which could easily be managed by the governing elite making payments to selected freemen. The 1833 parliamentary commissioners investigating municipal corporations were told that this practice of payments was believed to have been “introduced by the Bailiffs when the election contests began” -- most probably they meant the period after 1754.<sup>42</sup> In other words, while freemen were always reluctant to attend the variously tedious or socially and politically hazardous meetings of the Great Court, changes in the means of attracting them reflected wider changes in the role of the freeman at those meetings and owed much to intensified, increasingly venal, party strife after the 1750s.

Although Corporation membership still conferred some commercial and tax privileges, its economic importance to most freemen by the eighteenth century was secondary to the freedom's value as an entitlement to participate in the town's formal political structures. This opportunity, together with whatever prestige, status and association attached to the freedom, meant there were always both townsmen and neighbouring country gentlemen who would take it up if approved by the Great Court. As is observed more fully above,<sup>43</sup> despite the growing critique of corporate regimes generally, and the unpleasant character Ipswich Corporation politics could occasionally assume, membership was still attractive and an important feature of public identity for many townsmen. In the political battles of the 1750s and 1760s, the propaganda of both portmen and freemen appealed to a sense of identity and the voter's interests as freemen. Certainly, claims to be defenders of the freemen's rights were often self-serving rhetoric, yet this language would not have been employed if it had no purchase.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, although the significance of the Great Court was declining as a

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<sup>41</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup> *RCMC*, p. 2306.

<sup>43</sup> See above, pp. 241-48.

<sup>44</sup> SRO/I, HD 490/, 1Briefing Notes for Rex. v. Richardson, in a Collection of Ms. documents in a book entitled "Private and Proof Portraits", f. 8; SRO/I, fS 324, "To the Freemen of the Borough of IPSWICH", 19 June 1755, in *A Collection of Printed Political Squibs and Papers Relating the County of*

deliberative forum from the 1760s, the right to participate in the election of the bailiffs, who were the chief justices and chose the remaining justices from the portmen, was of practical interest to those subject to their authority.

It has often been observed that the venal practice of politics in many corporations made possession of the freedom a profitable asset. Both the Webbs and the 1835 municipal commissioners' report depicted the Ipswich freemen as principally interested in Corporation membership for the purposes of selling their votes to the highest bidder. The Wellington Club, essentially an organisation for selling votes and distributing patronage and bribery, has been held up as the symbol of the corruption and decay of the Ipswich Corporation. As has been stressed repeated in this study, however, the electoral politics and conduct of the freemanry of the last decades before reform cannot be taken as characteristic of the eighteenth century as a whole.<sup>45</sup> There is no evidence of persistent activity of the Wellington Club or similar clubs before the 1790s. Moreover, prior to the Paving and Dock Commissions and Court of Requests, all established between 1793 and 1807, enough genuine business came before the Great Court that it did not simply become a vote bazaar.<sup>46</sup> It was not the case that most eighteenth-century freemen valued their Corporation membership purely for the cash or favours offered by aspiring officeholders seeking to buy votes. Only in the 1790s, as the Great Court met less frequently and its volumes of business diminished, while election contests came to involve greater spending by the candidates, did the value of the freedom begin to change. Increasingly, the wider freemanry's participation became confined to the annual ritual of voting. As governance passed from the Great Court, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the bribery, treating and patronage opportunities afforded by contested elections were a boon to rank-and-file freemen who were otherwise seldom engaged in the business of the Corporation.

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*Suffolk and the Borough of Ipswich from 1736 to 1840*. Collected by Thomas Baldock Ross, f. 1; *IP*, 8 Nov. 1766.

<sup>45</sup> See above pp. 14-5; 210-50.

<sup>46</sup> Webb, *Manor and the Borough*, pp. 560-68; *RCMC*, pp. 2311-13; Keith John Atton, "Municipal and Parliamentary Politics in Ipswich, 1818-1847" (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Univ. of London, 1979), p. 2.

Some historians have observed that in many towns the relegation of corporation freemen to a pool of voters was related to massive expansions of the freemanry as contending parties sought to admit large numbers of their own supporters.<sup>47</sup> There were a few occasions of mass admission of this sort at Ipswich. The most notorious was the admission of 127 men following John Gravenor and Richardson's seizing of power from the portmen in 1755. Three years later, 119 of those admissions were ruled illegal by the Court of King's Bench. Later, in 1790, 73 freemen admissions were also made in a single session of the Great Court shortly after the portmen recaptured the bailiwick from the twentyfourmen who had held it for five consecutive years.<sup>48</sup> Yet, as Table 7.4 indicates, such mass admissions were not common, and the practice at Ipswich was not comparable to that found elsewhere. As Nicholas Rogers has observed of Bristol, the political advantages obtained by one faction's expansion of the freemanry in this way were temporary and ultimately tremendously costly. For much of the eighteenth century, the factions at Ipswich were normally able to resist such a political strategy before the costs of elections span out of control. G.R. Clarke, looking back from the 1830s, remarked that by 1784 both of the town's factions were avoiding the creation of honorary freemen or admitting freemen by purchase.<sup>49</sup>

<b>Table 7.4: Freeman Admissions by Year *</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>1721</b>	<b>1722</b>	<b>1723</b>	<b>1724</b>	<b>1725</b>
<b>No.</b>	11	78	60	4	30
<b>Year</b>	<b>1754</b>	<b>1755</b>	<b>1756</b>	<b>1757</b>	<b>1758</b>
<b>No.</b>	34	5	5	2	11
<b>Year</b>	<b>1791</b>	<b>1792</b>	<b>1793</b>	<b>1794</b>	<b>1795</b>
<b>No.</b>	33	11	5	13	14
* Admissions subsequently ruled illegal are not shown Source: Great Court Book, (SRO/I, C5/14/8-10)					

The extent and sophistication of the freemen's engagement in corporate politics clearly declined during the eighteenth century. But it was not simply a long, slow

<sup>47</sup> Langford, *Public Life*, p. 215; Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>48</sup> GCB, 19 June 1755, 25 May 1758, 7 June 1790.

<sup>49</sup> Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, pp. 286-88; Clarke, *History ... of Ipswich*, p. 111.

decline characterised by obsolete institutions atrophying and an increasing corruption of a venal electorate. Certainly, by such important measures as frequency of meetings, volumes of business, and attendance, the Great Court was in decline. Yet the significance of these figures should not be exaggerated; the Great Court's constitutional role remained unchanged and, as will be seen below, it remained the pre-eminent institution of government until the 1790s. The meaning of elections and electoral practices also needs to be carefully considered. Again, it was not until the last two decades of the eighteenth century that developments in the electoral system began to seriously undermine the stability of the Corporation and its place in the community.

Government of the town was about administration and the power which administration conveyed. Accordingly, the elections for corporate offices were about men not measures, and patronage rather than policy. Occasionally, elections for the borough's parliamentary candidates may have produced contests in which issues and policy were more important, but such elections were much less frequent than those turning on the influence and appeal of individual candidates. That most freemen's participation in politics was focused on the selection of individual candidates and the importance of patronage and treating does not mean that politics was corrupt and so inhibited effective governance. On the contrary, the importance of personal bonds, the assessment of candidates for office in terms of what they could do for the town and/or for the individual voter, reflected a viable, socially important political system. The patronage, treating, and festivity, which were together central features of the electoral process, allowed the affirmation of connections based on commercial and social interdependence. In this way corporate politics was an important, constructive element of the community's life. This character of town politics, however, began to be undermined after the 1770s by the escalating costs of elections together with the intensity and persistence of faction. The rise of vote selling political associations like the Wellington Club in the early nineteenth century, and the massive spending on securing the support of large numbers of non-resident freemen, reflect the advent of new, unsustainable form of politics in which the freeman's interest could only be venal.

### 3.2 Political Engagement beyond the Freemanry

Although the politics of Corporate offices and elections were principally the domain of the freemen, these matters afforded some measure of participation for other members of the community. Hotly contested elections were not, for example, affairs for the freeman voters and candidates only. The 1754 bailiffs' election and the popular support shown for Edward Vernon in his campaigns for a parliamentary seat involved large crowds who included non-freemen. Such people were recruited or encouraged to participate by candidates and their supporters, both to create the impression of popularity and to intimidate opponents and their supporters. Contemporary reports suggest that treating, including the provision of drink, was used to mobilise such crowds.<sup>50</sup> In some instances it is clear that candidates and their causes were genuinely popular. Vernon had a patriotic appeal which was publicly expressed by many who were probably not freemen. Participation in the politics of the Corporation in this way by people who were not enfranchised can be seen as a form of engagement in a public event which had elements of theatre or ritual and afforded opportunities for entertainment, sociability, and the affirmation of individuals' associations with political and social groups.<sup>51</sup>

Civic ritual and public ceremonies had, of course, long been developed as central features of the culture of governance in corporate towns. As elsewhere, civic ritual and ceremony were used at Ipswich to affirm the legitimacy of the governing regime, to confirm the Corporation's rights, and to reinforce townsmen's loyalties and obligations to the Corporation and the wider community.<sup>52</sup> The parading of the assemblymen and the Corporate maces to the bailiffs' place of worship has been noted above. The performance of this act, following the selections of officers in September of each year,

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<sup>50</sup> *A Collection of Papers*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>51</sup> See O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties*, pp. 138-41; and idem., "Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780-1860" in *Past and Present* 135 (1992), pp. 79-115.

<sup>52</sup> C. Phythian-Adams, "Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year at Coventry, 1450-1550" in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (London, 1972), pp. 57-85; Borsay, "All the Town's a Stage" pp 228-58; R. Tittler, *The Architecture of Power, The Town Hall and the English Urban Community, 1500-1640* (Oxford, 1991).

was calculated to rally the community around the new leadership and to promote solidarity amongst the freemen who may have been divided in the course of the selection process.<sup>53</sup> By the early eighteenth century, however, the provision of other large-scale occasions and entertainments, which might have once been important in the creation of community association, had substantially diminished. Until the early seventeenth century, under the auspices of the merchants' guild of Corpus Christi, the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christie had involved a great public dinner and pageant. By the 1720s the guild had ceased to be an active body for more than a century, and the feast survived only as a private dinner for the Portmen and Twentyfour. Indeed, there are no records of even this scaled-down version of the feast after 1725.<sup>54</sup> But the eighteenth-century Corporation did support other things which gave it a presence in the community beyond the administration of its courts and the regulatory activities of its officers. Another important occasion was the perambulation of the bounds of the Corporation -- when the bailiffs and other officers travelled the perimeter of the Corporation's boundaries (which also involved rowing or sailing the limits of its extensive admiralty jurisdiction) with whoever would go with them. This was both a legal necessity to confirm the Corporation's jurisdiction and a social occasion by which an individual's identification with the Corporation was affirmed through a day's exercise followed by a dinner paid from the treasurer's account.<sup>55</sup>

Corporate sponsored celebrations of great national events, such as the anniversary of George I's accession to the throne, were also important exercises in creating a sense of community around the Corporation. However, such events were not always open to the public at large. The celebration of the King's birthday in 1756 was held in the council chamber of the town hall and was a more exclusive event.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century the Corporation maintained a band of musicians who routinely played before the public. Moreover, the Corporation also sponsored the organist at St. Mary Tower, as part of the extensive support it received as the

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<sup>53</sup> See Borsay, "'All the Town's a Stage'...", pp. 230-1, 239-40.

<sup>54</sup> Wodderspoon, *Memorials*, p.179; GCB, 7 May 1725.

<sup>55</sup> GCB, 16 May 1721, 19 Sept., 1721. For other towns see: Borsay, "'All the Town's a Stage'...", p. 231.

<sup>56</sup> GCB, 19 April 1723; 31 July 1723; 6 April 1756; 19 Nov. 1756; 29 Jan. 1759.



“Corporation Church”.<sup>57</sup> As the eighteenth century drew on, perhaps the most important event by which the Corporation engaged a wider range of the local community was the annual horse race meet held in summer on the edge of town. From at least the 1720s races were held at Ipswich under the control of the Corporation. Local gentlemen put up substantial prize money while the bailiffs approved entries and the town clerk served as the clerk of the course. The Corporation met all the other costs of staging the races, including the fees of the constables providing security at the event.<sup>58</sup>

While civic ritual and the provision of public events were important means of creating a wider culture of governance and sense of participation in the affairs of the Corporation, inevitably both the less prosperous freemen and many of the unenfranchised residents of Ipswich undertook other forms of political interaction in pursuit of their particular material interests. The system of poor relief built up from the charities and the administration of the Poor Laws had a political significance which extended beyond the rivalries of the Assemblymen or the Corporation’s assertion of authority over the parishes. As central as those things were in the determination of town politics (that is, the disposition of power among the most prosperous members of society), the poor relief system was also the principal context of a wider sense of political interaction between the local authorities and much of the rest of the community. The poor could engage the Corporation’s officers through appeals to the borough sessions regarding their poor rate assessments or claims for entitlement to relief. They might also petition for relief from the Corporation’s charities. The political significance of such forms of interaction lies in the power relations implicit in them: Corporation officers legitimised themselves and their offices by the perceived justice with which they dealt with these matters. At the same time the poor’s entitlements to such charity, as a matter of right, created a situation in which competing claims and interests were negotiated.

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<sup>57</sup> For examples of these expenditures see: SRO/I, C9/20/113-121, Treasurers’ Accounts, 1766, 1785; GCB, 13 Jan. 1755; 28 July 1757.

<sup>58</sup> Borsay, ... *English Urban Renaissance*, 364; *Ipswich Gazette or Bagnall’s News*, 19 May 1733; 23 June 1733; GCB, 19 June 1755; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 107, 452.

Times of high food prices and disputes over the terms of employment of dockers occasionally provoked direct confrontations between angry crowds and the Corporation's officers.<sup>59</sup> The circumstances of these confrontations and the responses of the Corporation leadership reflected the sorts of tensions which were manifest throughout the country over the correct principles of food marketing and the respective rights of capital and labour. Several historians have argued that while there is strong evidence that a commitment to free markets was increasingly characteristic of the middling sort over the course of the eighteenth-century, this development was not unalloyed. The officeholding middling sort was not so homogeneous as to be uniformly committed to purely capitalistic modes of exchange. Moreover, it has been shown that local authorities, for much of the eighteenth century at least, were willing to revert to "paternalistic" regulation of food markets when the maintenance of free trade posed threats to public order.<sup>60</sup> As an important distribution and processing centre for much of Suffolk's highly commercialised agriculture, Ipswich's civic leaders might be expected to be disinclined to interfere with the workings of the market. Yet throughout the eighteenth century the Corporation's leaders readily intervened to regulate markets and support the poor. The most frequently recorded strategy involved the Corn Committee or a similar group buying foodstuffs for resale to the poor at prices below those of the market. The charities' revenues undoubtedly provided a reserve of funds for that purpose in difficult periods, but voluntary subscriptions were also collected to fund such purchases. Despite these efforts, riots and other market related disturbances occurred in 1756, 1766, 1772, 1795 and 1800.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, voluntary subscriptions, the charities and the poor rates were not sufficiently elastic to provide all the cash such emergency subsidised sales could require. This was particularly evident by the surge in rate payers'

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<sup>59</sup> A good survey of the literature of the eighteenth-century crowd is found in N. Rogers, *Culture, Crowds and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 1-15.

<sup>60</sup> See: S. Poole, "Scarcity and the Civic Tradition: Market Management in Bristol, 1709-1815" in Randal and Charlesworth, *Markets*, pp. 91-114; S. Renton, "The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort in the Eighteenth Century: the Case of Norwich in 1766 and 1767" in *ibid.* pp. 115-36; W. Thwaites, "Oxford Food Riots: a Community and its Markets" in *ibid.* pp. 137-162. Also see: *idem*, "The Corn Market and Economic Change: Oxford in the Eighteenth Century", in *Midland History* xvi (1991), pp. 103-25.

<sup>61</sup> *Calendar of Home Office Papers, 1760-1765* (London, 1878), items 880, 931; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, pp. 100, 107, 109, 257.

appeals in 1766-7 and 1771-2. In those years special sessions had to be held to hear appeals which were undoubtedly prompted by parish officers' need to impose higher rates on many payers whose economic difficulties made them less willing or able to pay.<sup>62</sup>

Under such circumstances, the local authorities only alternative was to try to regulate market prices so that the poor might still be able to afford food. As late as 1800 local authorities were prepared to act against those holding grain back from the market. In that particularly difficult year, a public meeting at the Town Hall in September resulted in the formation of an "Association for prosecuting FORESTALLERS, ENGROSSERS, REGRATERS and other offenders." John Kerridge, one of the bailiffs, was chairman, and other members of the Assembly served on the committee appointed to act for the Association. It is difficult to know whether Kerridge and his colleagues in the Assembly were actually taking the lead and making policy or simply putting themselves at the head of a parade of public sentiment.<sup>63</sup> In any case, both the sessions bench and the Corporation already had the means to act against forestallers, but the formation of the Association might have been thought necessary to ensure that something was seen to be done. The local authorities' approach to the crisis was somewhat different from that recommended by the central government. In a zealous defence of free markets and the state's authority, the Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland, expressed the Government's view that local officials ought to proceed by suppressing rioters whose action kept dealers away from the markets. The "scarcity of provisions", it was maintained, could only be addressed by assuring "farmers and fair dealers" safe access to the markets.<sup>64</sup> Nothing was said about acting against engrossing or forestalling, but for the local authorities at Ipswich such action -- or the appearance of such action -- was still necessary.

Professors Hay and Rogers have recently argued that by the last decades of the eighteenth century the state was increasingly able to use military force in confrontations

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<sup>62</sup> SRO/I, C8/4/10, Sessions Book, 30 June 1766, 10 July 1767, 4 Sept. 1771 & 3 Jan. 1772 .

<sup>63</sup> *IP*, 13 Sept. 1800.

<sup>64</sup> *IP*, 28 Sept. 1800.

between the authorities and crowds who resisted the enforcement of free market principles. Accordingly, the negotiation of interests featured in crowd action in support of the traditional moral economy was undermined.<sup>65</sup> In eighteenth-century Ipswich confrontations between crowds protesting at the price of food and the Corporation authorities seldom involved the deployment of troops. In 1793, the Corporation's justices quickly deployed the constables and summoned the assistance of locally posted troops to disperse striking seamen during their pay dispute with a local shipmaster.<sup>66</sup> There was much more violence in September 1800 when disturbances over food prices prompted the Justices to call upon the Loyal Ipswich Volunteers, a local militia unit formed in 1794, to assist the constables in driving rioters from two mills under seige. The *Ipswich Journal* reported that the Volunteers needed assistance to complete the task, and so a troop of regular army dragoons was deployed. Eventually, the crowd was dispersed without the loss of life. Two days later the bailiffs gave notice of their determination "to make every legal exertion for the preservation of the public peace and private property."<sup>67</sup>

The availability of troops certainly meant that the Corporation leadership could develop strategies for dealing with the crisis other than simply finding some accommodation between the demands of the food rioters, the food retailers and the townsmen anxious for order in their streets. It would be wrong, however, to see the Corporation leadership as being able to govern without reference to other interests in the community. The local militia had been unable or, perhaps, was unwilling, to deal with the food rioters. Prior to being emboldened with military support -- a resource which might not always be available in time -- the magistrates' pronouncements on the crisis were entirely oriented towards dealing with engrossers rather than protecting suppliers or suppressing rioters as the Home Secretary had urged. Kerridge's support for the inhabitants' meeting "in consequence of the present very high prices of provisions" and his chairing of the committee to prosecute engrossers were efforts to act in accordance

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<sup>65</sup> D. Hay and N. Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 141-2.

<sup>66</sup> Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 120; *Universal British Directory...*, iii, p. 429.

<sup>67</sup> *IP*, 20 Sept. 1800; BL. Add. MS 25335, Batley, "Collections...", f. 142; Clarke, *History... of Ipswich*, p. 120; *Universal British Directory...*, iii, p. 429.

with prevailing sentiment. But after the riot, with troops still available, neither Kerridge nor any of the other assemblymen joined a successor committee established at a further “meeting of the Inhabitants convened for the purpose of taking into consideration the present enormous price of provisions”. At that meeting, it was urged that action be taken beyond prosecuting engrossers, forestallers and regrating. It was resolved that the signatories of the resolution would not pay more than agreed maximum prices for a variety of food stuffs, and that they would boycott forever any vendor who sold above those prices.<sup>68</sup>

Such action may have been too difficult to reconcile with the other interests of the senior corporation officers. There is no evidence, nor does it seem likely in the absence of the support from the bailiffs and the sessions bench, that this attempt to impose price controls was very successful. While local governance was not yet entirely imbued with the ethos of liberal, free market philosophy, the time had passed when from either altruism or self-interest the town’s authorities would undertake direct regulation of the local economy in the interest of the poor. Here was an undeniable tilt away from the sort of traditional moral economy negotiation of power relations towards a new market-oriented approach. This, in turn, was part of broader shift in the nature of the town’s governance. It signaled a further reduction of the engagement of the Corporation with the community by the end of the eighteenth century. With the Great Court meeting less often, the justices increasingly acting summarily away from the borough sessions, and a more frequent use of troops to settle disorder arising from economic disputes between elements of the local society, the wider community’s participation in the process of government was more restricted.

#### **4. The Corporate Elite and the Diversification of the Sites of Government**

While the opportunities for political participation were more restricted for most of the town’s residents by the late eighteenth century, the formal sites of power open to the

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<sup>68</sup> R.L. Cross, *Ipswich Markets*, p. 50-1.

governing elite were becoming more diverse. This group, defined as those who held the senior offices of the Corporation, constituted a group of normally between twenty-five and thirty-five people, with an active core of typically twenty. These men, although not normally embracing the wealthiest members of the community, exerted considerable power locally through their offices, as well as by their stature and influence as merchants and professional people.<sup>69</sup> With the important exceptions of the jurisdictions of the Assize judges and the Church courts, the town's governing elite had almost exclusive powers of governance through the offices of the Corporation. Even the local branches of the central government revenue agencies were normally under the control of members of the Portmen or Twentyfour. From the middle of the eighteenth century, however, offices of public authority were being established outside the legal framework of the Corporation's charters, bylaws, and the statutes which helped define its jurisdiction. As the institutional structure of public authority began changing by the end of the century, so to did the definition of its governing elite.

The establishment of new types of charities was a particularly important form of institutional diversification in spheres of activity which had been the preserve of the Corporation. Various historians have noticed the importance of voluntary societies in both in the provision of some forms of poor relief and as mechanisms of political and social association for their members.<sup>70</sup> In Ipswich several instances of "associated philanthropy" arose. Perhaps the most important of these were the subscriptions for the Red Sleeve School and the Widows and Orphans of Suffolk Clergymen. The subscription lists to these charities included the more prominent members of the town and surrounding county's elites.<sup>71</sup> The association for charitable purposes with social

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<sup>69</sup> See above pp. 75-107; 111-31.

<sup>70</sup> R. J. Morris, "Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis" *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), reprinted in Borsay, *Eighteenth Century Town*, pp. 338-66; D.T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1989); K. Wilson, "Urban Culture and Political Activism in Hanoverian England. The Example of Voluntary Hospitals" in E. Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture in England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990); A. Borsay, "Cash and Conscience: Financing the General Hospital at Bath, c.1738-50" in *Social History of Medicine*, 4 (1991), pp. 207-29; Langford, *Public Life*, pp. 491-500; and J. Barry, "Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort" in Barry and Brooks, *The Middling Sort*, pp. 96, 111.

<sup>71</sup> Canning, *...Gifts and Legacies...*, p. 131.

and political implications was not, however, the preserve of the elites. Less prosperous members of the community had, by the end of the eighteenth century, founded benevolent or friendly societies whose combined membership in 1819 was 617 persons. This sort of provision for hard times was an important form of public organisation outside the sphere dominated by the Corporation. After the first “Friendly Society Act” (1793), justices were, however, given some regulatory power over the societies which entailed their registration at the sessions. While the authorities were keen to promote the poor relief activities of these bodies, they were also feared as potentially fomenting Jacobin agitation or industrial workers’ organisations.<sup>72</sup>

**Table 7.5: *The Founding of Benevolent Societies at Ipswich***

	1700-49	1750-69	1770s	1780s	1790s	Totals
<b>No. of Societies Founded</b>	2	2	2	5	1	12
<b>No. of Members in 1819</b>	79	99	111	257	71	617

Source: R. Canning, *Account of the Gifts and Legacies that Have Been Given and Bequeathed to Charitable Uses in the Town of Ipswich...* (Ipswich, 1819), p. 275

The growing problem of poverty necessitated responses from the local authorities. But while some Ipswich worthies were at the centre of the innovations in parochial management of the poor in rural Suffolk, there was comparatively little change in the administration of the Poor Laws in the town’s own parishes.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, there were some developments in Ipswich’s charities which revealed tensions in the conception and institutional arrangements of local authority. Changes in the forms of charitable foundation and ideas about the social, moral and economic purposes of charity were important symptoms of developing conceptions of governance

<sup>72</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963; reprint, Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 456-60; Rev. John Foley, “A Charge to the Grand Jury of the County of Gloucester....1797” in G. Lamoine, *Charges to the Grand Jury 1689-1803*, Camden Fourth Series, Vol. 43 (London, 1992), pp. 601-6.

<sup>73</sup> Amongst those involved were: Edward Vernon (borough MP), Rev. Richard. Canning (an active writer on Corporation affairs), Robert Edgar (portman), Thomas Fonnereau (resident of Christchurch Manor and MP for Sudbury), and William Lynch, William Trotman, and Mr. William Truelove, jun. all involved in Ipswich politics or immediately related to assemblymen: see *IP*, 10 July 1756.

and the public interest which did not sit easily with legal basis and institutional structure of the Corporation.

The development of Ipswich's charities can be located in wider eighteenth-century debates about the value and effects of particular types of poor relief. From the late seventeenth century, there emerged a critique of the poor laws and certain types of benevolent charities, maintaining that they were economically inefficient, directed aid poorly, and encouraged idleness and dependence. Such thinking lay behind new types of charitable foundations which have been described as "associated philanthropy" because they consisted of a groups of subscribers, some of whom were actively engaged in the ongoing running of the charity.<sup>74</sup> In eighteenth-century Ipswich, such philanthropy supplanted legacies and endowments left in the trusteeship of the Corporation or parishes. While there had been at least thirty-eight such endowments in the years 1630 to 1729, after 1730 there were only four and they appear to have ceased altogether after 1755.<sup>75</sup>

The new associated philanthropy type of charities also had somewhat different objects. While the older type of endowed charities were most often intended to provide shelter, food or clothing to ease the suffering of the destitute, the new associated charities at Ipswich were mostly concerned with the education of the poor. The charity schools, Grey Coat Boys and Blue Coat Girls, were founded in 1709 by voluntary subscription, although they were also recipients of legacies. The Red Sleeve School, which had been an ancient charity school, was re-founded by subscription in 1752. The Green Sleeve School, founded by Dissenters in 1736, was similarly run by the governors of a subscription society. The Grey Coat-Blue Coat Schools charity had, by 1817, revenues worth over £938 (while the costs of operating the school did not exceed £570). This charity's revenues exceeded that of any of the Corporation charities.<sup>76</sup> The trustees for the schools included only a few of the men who were dominant in the

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<sup>74</sup> M. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 447-8, 469.

<sup>75</sup> "Abstracts of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor Persons; 1787-1788" *Parliamentary Papers* (1816), vol. XVIb, pp. 1218-19.

<sup>76</sup> See Table 5.14, p. 187.



Corporation's affairs. Instead, the subscribers and governors lists featured other prominent townsmen and country gentlemen living in the neighbourhood.<sup>77</sup>

Of even greater significance for the institutional diversification of the town's government than the non-corporate charities, was the establishment of new local authorities by statute from 1793. These new bodies, which in many towns augmented or supplanted corporate powers, were the most important development in urban government in the eighteenth century. Their establishment has been attributed to the need for more efficient, better funded and legally solid organisations for the enhancement and management of the physical fabric of towns. The political significance of such bodies has also been recognised in some towns where their establishment was prompted by a particular faction keen to establish a public authority under their own control or which was at least not in the hands of a rival faction.<sup>78</sup> That such bodies were not established at Ipswich until 1793, comparatively late for a town of its size, was a reflection of the adequacy of the existing maintenance and provision of public works by the Corporation. The Corporation owned considerable assets and normally was easily able to raise money; and its complement of officers and agents proved themselves capable of building and running important features of the town's infrastructure such as its docks and water supply. The acquisition of an improvement act in 1793, with amendments extending its authority (1797 and 1815), and two further acts for other statutory authorities within the next fifteen years, owed more to the wider politics of the community than to practical financial or administrative requirements.

The first earnest proposals for the establishment of a paving or improvement commission were made in 1780. A public meeting was held and a petition to Parliament was drafted but the matter went no further. In 1792 another meeting was held which also produced a petition, and a subscription was taken to fund a campaign for an act of parliament.<sup>79</sup> The matter clearly divided the local elite. The Corporation, whose senior offices had been dominated by the twentyfourmen since 1783 was initially

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<sup>77</sup> Canning, *Gifts and Legacies* (1747 edn.), pp.171-4; and *ibid.*, (1819 edn.), p. 131.

<sup>78</sup> Corfield, *Impact*, pp. 156-7; Jones and Falkus, "Urban Improvement", p. 135-45; Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, p. 71-2; Eastwood, *Government...*, pp. 66-8.

<sup>79</sup> M. Clegg, *The Way We Went* (Ipswich, 1989), p. 23.

hostile to the proposed new commission. As the town MPs were unlikely to support a measure opposed by those whose influence carried the Great Court, the proponents of an improvement commission secured the support of one of the Suffolk County MPs, Sir Charles Bunbury, who introduced the necessary legislation in Parliament. After Bunbury had done so, the Assembly passed a resolution in April 1793 instructing the borough MPs to oppose the bill. A month later, the fight was not going well for the Corporation; it softened its position, appealing to Bunbury at least to postpone the passing of the bill until the next session of Parliament. It was claimed that many parts of the paving bill appeared “to militate against the Chartered Rights of the Freeburgesses of Ipswich”, and the Corporation sought more time to propose amendments to the bill to make it consistent with those rights.<sup>80</sup> While the Corporation and its allies, the Stowmarket Navigation backers, managed to have some provisions of bill amended they could not have it defeated. Thus, the Commission for “Paving Lighting Cleansing and otherwise improving this town” was created by statute in 1793.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the Corporation’s resistance to the new Paving Commission, the two authorities co-operated -- initially, at least. As early as September 1793 the Assembly and Great Court were considering proposals from the Commission’s surveyor with respect to the “conduit house” and a water cistern which were important elements of the Town water supply. The Commission surveyor’s plan, which diplomatically recommended “that John Gooding [a twentyfourman] should superintend the work”, was adopted without amendment by the Great Court which ordered the Corporation to provide the necessary funds. Three months later the Paving Commission issued a requisition to the Corporation to take demolish the shambles. The Assembly agreed that renovations were needed, and the Corporation came to an agreement with a private individual who offered to replace the old building with a new shambles in exchange for long lease on the property.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Assembly Book, 5 April 1793; GCB, 5 May 1793; *CJ*, 13 Mar. 1793, 6 Apr. 1793, 9 Apr. 1793, 15 Apr. 1793, pp. 391, 607, 619, 635.

<sup>81</sup> 33 Geo. III c.92 (1793); *CJ*, 15 May 1793, p. 776.

<sup>82</sup> GCB, 1st Jan. 1794.

But these first instances of co-operation soon gave way to conflicts over the essentials of government: jurisdiction and money. At the end of March 1794, in a perhaps audacious, symbolic attack on the Corporation's authority, the Commissioners' clerk wrote to the bailiffs informing them that the Commission's Paving Committee had determined that the stairs leading to the court room of the Town Hall were an obstruction and ought to be taken away. "Desirous of acting with the concurrence of the bailiffs..." the clerk sought their opinion on the matter. The reply came in the form of a Great Court resolution which denied the Commissioners' legal right to remove the stairs, not on the basis of some ancient right attached to the stairs, but because such matters fell under the Corporation's general jurisdiction.<sup>83</sup> The matter seems not have gone any further. While this might be regarded as a vindication of the Corporation's jurisdictional claims, it should be noted that the Headborough's Court, an ancient body consisting of twelve of the twentyfourmen who heard presentments and issued orders relating to the roads and building regulation, rapidly ceased to function after the Paving Commission began its work.<sup>84</sup>

The financing of the Paving Commission provoked further conflict with the Corporation. In January 1794 the Paving Commission began to raise funds for its operations. Initially £2,000 was sought; half through loans paying 4.5%, and half from the sale of life annuities. It is not known how much of this capital was raised, but the sums sought were comparable to the Corporation's debt. The Commission, however, had to service its own debt from more modest sources of income. Under the terms of the Commission's founding statute, its ordinary income came from rates which, although collected separately and paid directly to the Commission, were to be set at the same level as the poor rates and based on the property valuations done by the parish officers. This gave the Corporation's justices, who approved the poor rates and heard valuation appeals, something of a lever against the Commission. Tension between the sessions justices and the paving commissioners was almost inevitable given that the two bodies were ultimately answerable to different constituencies with distinct interests.

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<sup>83</sup> GCB, 9 April 1794.

<sup>84</sup> See above pp. 42, 66.

The justices were directly or indirectly elected by the freemen-ratepayers, of whom there were about 700 in the early 1790s. The improvement commissioners were elected by an estimated 100 townsmen who possessed real property worth £40 or a personal estate worth at least £800. It was politically more difficult for the justices to raise the rates of the numerous less prosperous freemen than it was for the commissioners whose better off electors could more easily afford rate funded amenities or whose businesses stood most to profit from the commission's infrastructural investments.<sup>85</sup> In 1797, frustrated with their dependence on the JP-controlled rating process, the commissioners went to Parliament seeking an amendment to their founding statute which would allow them to make their own assessments and set rates independently of the justices and the parish officers. The Assembly ordered the borough MPs to resist this amendment to the 1793 Paving Act, the Assembly claimed that if the proposed changes to the rating system were

...permitted to pass into a Law [it would] be productive of perpetual Disputes Debates and Litigations, and not tend at all to further or promote the principal Object of the Act, Viz. the Improvement of the Town, but that it will destroy that Peace and Tranquility which now happily prevail among the Inhabitants with respect to the Rates of the said Town in general, against which Rates only 3 appeals have been heard and determined at the Sessions within 12 years last past.<sup>86</sup>

The commissioners might well have reasoned that so few appeals indicated that this was an under-taxed community. With the support of the County MPs, the amendments were passed by Parliament and the Paving Commission became financially independent of the Corporation.

During the 1797 debates, the Corporation tried to protect its rights and even to claw back some of the jurisdiction it had lost to the new body. The amending bill proposed that appeals to the commission's rates should be heard by the commissioners

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<sup>85</sup> There were about 70 people whose property was worth £40 or more in the 1750s compared to about 500 freemen who voted (see: Chapter Four, Table 4.1). If the ratio of such property owners to voting freemen was constant, by the 1790s there might have been about 100 such ratepayers and 700 freemen in an estimated adult male resident population of between 2,500 and 3,000.

<sup>86</sup> Assembly Book, 5 Feb. 1797.

themselves or by the County Justices. The Assembly countered with demands that, under its ancient rights, only the Corporation's justices could hear such appeals. Further, the Corporation sought the repeal of clauses in the 1793 Act which empowered the commissioners to mitigate penalties imposed by the justices for offences pertaining to the Commission's jurisdiction. The Assembly claimed that the Commission had frequently provided no public notice of its meetings. In order to prevent the commissioners from effectively conducting their business in private, it was demanded that notice of Commission meetings and their agendas be published in the *Ipswich Journal*. Moreover, the borough MPs were instructed to seek a cap of one shilling and six pence upon the rates the Commission could impose, and that properties valued at less the four pounds per annum be exempt from the rate.<sup>87</sup> The Corporation was not, however, successful in obtaining any of the changes it desired in the 1797 amending bill. With its passage into law, an important shift in the institutional location of power occurred which was central to the changing nature of elite participation in government after the mid-century emergence of popular, contentious politics in the Great Court. The Commission's expanding authority to collect revenue, to determine its own policy and adjudicate its own disputes with the inhabitants of the town represented a shift of important aspects of government out of the Great Court, with its more than 700 active voting members, to the much smaller Commission, which was elected by those owning property worth £40 or more.<sup>88</sup> Acts establishing a commission for improvement of the port (1805), a court of requests (1807), and further amending the Paving Commission (1815), created further opportunities for a more narrow, oligarchic exercise of power outside of the Corporation's institutional framework.

This is linked with the decline of the Portmen. The adoption of a political strategy in the last two decades of the eighteenth century which meant that vacancies in the Portmen went unfilled, suggests that the body had lost much of its earlier importance as a major way of participating in the Corporation's affairs. By the 1790s

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<sup>87</sup> Assembly Book, 24 Feb. 1797; *CJ*, 1 Feb. 1797, 15 Feb., 1797, pp. 277, 306.

<sup>88</sup> 33 Geo.III c, 92 (1793). Note that this was four times the rate set for borough voters under the 1832 Reform Act. A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London, 1979), p. 263.

there were five unfilled vacancies in the Portmen, and typically only three of its members attended meetings of the Great Court.<sup>89</sup> Even though four of the town's justices were selected from the Portmen, it seems clear that the body was no longer the key instrument for the governing elite that it had once been. With advent of new charities and the Paving Commission, those more prosperous members of the community who wished to participate in its government found ways of doing so outside the Corporation. Moreover, these bodies, together with other new forms of association such as the mason's lodge founded in 1762, provided alternative sites for urban middling sort sociability. In doing so they undermined the Corporation's role as the once pre-eminent focus of public life in the town.<sup>90</sup>

None of this is to suggest that town elite completely abandoned the Corporation; it possessed too many valuable assets, and the freemen's election of the two MPs ensured that some of the town's leading propertied men were always keen to seek its senior offices. Nonetheless, it appears that in the second half of the eighteenth century, at a time when the rise of a more contentious politics made the possession of the senior offices and domination of the Great Court much more difficult, the town's elite found additional ways of exercising public authority which reduced the need for engagement in the popular politics of the Great Court.<sup>91</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Throughout the eighteenth century a wide range of people participated in the politics and governance of Ipswich through a variety means. The effects and implications of this participation are significantly revealing of the nature of the corporate regime and its

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<sup>89</sup> GCB, 8 Sept. 1790 to 29 Sept. 1795; *Reports from Commissioners: vol. xxvi, 1835. First Report Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales*, 2297; also see pp. 93-6.

<sup>90</sup> S. F. Watson, *A History of British Union Lodge No. 114, Ipswich, 1762-1962* (Ipswich, 1962), 15-21; Barry, "Bourgeois Collectivism?", pp. 85, 98.

<sup>91</sup> For political motivations in the establishment of new forms of public authority in other towns, see Adrian Wilson, "Conflict, Consensus and Charity: Politics and the Provincial Voluntary Hospitals in the Eighteenth Century", *English Historical Review*, 111 (1996), pp.599-619.

place in the community. Indeed, changes in the manner and patterns of participation in the processes of government are vital to understanding how the Corporation's central role in town's affairs began to decline in the last decades of the eighteenth century and was to be severely undermined in the last decades before the reforms of 1835.

Involvement in corporate affairs was open to very wide range of people, although the quality of that engagement varied enormously according to various types of social identity. Women could be active in important roles such as overseers and gaolers. Anne Sparkes, a widow with substantial property, appears to have been able to exert sufficient influence in Great Court affairs that she obtained valuable leases of corporate property. Nor was age a barrier to adult participation in town government. Yet, while there was no formal exclusion of women, the elderly, or young adults, other less visible obstacles operated. Women were never made freemen nor assumed senior corporate offices, and those that held lesser posts did so in the manner of an heir to their husbands who formerly held office at the time of their death. Social conventions about the roles of women unsurprisingly operated to keep women out of senior offices. That such offices were dominated by middle aged and elderly men was, again, not a function of formal prescription, but in this instance a matter of wealth, leisure, and inclination. As in most societies wealth was a crucial determinant of the quality of an individual's participation in governance and politics. Unsurprisingly, there is a correspondence between wealth and the seniority of official posts. But as demonstrated earlier, this was a crude correlation and the wealthiest members of society did not seek corporate office. Moreover, as this chapter has show, there were many forms of participation beyond officeholding. Thus, women, the poor, and the young might all have been involved in the process of government as members of election crowds, participants in riots or other popular protests, or as lesser officers or employees of the Corporation. With as many as 120 to 160 people holding parochial and corporate office each year, the annual round of elections, and frequent meetings of the various corporation courts and charities, the governing elite, consisting of the portmen and the twentyfour, had to engage a wide spectrum of community in the pursuit of their official duties and political aims. Clearly,

there was no equality of opportunity to participate in the town's government, but participation was sufficient that, through the various forms of corporation business, the exercise of public authority required considerable negotiation amongst the various elements of the community.

Beyond its explicit political and administrative importance, participation in the process of government also had significant social and cultural functions within the community. It has been noted that the rituals, festivities, and entertainment of corporation-related events helped define the community and often contributed to its cohesion. Moreover, it is important to note the social functions of elections in which patronage, treating, persuasion, and festivity all served to affirm and re-negotiate social connections between leaders and members of the wider community.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the Corporation's central place in the life of the town was due, not only to its overt political and administrative functions, but also to the fact that its courts, elections, and other occasions, served important social and cultural functions.

Changes in the various forms of participation betrayed important shifts in the character of the corporate regime and its place in the community. Over the course of the eighteenth century the opportunities for people outside the governing elite to participate in the process of government is likely to have modestly expanded. A few minor posts were added under the Corporation, while Paving Commission and the non-Corporate charitable trusts would have required only a few servants. However, such jobs did not provide much real participation in the discretionary exercise of significant authority or responsibility such as that attached to older corporate offices like the sergeants at mace, the corn meter, or petty constable.

Political participation underwent important changes in the last decade of the century. The decline in the frequency and business of the Great Courts undermined the freemen's most important form of participation in government by reducing their opportunities to audit accounts, discuss spending, and debate other action by the Corporation. Yet, while participation narrowed in this way, the increasing frequency of

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<sup>92</sup> See R.J. Morris, "Civil Society and the Nature of Urbanism: Britain, 1750-1850", *Urban History* 25 (1998), pp. 289-301.



contested elections after the 1768, with reportedly higher levels of canvassing, treating, and bribery can be seen as an increase in popular participation in politics. From the mid-eighteenth century, a range of evidence -- including the increasing political content of the *Ipswich Journal*, the greater number of political pamphlets addressing local issues, the publication of Great Court committee reports, the oaths taken by Corporation officers, and extracts from the Corporate charters -- further suggest higher levels of political engagement amongst the local community.<sup>93</sup> After 1784, however, the increasingly venal character of partisan politics and growing importance of non-resident voters, suggests that the social function of elections as occasions for the affirmation and re-negotiation of connections within the community was diminishing.

In terms of a wider sense of political interaction and the negotiation of power relations between the poorer and richer sections of the community, the effectiveness of popular participation was being reduced by the local authorities' ability to resort to the military to end the 1793 seamen's strike and the 1800 food riots. Admittedly, these events are late in the period, and even in the 1800 food riots there was a strong popular appeal to traditional moral economy principles, and a willingness on the part of the Corporation leadership at least to entertain strategies consistent with those principles in the interest of restoring public order.

The second half of the eighteenth century also saw an important diversification in the sites of the governing elite's activities. The rise of the non-corporate charities and the statutory authorities were important in two respects. Firstly, they are associated with a change in the composition of the governing elite. It was noted above that the professions assumed a more significant role in town government from the late 1740s.<sup>94</sup> With the advent of the non-corporate charities, it is clear that people who were not members of the Portmen or Twentyfour, indeed, who may not have been freemen, were becoming involved in public affairs through these institutions outside of the Corporation. Secondly, the fact of the establishment of these charities and the statutory

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<sup>93</sup> The Rev. Richard Canning and the William Craighton, publisher of the *Ipswich Journal*, were behind much of this printed output. See, for example, R.Canning, *Gifts and Legacies*; idem, *The Oaths of Office*; idem, *Principal Charters*.

<sup>94</sup> See above pp. 111-21.

authorities represented an important shift in the institutional location of public authority. While, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Corporation exercised a near monopoly of public authority within the town (the Assize judges and Church courts had important but circumscribed roles), the rise of the new charities and the Paving Commission after the 1770s undermined the Corporation's pre-eminence. This was a practical challenge to the effectiveness of the corporate regime. It was also a challenge to the principles which legitimised the Corporation.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Despite the stability of its institutional structure, the governance and politics of Ipswich underwent important changes during the eighteenth century. These changes, however, were not characteristic of a declining town whose obsolete corporate body was already in an advanced state of decay begetting corruption and ineffective government. Rather than this caricature, bequeathed to historians by the 1835 municipal commission via the Webbs, the story of government in eighteenth-century Ipswich is one of various, sometimes complexly related, developments. Generalisations about the state of affairs in the early decades of the nineteenth century cannot be taken as representative of the entire preceding century.

The practices of politics and administration had certainly been affected by social, economic, and cultural change during the eighteenth century, but the consequences of those developments had not been a simple out-moding of the corporate regime. The flexibility of the Corporation's institutional structures, the adaptation of its practices, and changes in its roles, all ensured that body remained the pre-eminent instrument of public authority and a central feature in the life of the community. Even in the face of significant challenges from other institutions late in the century, the Corporation retained much of its importance.

This study of Ipswich makes clear that the character of politics and government in any town depended upon its particular social and economic circumstances, as well as the provisions of its constitution and the dynamics of local politics. The durability and effectiveness of the corporate regime at Ipswich was not always the experience of other places. For instance, Colchester's charter was revoked in 1742 and not replaced by a new, modified one until 1764. In addition, the character of local politics and the particular constitutions of Leicester and Norwich made effective local governance much more difficult in those places during the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D'Cruz, "The Middling Sort, pp. 204-6; Greaves, *Leicester*; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 378-433.

Nevertheless, this case study of Ipswich does reveal the sorts of variables, in terms of social, cultural, economic, and constitutional circumstances, as well as the dynamics of politics, which must be recognised in trying to understand government in a town with a corporate regime. Moreover, this study identifies several ways in which corporate institutions and practices engaged their communities. In these forms of engagement, various functions and means of legitimising corporate rule can be seen which are quite distinct from the liberal, utilitarian criteria of democracy and efficient administration against which this form of government's critics have so long found it wanting.

At Ipswich the Corporation was an effective institution capable of mobilising resources and applying them to tasks set by the Great Court and the traditions of town governance. For most of the century the Corporation was the site of various forms of political engagement for a wide spectrum of society. The apparently fragmented institutional structure of the corporation reflected a system that had evolved over time with the accretion of tasks, offices, and both deliberative and adjudicating bodies. The resulting system lacked the modern spirit of bureaucratic, integrated government but it was flexible and had other practical advantages -- chiefly the diffusion of the risks, burdens, and powers of office. This institutional structure, together with the customs and legal instruments upon which it was founded, engendered a particular ethos of government. Charters, statutes, bylaws and customs all sanctioned meetings, described the spheres of officers' duties and authority, and provided the rules for the selection of officers and the holding of meetings. But these legal foundations did not establish a governing body in the institutional sense that the Webbs sought, or which the reforms of the nineteenth century established. Town governance under the pre-1835 regime was fundamentally about individuals, not agencies, doing the business of government. This was a scheme of government and politics which sought to select and empower individuals to deal with specified matters. It did not recruit professional officeholders, or create a bureaucracy which was to have an institutional identity and "life" of its own within the community. Thus, people did not look at the Corporation as an agency, rather it had significance as a collection of individuals who held certain common rights

(in collective property and to participate in the deliberative processes) and who were eligible to serve in offices. It seems unlikely that townsmen with problems turned to “the Corporation”, rather they sought the individuals who had been empowered by the Corporation to deal with specific matters, such as the bailiffs, justices, the coal meter, or the beadles. Political discussion then, invariably turned on the selection of individuals and specific courses of action. One finds little discussion of “policy” or the construction and managing of an on-going administrative apparatus.

The 1835 Parliamentary Commissioners’ report and the Webbs use a conception of the corporation as “the government” of the town in a way that is anachronistic to the eighteenth century. Inevitably, the ancient corporation was found to be deficient as a modern, liberal bureaucratic instrument of government. Certainly, corruption was evident and the corporate regime did not attain the political and administrative standards implicit in either of the Webbs’ notion of the ancient corporate ideal or modern, progressive governance. Yet it does not follow that the Corporation was a decayed, dysfunctional relic or some weak, inchoate mechanism groping towards modernity. It is essential to understand that the Corporation functioned in different ways and to different ends than those demanded by its nineteenth and twentieth-century critics. Corrupt practices such as treating and even bribing voters, or the use of office for personal gain, were all certainly prevalent. Indeed, the corporate regime was not without its critics in the eighteenth century. All the same, the Corporation did manage a high degree of effective government, and it provided many forms of participation for a wide spectrum of people throughout the period of this study. The significance of the Corporation for much of the community extended beyond the provision of services, such as market regulation, charity administration, or port maintenance. The Corporation had a wider role in the life of the town in that the meetings of its various courts and other official occasions, together with corporate provision of public events (horse races, public celebrations etc.) were important social occasions which helped affirm a wider sense of community. Clearly, the role of corporations in the creation of a sense of community, social identity and cohesion within towns had, by the eighteenth century, diminished

compared to previous centuries; nonetheless, despite new forms of association and means of generating social and cultural life within many towns, the Corporation at Ipswich continued to play an important role in this sphere.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar manner, the corporate political process had significance beyond the selection of officers and the resolution of questions before the Great Court. Elections were occasions for the affirmation of connection and the re-negotiation of patronage links. Elections were also festive occasions which could engage a wide spectrum of the population. In some instances, as Admiral Vernon's campaigns reveal, affirmation of a candidate and association with him could defy the conventional political logic of Westminster factions and issues because voters were moved by other concerns. Thus, the processes of both government and politics engaged a wider spectrum of the community in a variety of ways. It was through that engagement that the Corporation remained a central feature of town life throughout the eighteenth century.

Characterising these forms of engagement or their general effects is not a simple matter. Certainly, the eighteenth-century Ipswich Corporation was not, and may never have been, an embodiment of the Webbs' ideal type of a "community of producers". Nevertheless, the place of the Great Court in the Corporation's constitution and the structure of its senior offices did imbue town governance with a particular kind of corporate principle. During most of the eighteenth century, both the formal role of the Great Court and the charter-mandated structure of officeholding were consistent with a conception of the Corporation as an instrument for the collective management of common interests and assets. The Great Court's extensive powers in terms of making bylaws, as well as its authority to select and direct officers, made for a theoretically wide dispersal of power amongst the community of freemen. The principle of collective management by the members of the Corporation was further reflected in the absence of

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<sup>2</sup> For the corporations and civic culture in the sixteenth century see R. Tittler, *The Architecture of Power* (Oxford, 1991), *passim*; idem, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), *passim*. For engendering of urban culture and social relations beyond the corporate sphere in the eighteenth century, see Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, *passim*.

a strongly vertical hierarchy of offices, coupled with the facts that most posts were annually selected and assigned discrete duties.

In practice, of course, the corporate regime was hardly a community instrument for collective governance. To begin with, despite its relatively large freeman electorate given Ipswich's size, two-thirds of the adult male population were not members of the Corporation in the 1750s. There was an important and long-standing tension between the nature of the Corporation and its function as the institution of local government. From its first charter a condition of incorporation was the undertaking of aspects of the Crown's business with respect to all subjects within the town. Thus, although a self-interested corporate body, the Corporation was also required to act as a local agent of the Crown exercising authority over the entire community. Moreover, even the equality of freemen was never seriously maintained. Indeed, the charters themselves drew social and economic distinctions between the Portmen, the Twentyfour, and other members of the Corporation. The loose system of discrete offices, which in theory were to manage various facets of the freemen's collective interests, was effectively a means for spreading the burdens, benefits, and risks of office amongst a governing elite. The senior offices were generally not held by the richest men in the community, but rather by those who had both sufficient means to afford the time to do the work of government and were in a position to profit, materially and or socially, from the office. Similarly, neither the obligation to serve nor turn-taking were characteristic of the lesser Corporation offices. Again, the gratification of self-interest seems to have motivated men to hold offices for a number of years at a time.

Yet, while corporate membership did not embrace the whole community, and a governing elite dominated the senior offices, corporate principles pervaded the sense of government in eighteenth-century Ipswich. Much of the legitimising rhetoric in the published and frequently cited charters and oaths of office endorsed or appealed to this conception of the corporate body. The town's freemen were warned of the "regiment of baronets, esquires, farmers, and devines [sic]" who threatened their rights as members

of the Corporation.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, although in practice, the freemanry was subject to the influence of powerful leaders like Cooper Gravenor or factions like Sparowe and Cornelius's portmen, the freemen's central place in the government of the town derived from the principle which required that every bylaw and important official appointment was decided by a vote in the Great Court.

While much of the corporate ethos continued to pervade town governance, some key ancient corporate principles, already little more than vestiges of late medieval practices, were seriously undermined over the course of the eighteenth century. Prevalent amongst these developments was the abandonment of the freemen's economic privileges. By the end of the 1730s attempts to impose foreign fines were abandoned and with them one of the last forms of action that the Corporation took in the exclusive economic interest of its members. Attempts to defend trade and jobs in the town thereafter reflected a much greater concern to protect rate payers and keep residents off poor relief. Given the scale of the problem of poor relief, in terms of money and human resources, it is unsurprising that the Corporation leadership, despite partisan political considerations, came to see the town's ratepayers as their constituency.

The corporate ideal was further eroded by developments in the freemen's participation in the process of government. In the second half of the eighteenth century the decline in the frequency of Great Court meetings, and the volumes of business handled there, signalled a narrowing of freeman engagement in deliberations about corporate business. Nevertheless, the Great Court remained significant; indeed, it was not until the 1790s that the Assembly took over important elements of its business. Other developments also reduced the engagement of freemen in corporate affairs. For example, less frequent borough sessions and the extension of the JP's summary jurisdiction reduced the role of the petty juryman; and, the concentration of power in key offices, especially the bailiffs and treasurer, undermined the wider distribution of the authority and benefits of officeholding over a number of more discretely defined posts.

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<sup>3</sup> "A Collection of Printed Political Squibs", f. 1



Yet while the freemen's engagement in deliberation and administration was narrowing, their participation in electoral politics was expanding. After the mid-eighteenth century the advent of on-going, more evenly fought partisan struggles for senior offices afforded a more active role for ordinary freemen, and, to a lesser extent, non-free townsmen as well. The wooing of voters by candidates and their agents was an important opportunity for many freemen to seek favours, patronage, and even bribes from the governing elite. The excitement of these electoral contests, and the increasingly desperate struggle to win votes, was reflected in the growing numbers of public meetings, the publication of pamphlets and squibs, and the increase of the *Ipswich Journal's* political content.

Corporate politics changed not only in the extent and character of freemen participation, but also in its factional structure. These changes in the nature of town politics had an important connection to the evolving place of the Corporation in the community and the nature of its governance. It is essential to recognise that the dysfunctional debt-ridden Corporation found by the parliamentary commissioners in the early nineteenth-century was largely the product of a particular kind of contentious politics which had started to develop from 1768 and which intensified after the 1790s. Although electoral battles were intermittent from 1754 onwards, they occurred with greater frequency and cost than in the preceding thirty years. As a result there was a substantial increase on the Corporation's debt, as litigation and the exploitation of office for political purposes grew.

Partisanship under Cooper Gravenor, in the first two decades of the century, led to bitter elections, litigation, and increases to the corporate debt, yet these conflicts, like those in the 1750s, neither financially ruined the Corporation nor severely undermined the process of governance. From the mid-century onwards, however, the situations became aggravated by the fact that political conflict polarised around the two principle bodies of the Assembly: the Portmen and the Twentyfour. Neither reconciliation nor the complete triumph of one faction was likely under these circumstances since each party controlled specific institutions with distinct powers. The development of this

situation in other towns sometimes had the effect of immediately paralysing the process of government. At Ipswich this was not so. The respective powers of the Portmen and the Twentyfour were not so great that one of these bodies could alone obstruct the process of government; for it was the Great Court which held the important legislative powers and the authority to appoint and supervise major officeholders.

Thus the government could carry on, but the persistence of conflict in the changing social and political environment of the second half of the eighteenth century meant that debt rose and factional tensions did not abate. The contentious politics of the last decades of the eighteenth century led to the rise of particularly persistent and powerful political clubs in the 1790s and the early nineteenth century. These organisations, whose principal purposes were to manage electoral funds and marshal support at the polls, exacerbated the costs of elections and the divisions within the Corporation.

The pattern of politics in the 1790s and the early nineteenth century was clearly corrosive to the distribution of power which the long evolution of officeholding had bequeathed the corporation in the early eighteenth century. In doing so, it contributed to the undermining of the very idea of corporate governance. The rise of persistent factions which sought to control all of the Corporation's offices may have helped draw together the autonomous and formally unconnected posts and functions carried out under the corporate regime. This consolidation of corporate offices and functions may have helped townsmen see the process of local government as a more unified process. Thus, the expectation of "the town government" as an integrated agency may have been the product, at least in part, of the advent of a new political system in which competing factions gathered-up the patronage and power of the diverse, formerly discrete elements of the old corporate regime, and linked them together for political purposes. There had been party and faction-oriented politics before, certainly from at least the 1640s, as well in the first decades of the eighteenth century; but such organisation had been of relatively short duration and had not required the administrative qualities demanded by the costly elections involving the large electorates of the late eighteenth century.

Indeed, this was an environment particularly suited to the bankers and lawyers whose influence in the Corporation grew as this pattern of politics developed.

The rise of the professions in town affairs was significant both because of their part in the growth of a contentious, costly politics from the mid-eighteenth century, and because of their connection with the emergence of new conceptions of governance which undermined the ancient corporate principle in favour of new notions of public interest. By the mid-eighteenth century the legitimacy of the corporation as the instrument for the management of collective property and the common affairs of a community of producers was losing credibility. Nonetheless, the weight of tradition, and the legal entrenchment of the charters, together with the absence of alternative models of town government and the political impracticality of reconstituting municipal regimes, all assured the persistence of corporations. Most corporations endured, some had their powers augmented, and those few which were dissolved, such as Colchester (1742-64), were the victims of unintended constitutional suicides.

Yet, although statutory reform was neither sought nor practically possible, both the conception and practice of town government was changing. The growing role of the professional men was both a partial cause and a symptom of these changes. The developing rhetoric of politics at Ipswich reflects the rise of the professional ethos, with its claims to serve the public good, rather than the legitimisation of merchant elites by their connection and personal interest in the town's trade. From the 1780s the reform of the Corporation's financial management reflected the advent of the professionals and the direction this gave to the ongoing concern for the effective conduct of corporation affairs.

The integrity of the Corporation was further eroded as the governing elite established sites of public authority outside the institutional structure of the Corporation. The founding of the Paving Commission (1793) and the Dock Commission (1805), together with the creation of various educational and medical charitable trusts undermined the Corporation in two related ways. Firstly, the newer institutions broke the Corporation's near monopoly on public authority by creating additional or even

alternative sites of governance. As paving commissioners or principals in the management of wealthy charities, townsmen and country gentlemen who were not members of the Corporation had an institutional base from which to influence town affairs. This had the effect of diluting the Corporation's authority and reducing the prestige of its offices. The Corporation had once been the principal context for middling sort association, but the newer extra-corporate institutions, whose members included influential and socially important members of county society, became a more powerful draw.

Secondly, not only were the newer charities important points of influence, patronage, and connection which were out of the Corporation leaders' hands, they also represented an ethos which was essentially hostile to the Corporation. The ideas of moral and social progress which animated this sort of associated philanthropy had implications which were dissonant with the nature of the Corporate regime. The old endowed charities managed by the Corporation had been intended to ameliorate what were taken to be the inevitable sufferings of the poor. The new charities were founded as public institutions dedicated to moral and economic improvement. These new foundations were for schools, not almshouses, and their rhetoric emphasised the beneficiaries' improvement rather than the benefactor's piety. The new charities implied a conception of governance as the institutional achievement of social progress.

The ancient corporate principle, however much adapted, was dedicated to and institutionally constituted for the orderly regulation and management of a limited sphere of civil and commercial affairs in what were, ideally, static conditions. Of course, in practice, both in the management of its charities and through the activities of its justices, the Ipswich Corporation had functioned as an institution of government for the whole community. But the eighteenth-century corporation was not politically or legally disposed to embrace the idea of governance implicit in the new charities and to become the sort of active social agent some of them aspired to be. Inevitably, as this interventionist concept of governance gained currency, the legitimacy of the Corporation was eroded. Thus, even though the Corporation was normally able to deal

with such problems as high food prices, the issue of the poor provoked a new conception of governance, embodied in some of the charities, which became an important element in the early nineteenth-century critique of municipal corporations.

Despite these challenges to the very idea of corporate governance, and the impact of new patterns of politics on the effectiveness of corporate regime, the Corporation still remained the pre-eminent institution in Ipswich's town government in 1795. Its legal authority, patronage resources, and the significance of its election of two MPs, assured its political and governmental importance. Despite the problems of electoral costs and corruption, the Corporation's debt situation was not irretrievable. Moreover, the Assembly was commissioning improvements to the Hanford Mill and the Shambles. Nonetheless, the emergence of the charitable trusts and the paving commission in the 1790s foreshadowed the nature of the potent, radical, utilitarian critique of the Corporation in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the paving commission and charitable trusts can be seen as attempts to reform town governance, albeit without attempting the political struggle of dissolving the Corporation. But as efforts at reform they were certainly less than half measures, and it is not clear that the new statutory authorities and trust charities were any more effective than the corporate institutions and offices. Indeed, in many respects they worsened the condition of local government by helping to undermine the Corporation. As these new forms of public authority siphoned off resources, legitimacy, and prestige from Corporation, so they left it more vulnerable to corruption and liable to decay into a venal exchange mart for parliamentary seats and exploitable corporate offices. Thus, while not real instances of reform themselves, the statutory commissions and trust charities aggravated the circumstances which required reform.

It may seem somewhat ironic that when reform finally came in 1835, despite various other models for local administration, town governance remained vested in a form of corporation. Retention of elements of the corporate form conveyed some sense of familiarity and continuity between the old and new systems which undoubtedly eased acceptance of reform. Moreover, the use of a form of corporation easily facilitated the

engagement of locally important people without whom local government was impossible, given the devolved, relatively weak bureaucracy of the early nineteenth-century British state. Most significantly, however, the new form of corporation neatly retained one key element of the old corporate principle while dispensing with another. The reform of corporate regimes was not intended to establish municipal democracies. The old and new conception of the corporation shared the notion that participation in municipal politics was a function of property. Where they differed was in the rationale of the property principle. In the old corporate model, the freemen's participation in governance was a matter of right, as joint owners of the property of the corporation and as participants in a sphere of common commercial interests or, to use the Webbs' term, a "community of producers". In the reformed corporation post 1835, the legitimate participants in government were those whose possession of a certain amount of property identified them as sufficiently worthy or with some sense of a general interest in public affairs. It is clear that throughout the eighteenth century, local economic organisation in Ipswich -- as in most other towns -- did not accord with the "community of producers" model. Nonetheless, although based on the obsolete notion that it was the freemen's instrument for collective governance of the common affairs, the old Corporation remained an effective means of local government and a central feature of the life of the community until very late in the eighteenth century.

Finally, it is important to recognise that in 1835 the Corporation of Ipswich was reformed but not democratised. Certainly, the post reform regime was better structured to withstand the contentious party politics of the early nineteenth century than the ancient Corporation had been. The reform of the franchise and the restructuring of the deliberative bodies removed features of the old Corporation which had become so destabilising in the political climate which prevailed by the 1790s. Yet just as the new reformed regime retained the basic institutional concept of a corporation, and political participation was still founded on property, so the reformed Corporation faced the same fundamental problems as its predecessor. The legitimacy of corporate authorities and the nature and ends of local government remained as live issues. But neither the system

of government established in 1835 nor the circumstances in which it would operate would allow for the adaption and organic development which had been the essential characteristic of the ancient Corporation.

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