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The Localism of the County Feast in Late Stuart Political Culture

NEWTON E. KEY

n 29 June 1678, Huntingdonshire natives residing in or visiting London had the opportunity to witness a glittering entertainment, *The Huntington Divertisement, or, an Enterlude For the Generall Entertainment at the County-Feast, Held at Merchant-Tailors Hall*. On 27 March 1690, Yorkshire natives, also feasting in Merchant Tailors Hall, were treated to a triumphant song by Thomas D'Urfey and Henry Purcell. These elaborate pieces, presented a dozen years apart and admittedly unrepresentative of the sermons, processions, and huzzas that graced usual natives feasts, are nonetheless worth analyzing for the issues and rhetoric that the artists and their patrons thought relevant. By examining these pieces of high culture as well as more typical fare, this essay delineates one aspect of natives feasts—their localist rhetoric—and places this rhetoric in its political and social context.

Through the deployment of rhetoric and ritual, late Stuart London saw the creation (or reinvention) of a mythic county community. The provincialist myth emphasized country values—local unity, loyalty, purity—through a recitation of the county's past achievements. Country values were contrasted with factious, partisan, urban values. While provincial in its content, the provincialist myth was a rhetoric deployed in national discourse. Paradoxically, the country values delineated through the feasts' use of local history, as well as the feasts themselves, played a part in the development of party, a process that was central to late Stuart political culture. Equally paradoxically, the county feast stewards and feasters were as much part of the London community as of their county community. Their dual social status shaped the meaning of feast rhetoric and its relation to the political nation.

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The masque-like nature of the anonymous *Huntington Divertisement* (1678)—the only known theatrical production presented at a natives feast and one of but a handful of private theatricals surviving from the period—allows us to glimpse the way the county feasters viewed themselves.¹ The dedication—to “The Nobility, and the Most Generous Gentry, that are pleased to Grace this Annual Festivity with their Presence”—distinguishes between those organizing “our Annuall Convention” and members of the country elite in the audience.² Only part of the divertisement was actually performed—presumably because the author had specified not only props and musicians but also some thirty-seven actors and actresses.³

The intended production has at least three separate themes: the topography and history of Huntingdonshire, the fate of younger sons, and the charitable relationship between the feasters and the artisan poor of the county. It invokes the county community through inventories of religious houses, market towns, and local festivals. It praises the Montagues as local patriots and patrons of charity, and the *Divertisement* itself is set at Hinchbrook, county seat of the Montagues, the earls of Sandwich.

A brief historical narrative emphasizes the shire’s unity and loyalty, beginning with “Great Canutus” (p. 5). Much, but not all, of the local antiquarian detail

1. W. M., *The Huntington Divertisement, or, an Enterlude For the Generall Entertainment at the County-Feast, Held at Merchant-Taylors Hall, June 29. 1678* [licensed 16 May 1678, Roger L'Estrange; printed by J. Bennet] (London, 1678). The copy consulted for this article is Huntington Library, RB 146724; page references are given in parentheses in the text. Place of publication for all pre-1800 works is London, unless otherwise noted.

In *The London Stage 1660–1800*, pt. 1, 1660–1700, ed. William Van Lennep (Cardondale, Ill., 1965); and pt. 2, 1700–29, ed. Emmett L. Avery (Cardondale, Ill., 1960), a number of private plays and entertainments not performed at the court are noted, but most of these are the standard repertory of writers such as Howard, Fletcher, and D'Urfey, performed at Inns of Court revels. *The Huntington Divertisement* appears to be the *only* specially commissioned entertainment, between 1660 and 1714, outside court masques, performances feting George Monck in 1660, St. Cecilia's Day Odes, and the Yorkshire feast song (see below). Helpful for analyzing the form of the *Divertisement* are Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, 1965); and David Lindley, ed., *The Court Masque* (Manchester, 1984).

2. The dedication is dated a week *before* the feast. Were copies of the *Divertisement* available at the feast?
3. The author, W. M., is perhaps William Mountfort. His marriage license suggests he was only fourteen in 1678, too young to have composed the entertainment. But *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. 5, 1660–1750, ed. John Loftis et al. (London, 1976), suggests he might have been born around 1660, which would make him eighteen. The play itself makes a (self-?)mocking reference: “There is hardly a Boy of 18 years old, but is Politician enough to huff the French King out of Flanders, and make nothing to trip up his heels in Alsatiia; Or to cuff the Butterbox, if he will not cringe to the good Prince of Orange” (p. 17). Mountfort was performing in London in 1678 and became known for impromptu entertainments. Later, of course, he became a full-fledged playwright.

derives from Camden's *Britannia*.⁴ Incidents mentioned illustrate Huntingdon's loyalty to church and state in the face of vaguely defined enemies. For example, the county does not "blush to boast Her present piety in Eighty Churches (Which have surviv'd the fury of th' late Age)"; and "Godmanchester glories in her Ploughs (Where ninescore Teams have their attendance paid T' our Sovereigns in their progresse)" (p. 6). Huntingdon, however, had an unfortunate recent history: "None can upbraid its Loyalty; its true, Th' Arch-Rebell Oliver [Cromwell] here drew's first breath . . . , but that Ought not to stigmatize th' surviving Town" (p. 7).

The plot itself concerns the plight of younger sons, the relationship between country and city, and how this relationship affects national policy (charitable or otherwise) and outlook. The central characters are country JP Sir Jeofry Doe-Right, his sons, and his nephew. Sir Jeofry saunters through country meadows, "with Horace's Odes in his hand," contemplating his "happy Rural Banishment" (p. 1). His nephew, Theodore Meanwell, recites a "Sonnet on The Countrey Life":

Happy's the pesant [sic], whose indulgent fate
 Hath fixt him in a Rural state,

 He studies th' nature of the flowers and trees,
 Th' politick Government of th' Bees,

 Nor doth's bloud-thirsty sword or hand delight,
 To murder, plunder, rob, or t' fight,
 Except for th' Countreys Good

(P. 4)

As in a court masque, the stock sentiments of pastoral idyll oppose another view and way of life.⁵

4. William Camden's Latin *Britannia*, translated by Philémon Holland as *Britain or A Chorographically Description of the Most flourishing Kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland . . . out of the depth of Antiquities* (1637), 497–500. Both the *Divertisement* and Camden mention Huntingdonshire's forests and deforestation; King Canutus's travels from Ramsey Mere to Peterborough; Ramsey and Saltry, St. Neots, and Kimbolton. Camden mentions neither St. Ives, nor Hinchbrook, however; from whence does this local knowledge derive?
5. Orgel, *Jonsonian Masque*, 192–93. "Rural Happiness. A Song," in *The Last and Best Edition of New Songs. . . in Town or Court* (1677), [sig. A7], begins similarly: "How happy's the silly poor innocent Swain, / That spends all his life in a Grove or a Plain." John Dryden's poem "To My Honoured Kinsman John Driden of Chesterton in the County of Huntingdon Esquire" (1700) (*Poems and Prose*, comp. Douglas Grant [1955; reprint, Harmondsworth, England, 1985], 89), also begins: "How blessed is he who leads a country life, / Unvexed with anxious cares and void of strife! / Who studying peace and shunning civil rage / Enjoyed his youth and now enjoys his age."

For all is not well in arcadia. The younger sons complain that Sir Jeofrey has not provided for them, and they contemplate their urban career options.

Thomas: Apox on this hard fate of Younger Brothers; where the Eldest . . . must run away with the Estate. . . .

Richard: Introth, he aims to breed us up Scholars fit for Fellowships in the University or some despicable Parsonage; Or some subservient Offices at the Inns of Court, for none of which we care a rush. . . .

Thomas: My Father indeed threatens to binde me to the plough tayl, if I will not be a Scholar; But . . . I'll ramble to the East or West-Indies first. . . .

(P. 9)

Thomas then reads a mock sonnet on the country life—while, in a raucous anti-masque in the background, a drunken fool gambles away his clothes to young boys. Commenting on their drunken elder brother, Richard notes that “young brothers oft make the best Gentlemen” (p. 15). A carrier brings news from the metropolis, including notice that Huntingdon “Countrymen” there keep a charity feast.

[T]hey have set up a Monthly Club, which is kept the first Wednesday-night in every Month; when in a glasse of Sack or Claret they remember You here in the Country, and especially their great Patrons; And once a Year they have set[t]led a Feast for the honour of our Country, where all the Lords, Knights, and Gentlemen are nobly entertained at a good dinner, and the Charitable Benevolence bestowed to put out poor Children of our own Country to be Apprentices. (P. 19)

As in a court masque, the boundary between audience and action is continually crossed. Indeed, the carrier himself represents the dangerous mixing of social classes possible in the metropolis and, specifically, among the county natives at the feast. Although the carrier claims his status is too lowly for him to discuss politics—“for State-news, I will never know any; and . . . I shall never tell none, to hazard my ears; such matters will be best told You by your Letters Sir” (p. 17)—he admits that only fortune separates him from the county feasters or, indeed, from Sir Jeofrey's younger sons. “The last Year *I* was there,” the carrier remarks, adding, “I have been in my time a Merchant of almost all Trades; sometimes up, and sometimes down; and yet I live” (p. 19; my italics).

At the end, all the young men are happily established in London. In its finale, the *Divertisement* switches to a grand allegory with addresses from twelve “nymphs” representing wool carders, spinners, knitters, and lacemakers. The nymphs plead for charity and mercantilist policy: “Th’ whole County’s grown your Hospitall.” Finally, fair Huntingtonia makes separate addresses to each group of feasters—nobles, judges and lawyers, divines, gentry, citizens (“Industrious Citizens! t’ your generous Tribe, / Much of this signal splendour we ascribe” [p. 50])—and to all in general. For her last address, Huntingtonia turns and speaks to the ladies in the gallery. Though women probably attended only the entertainment and not the feast itself, their presence underscores the mixed status of the feasters as audience.⁶

D’Urfey’s words to the Yorkshire feast song, “Of Old, When Heroes Thought It Base,” repeat in a brief compass the localist themes of the *Huntington Divertisement*: past local loyalty to church and state and the relation between county and metropolis.⁷ Two verses emphasize the military might of ancient Yorkshire—“fam’d Brigantium”—and celebrate York as the supposed birthplace of “victorious Constantine.” The third verse mentions “the bashful Thames” and narrates London’s growth: once a “puny town,” she now “rears her tow’ring front so high.” The fourth verse presents the history of the shire’s military virtue through the Wars of the Roses. The song also praises the conduct of Yorkshire natives since the Reformation, when in the fight against “Rome’s slavery . . . , none were more loyal, none more brave.” For both province and metropolis the history is Whiggish—progressive and concerned to justify present arrangements. Successive verses focus on recent national history. The country had nearly been overcome by James II’s Romish plans: “the glitt’ring Queen of Night / with black eclipse in shadow’d o’er.” But William of Orange, “the renown’d Nassau / came to restore our liberty and law.” (Purcell’s music is especially glorious both at this verse and later as the contralto announces “[t]his is the knell of falling Rome.”) The last verse reveals the links between antiquity and current history, between Yorkshire and metropolis and their relevance to “this glorious festival”:

6. I am grateful to Nicholas Rogers for this point. Women certainly attended the great guild feasts in these same halls. See William Connor Sydney, *Social Life in England from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660–90* (London, 1892), 433–34.
7. From the “Yorkshire Feast Song” broadside [1690], published c. 1710. See Martin Adams, *Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of His Musical Style* (Cambridge, 1995), 241–45.

Sound all to him
 That our mighty defender has been,
 And to all the heroes invited him in.
 And as the chief agents
 In that royal work,
 Long flourish the city
 And county of York.

The Yorkshire magnate Thomas Osborne, the earl of Danby (created marquis of Carmarthen by William in 1689) is reputed to have commissioned this costly song for £100. As one of the “Immortal Seven” who invited William into England, he is cast as a hero in the piece,⁸ which also casts the county natives in London—Brigantium in Augusta—as heroes in the narrative of England’s deliverance and improvement.

The county natives meeting annually in London fostered a localist or “county” rhetoric. They created an imagined community both within their meetings and in recitations of local history in feast sermons and ephemera. Understanding their localism and the social composition of the county natives—those who would march to a London church and then, after a specially commissioned sermon, march to the hall of a livery company to feast—helps us understand the role played by the county community in early modern English society and politics.

The country—or county community—rhetoric and the contemporary use of local symbols lie within three contexts: one spatial, one social-structural, and one political. Spatially, the county community was provincial not metropolitan, a geographic truism that emphasized the well-known rhetorical contrast between the harmonious, honest country and the factional, deceptive city; the country was hospitable, the city inhospitable.⁹ In 1667, the *City and Countrey Mercury* starkly contrasted “Citizen,” who reports London coffee-house dialogue of commoners and even of women, with “Countryman,” who refuses to discuss “State affairs.” “Pox o’your opinions,” Countryman exclaims:

8. Andrew Browning, *Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby and Duke of Leeds, 1632–1712* (Glasgow, 1951), 1:449–66.
9. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973), chaps. 1 and 5; Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), 112–13; and W. A. Speck, *Society and Literature in England, 1700–1760* (Dublin, 1983), chap. 4.
10. *The City and Countrey Mercury*, nos. 2 (10–13 June 1667), 10 (8–11 July).

Our honest Countrey men . . . , when they go abroad enquire
how the Markets go, and how the Growths are, and how things
are like to be this Harvest, and t' other Grass, and not about
things above them!¹⁰

County feast sermons echo this contrast. And yet both newspaper and feast sermon originated from within London.

The social-structural context of feast literature is that of elite withdrawal—the demarcation of the county community as a distinct gentry community. As a number of historians have argued recently, the draw of London and parliamentary business led to elite disengagement from everyday county administration and local society. The process, it has been suggested, further divided patrician from plebian culture.¹¹ David Cressy describes the widening gap between ceremonial cultures: “Open parish feasts were becoming private anniversary dinners, at the same time as public theatres gave way to indoor masques. The classes and cultures of seventeenth-century England were drawing apart.”¹² County feast evidence suggests, however, that the “patrician” class was much wider—or more elastic—during the late Stuart period than historians might expect, and included minor gentry, artisans, and apprentices. Ironically, London citizens played a role in furthering the county community ideal. Below I suggest that the English deployed notions of a consensual county community as a political rhetoric within a developing partisan context. I return to this political meaning after examining county localism through feast rhetoric.

II

As I have shown elsewhere, the county feast was a particular type of natives feast.¹³ Although parish feasts had long been part of the ritual calendar of English city and rural life, natives of particular counties or cities perhaps began to meet in the early 1620s. In November 1621, John Chamberlain noted

11. See James M. Rosenheim, “County Governance and Elite Withdrawal in Norfolk, 1660–1720,” in A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James M. Rosenheim, eds., *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), 95–125; and Charles Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History* (Leicester, 1987), 19.
12. David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London, 1989), 32.
13. Newton E. Key, “The Political Culture and Political Rhetoric of County Feasts and Feast Sermons, 1654–1714,” *Journal of British Studies* 33 (1994): 223–56.

that an idle custom being lately brought up, that all Cheshire men about [London], Staffordshire men, Northampton, Sussex, Suffolk (et sic de caeteris) should have a meeting once a year at some hall and laying their money together have a feast, it must not be done without a sermon.¹⁴

Later, some countrymen set up annual feasts in their provincial city—Bristol, Hereford, Oxford, Winchester—but London was the most common site for an annual sermon and dinner for displaced countrymen. County feasts in London were resurrected during the mid-1650s along with—and for much the same reasons as—those of the clerical county associations formed by Richard Baxter and others. By 1660, however, ecumenical and evangelical fervor had dissipated, and the continued—if irregular—existence of the feasts is best explained by their political and social functions. The feasters themselves explained their purposes in terms of their own county's history and cohesiveness.

An attempt to unearth the origins of county feasting necessarily confronts the feasters' mythic sense of their own communal past. In 1702 Richard Holland claimed that the Warwickshire feast was "of ancient use and honourable Renown, famous in the Reign of Q. Elizabeth; and since that time admir'd and imitated by other Countries."¹⁵ In 1718 William Berriman claimed that the Oxfordshire feast was "the first of the kind, that was ever established or celebrated" in London, "its first erection being dated but little less than an hundred years ago." Such claims to antiquity and longevity are suspect, however. Any given county's feast was likely to be abandoned and periodically revived. The Oxfordshire feast was "the last and only one remaining," Berriman declared; but, as his midcentury editor noted, "this was said in the Year 1718; since which time . . . the Oxfordshire Feast has been dropt, and Others have been revived."¹⁶

At least 277 separate natives feasts were held between 1654 and 1714. There are only the two references to county feasts before this period (see n. 14), and relatively few references appear after it. Extant records include 69 printed feast sermons, about 120 advertisements for additional feasts, and occasional references to

14. Letter to Sir Dudley Carleton, 17 November 1621; *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman Egbert McLure (Philadelphia, 1939), 2:408. I am grateful to Lori Anne Ferrell for this reference. There are also references to Devon natives feasts, probably in 1632 and 1633, in *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies*, Surtees Society no. 65 (1875), 126–27.
15. Richard Holland, *A Sermon Preach'd to the Natives . . . of Warwick, and . . . Coventry, In . . . London, December 3. 1702* [1702?], 5.
16. William Berriman, "Sermon XI. Preach'd to the Natives of Oxfordshire . . . Nov. 20. 1718. Brotherly Love recommended," in *Christian Doctrines and Duties explained and recommended* (1751), 1:225–26.

other feasts (mainly natives meeting in Oxford and Bristol).¹⁷ Among the 162 county feasts held in London between 1654 and 1714, most were held in the early 1680s or the 1690s: fifteen were held in the 1650s, four in the 1660s, ten in the 1670s, fifty-nine in the 1680s, forty-two in the 1690s, twenty-eight in the 1700s, and only four in the 1710s. Among only twenty-seven natives feasts known to have been held between 1715 and 1776, more than half were for the newly founded Welsh Societies of Ancient Britons. Thus, the number of actively publicized *county* feasts clearly declined after the death of Queen Anne.

What was the rationale behind the meetings? A Hanoverian era feast sermon stressed “native Affection.”¹⁸ Thirty years earlier, in 1695, a feast preacher outlined four aims of a county feast: “satisfying the sensual appetite in eating and drinking,” “conversing together and Enlarging our Acquaintance in order to advance our Temporal Interest,” “Reviving good Neighbourhood, continuance of Country-Love, and mutual Affection,” and making “Collections . . . for the Support of our Poor Country-men.”¹⁹ Appetite, interest, and charity may be obvious reasons for such meetings, but the ideology of “Country-love” is peculiar and worth elucidating.

County societies made use of the full panoply of hierarchical processions, tickets, and stewards that characterized urban feasts.²⁰ The annual rhythms of county and guild feasting paralleled each other. In the late seventeenth century,

17. These figures cover county, city, and even parish feasts (if the latter were publicized). Numbers are based primarily on advertisements in *London Gazette* (1665–1715) and sermons in Sampson Letsome, *The Preacher's Assistant, In Two Parts. Part I. A series of the Texts Of all the Sermons . . . published Since the Restoration* (1753). (I have read sixty-five out of the sixty-nine pre-1715 feast sermons.) For advertisements, virtually all London newspapers, 1654–87, have been searched, as well as (besides the *London Gazette*): *Flying Post* (random 1696; complete 1698–1701; September–December 1702); *Post Boy* (October–December 1695–97; complete 1698–1700); *The Post Boy, With the Freshest Advices, Foreign and Domestick* (September–December 1709–10); *Post Man* (October–December 1695–97; complete 1698–1700; random 1702; September–December 1703–6; complete 1707; September–December 1709; complete 1710; September–December 1714–15); *Daily Courant* (September–December 1702–14, complete 1706, 1709–10; January 1711; complete 1712; random 1715). I have prepared a reference list for advertisements, sermons, and ephemera for each feast noted as part of an article on these sources for late Stuart local history.
18. Thomas Bullock, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Herefordshire Society . . . , London, on . . . February 2. 1725* (1726), 22–23.
19. John Russe[ll], *A Sermon Preach'd . . . to the Natives of Wiltshire . . . , November the 12th. 1695* (1696), sig. A2.
20. Jonathan Barry, “Cultural Patronage and the Anglican Crisis: Bristol c. 1689–1775,” in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor, eds., *The Church of England c. 1689–c. 1835: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), suggests that Bristol's corporation feast had a similar influence on the form of natives feasts there (p. 193).

London livery companies increasingly held feasts in their halls in late autumn, the season when county feasting was at its peak.²¹ County feast ritual punctuated early modern London's ceremonial life.²²

Of the many voluntary associations that flourished in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the London county feast societies employed the most pronounced historical and localist rhetoric. Other associations for transplanted natives—the Scots' societies and the Welsh Societies of Ancient Britons—and later social and charitable associations—the Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Sons of the Clergy (begun in the 1650s), school alumni, Lovers of Ancient Musick—followed the county natives in adopting the “formal annual meeting,” imprinting feast tickets with icons of their societies.²³ But the county feasts' emphasis on local history and the relationship between locality and nation surpassed even the nationalist sentiment of Scots and Welsh societies. A charity established in the mid-1650s for impoverished Scots in London emphasized apprenticeships together with localist sentiment; its original charter declared the charity to be “for the maintenance of old or decayed artificers of the Scottish Nation, and for training up their children to handicraft employments.”²⁴ But the Scots' societies did not develop a pro-

21. See Ian W. Archer, *The History of the Haberdashers' Company* (Chichester, 1991), 126–31.

22. See Michael Berlin, “Civic Ceremony in Early Modern London,” *Urban History Yearbook* (1986): 13–27. More than half the dated feasts (106 out of 192, or 55.2 percent) were held in November and December, following the Lord Mayor's parade on 29 October. The other major season was June through September (30.7 percent). This pattern suggests a strong survival of the traditional rural calendar (paralleling the seasons of Whitsun ales and harvest feasts in the countryside) in the midst of elite metropolitan culture. See Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 24.

23. William A. Bultmann and Phyllis Bultmann, “The Roots of Anglican Humanitarianism: A Study of the Membership of the S.P.C.K. and the S.P.G., 1699–1720,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 33 (1964): 39–40; Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991), 491–95; Keith Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading, England, 1976), esp. 14–15; and William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford, 1992), 109–10. For reproductions of similar tickets, see E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York, 1991), plates I–III (union “charities,” dating from 1725); and Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–83* (Oxford, 1989), plate 13 (Magdalen charity, 1764).

24. The government issued letters patent for a Scots' Hospital in 1655 and established the Scots' Corporation in 1664–65. See *A Survey Of the Cities of London and Westminster . . . by John Stow*, ed. John Strype (1720), 1:53–54; and Garret V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana, or, An Historical Inquiry into those . . . Societies . . . between the Years 1678 and 1740* (London, 1912), 168–69. Similar Scots' charitable societies formed in Boston, Massachusetts (in 1658, reformed in 1684), in New York (in 1744) and in Norwich, England (in 1775). Robert B. Adam, comp., *The Constitution and By-laws of the Scots' Charitable Society*

nounced localist rhetoric, nor did the Societies of Ancient Britons in London (from 1714) and Bristol (from the 1760s), although they did make vague references to their Welsh customs and history. The St. David's Day sermons of the Ancient Britons, delivered in Welsh, praised the preservation of the "Usages and Constitutions of your Ancestors" and of their "primitive Language before Julius Caesar's Time."²⁵ These societies also adopted feast rituals and apprenticeship schemes similar to those of the county societies.²⁶

It was the role of the feast stewards to decide which rituals to perform, as well as which apprenticeships to fund. Compared with the feast stewards of other London societies, county feast stewards were not a prestigious group. Out of more than four hundred named stewards at county feasts in London, three-fourths were titled "Mr." and another 15 percent had no title. Only thirty (7 percent) were squires or nobles.²⁷ County feast stewards were unlikely to be squires or prominent landed gentry; a significant minority, however, were prominent Londoners. At least twenty-seven county stewards were London aldermen or common councilmen who had been apprenticed into the various livery companies. Their fathers included a bishop, two knights, a squire, two gentlemen, and three yeomen, as well as two merchants, a mercer, two drapers, and an innholder.²⁸ In short, feast stewards were drawn from a wide swathe of countrymen and townsmen, gentlemen and middling sorts.

of Boston (Boston, 1896); *Rules of the Scots Society in New York* (New York, 1744); and *An Account of the Scots Society in Norwich, From its Rise in 1775, until . . . 1784* (Norwich, n.d.). The quotation is from *An Account of the Institution, Progress, and Present State of the Scots' Corporation in London* (London, [1810?]), 8.

25. W. Wotton, *A Sermon Preached . . . before the British Society . . . Upon St. David's-Day, 1722* (1723), dedication, sig. [A3–6].
26. See Sir Thomas Jones, *The Rise and Progress of the Most Honourable and Loyal Society of Antient Britons* (1717); Emrys Jones, "The Welsh in London in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Welsh History Review* 10 (1981): 470; and Jonathan Barry, "The Cultural Life of Bristol, 1640–1775" (D.Phil. diss., Oxford, 1985), 179. With tickets costing half a guinea, the Ancient Britons were restricted more clearly to the elite; *London Gazette*, no. 5408 (14–18 February 1716).
27. In contrast, two-thirds of the stewards of the Artillery Company of London (1669–82) or of the St. Cecilia's Day feasts (1683–97) were squires or nobles; see Key, "The Political Culture and Political Rhetoric of County Feasts," 239.
28. This list is compiled from stewards with the same names as alderman from J. R. Woodhead, *The Rulers of London, 1660–89* (London, 1965), who also have the same county of birth, county of birth of their parents, and/or county landholdings, and who are in the same age group. Another three or four were brothers of aldermen and another twenty share name and age group with specific aldermen, but the namesake has no clear county connection.

Apprentices often attended county feasts, in the first instance as objects of charity. About half of the feast sermons recommended a specific charitable purpose, and the charity most often urged and supported was the apprenticeship of country boys to London trades. Thomas Watts appended a list of those apprenticed by the Herefordshire Society to his 1723 feast sermon.²⁹ Other preachers noted the number of boys apprenticed. London natives in 1705 and Yorkshire natives in 1708 were urged to provide apprenticeships for children of “decay’d Members” of the societies.³⁰ Like choruses of schoolchildren at charity school feasts during the reign of Anne, apprentices would often grace the county feasts as an illustration and symbol of native benevolence.³¹ Interestingly, feast preachers did not consider the gap between charitable feasters and the objects of their charity to be unbridgeable. “[W]ho can say what great Traders, what large Estates, and what considerable Families may spring from these beginnings,” noted a Warwickshire feast preacher in 1679, reflecting on the apprenticeships supported by the feasters.³² London apprenticeships integrated the boys into civic life and the political nation. And Warwickshire feasters were reminded in 1680 and again in 1704 that boys apprenticed by the natives had risen to become “New Men”—presumably, London tradesmen—and stewards of the feast itself.³³

Socially, then, county feasters were of a profoundly hybrid character: they felt a keen sense of connection with their county but most had an even more tangible connection with London. Furthermore they were drawn from all but the poorest social groups, or at least from a large group of uncertain status. This applied in general to younger sons or cadet branches of middling gentry, who apparently played a large role in establishing and maintaining the county feasts. While the

29. Thomas Watts, *Social Friendship and Charity demonstrated . . . In a Sermon Before . . . the Natives of the County of Hereford . . . December 4, 1723* (1724), 33.

30. Joseph Dunstan, *Brotherly Love Recommended: in a Sermon Preached at the . . . Meeting of the Natives of . . . London . . . On November 17, 1704* (1705), 24; *Daily Courant*, no. 2017 (August 1708).

31. See Barry, “Cultural Life of Bristol,” 181; and Craig Rose, “London’s Charity Schools, 1690–1730,” *History Today* 40 (March 1990): 17–23.

32. William Basset, *A Sermon at the Warwick-shire Meeting, November 25, 1679* (1679), 23.

33. Robert Tayler, *A Sermon Preachid at the Anniversary Meeting of the Warwick-shire Men . . . Novemb. 25. 1680* (1680), 17. Luke Milbourn[e], *Christian Good-Fellowship. A Sermon Preached at the Meeting . . . of the County of Warwick . . . December the 7th. 1704* (1704), 23. For discussion of apprentices, see Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), esp. chaps. 4–5, 9; and Paul S. Seaver, “Declining Status in an Aspiring Age: The Problem of the Gentle Apprentice in Seventeenth-Century London,” in Bonnelyn Young Kunze and Dwight D. Brautigam, eds., *Court, Country, and Culture: Essays on Early Modern British History in Honor of Perez Zagorin* (Rochester, N.Y., 1992), 129–48.

younger son theme was a literary commonplace, contemporaries perceived the provision of careers for younger sons of gentry as a real social necessity. In the Jacobean comedy *Eastward Ho*, a gentle-born apprentice to a goldsmith exclaims: "Why, 'sblood, sir, my mother's a gentlewoman, and my father a justice of peace and of [the] quorum: and though I am a younger brother and a prentice, yet I hope I am my father's son."³⁴ Both Richard and Thomas in the *Huntington Divertisement* and Kent Society sermons (see below) emphasize gavelkind, or partible inheritance, which, in contrast to primogeniture, provided more equal estates to younger and elder sons.

Apprenticeship linked the mixed social and economic paths of the feasters, as well as bridging the gap between country and metropolis. It played a role in both the county feast charitable schemes and the provision for gentry sons. D. R. Hainsworth notes that gentry younger sons and sons of cadet branches entered into trade and commercial apprenticeships in significant numbers during the second half of the seventeenth century, and they played an increasingly important role in London society. Hainsworth argues that there were "close and continuing connections between gentry and bourgeoisie; a connection in which younger sons played a major role."³⁵ Natives feasts would allow younger sons to make connections in the city, maintain their social status, channel their religious and charitable impulses, and unite for political clout. In any case, it is significant that feasters at the margins of the provincial elite and tied as much to London as to their native shire should lead the making of the county community ideal.

III

The localist rhetoric fostered at natives feasts often centered on the recitation of county history on tickets, in ritual, and through feast sermons. The local Protestant martyrology and charities emphasized during the 1650s differ from the more secular county achievements trumpeted in the 1690, a shift that reflects

34. George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston, *Eastward Ho*, quoted in Seaver, "Declining Status in an Aspiring Age," 129, 48; quotation on 131.
35. D. R. Hainsworth, "Manor House to Counting House: The Gentry Younger Son in Trade in the Seventeenth Century," in Frank McGregor and Nicholas Wright, eds., *European History and Its Historians* (Adelaide, 1977), 66–74, esp. 71; J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550–1760* (London, 1987), 87; Linda Pollock, "Younger Sons in Tudor and Stuart England," *History Today* 39 (June 1989): 23–29; and Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Stanford, Calif., 1994), 87–88, 255.

distinct changes in sermonizing and rhetoric in English society at large. Here, the intention is not to describe the periodization of feast rhetoric or use of history but to show how different natives feasts fostered common threads of local history in the late Stuart period.

The stewards inscribed a literal portrait of the county community on feast tickets. Two surviving examples—a ticket to the Bristol feast of the “Gentlemen Natives of the County of Wiltshire,” circa 1734, and a Kentish feast ticket of 1700—sketch the themes of love of rural life, local topography, and county history found in more detail in county feast sermons. The Wiltshire feast ticket portrays Salisbury Cathedral, with a shepherd and his flock in the foreground and a miniature Stonehenge in the background. Stewards’ names and feast details clutter the center of the Kentish ticket and are surrounded by coats of arms for the county, its two cathedrals, and the earl of Kent and other nobility. Canterbury and Rochester cathedrals are drawn to the left and right, while Father Medway and Father Stour are below. A number of unlikely looking Saxons in kilts hide behind branches to the left, while mounted and armed Normans approach from the right.³⁶

Feast ritual often fleshed out the communal ideal through the use of local historical totems. When Southampton “countrymen” met in London in 1707, the town corporation sent “that famous Piece of Antiquity (which has remain’d in their Town many Hundred Years) the Sword of Sir Bevis of Southampton . . . , to be carry’d in the Procession from the Church to the Hall.”³⁷ Kent Society processions included “Green Boughs,” men “in Buff Coats with Bows and Arrows,” and even “Trumpets, Hoyboys and Kettle drums.” In 1699 and 1701 a strongman led the Kentish procession, carrying “a tree weighing 400 weight . . . , with three or four children upon the boughs.”³⁸ The 1731 inventory of the Charitable Society of Natives and Citizens of Winchester, which met in that city annually from 1669, listed a porter’s gown “with a silver plate with the city arms engraved

36. *Wiltshire Notes and Queries* (1896–98), vol. 2, facing p. 5; Henry R. Plomer, *The Kentish Feast* (Canterbury, 1916), frontispiece. For other county feast tickets, see Bodleian Library, MS. Wood 276 B, fol. 119 (1662), described in *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, described by Himself*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1891–94), 1:462–43, 2:199; and Beaver H. Blacker, ed., *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries* (n.p., 1897), 3:449. The latter describes a 1793 London Gloucestershire feast ticket emblazoned with George Ridler, his dog, and the proverb “As Sure as God’s in Gloster.”

37. *Daily Courant*, no. 1804 (26 November 1707).

38. Plomer, *The Kentish Feast*, 15–19; and George O. Howell, ed., *The Kentish Note Book* (London, 1891), 1:208–9.

on it" (purchased before 1675), a cap, and four steward's staves.³⁹ The Winchester society feast stewards and those of a Warwickshire feast in London wore "Garlands of Laurel."⁴⁰ In the 1680s both London parish and Westminster city feasters sang loyal verses.⁴¹ The historical totems in Yorkshire's feast song and Huntingdon's divertisement have been detailed above.

Feast sermons provide the most extended localist detail and argument. The sermons that stewards decided to have published treat three themes—unity, charity, feasting—which derived from the ancient notion of agape and the biblical connotations of such "love feasts." But late Stuart political and religious controversies continually threatened to divide any would-be community. To make consensus concrete, one rhetorical solution was to emphasize localist tradition and historical (or mythological) county community.

A portrait of the county and its history was a brief but important part of feast sermons, usually saved for the final application of the text at the conclusion. Stephen Chapman, sermonizing before the natives of Bristol in 1702, apologized for not extolling

something of the Excellencies of this our Native City; also of the great Worth and Vertues of our Ancestors: But this is a Subject fit rather for an History, than a Sermon; and much more becoming an Antiquary, than a Divine. Besides . . . I am wholly unacquainted with the Annals of this, tho' my Native Place.⁴²

Many other preachers, however, developed the county connection at length—as, indeed, stewards and feasters expected them to do. Daniel Woolf and other

39. Recently published in *Hampshire Chronicle* (23 August 1969). I am grateful to Miss S. Foster, archivist, Hampshire Record Office, for this reference. See also John Henry Todd, *A Memento of the Charitable Societies of Natives and Aliens, In the City of Winchester* (Winchester, 1869), 8–9. Local symbolism seems to have expanded in later feasts. The Gloucestershire Society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included songs and statues of George Ridler and his dog "reclining upon a barrel, with his pipe and jug, emblematical of his conviviality." See Blacker, *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries* (n.p., 1897), 3:449 (London, 1890), 4:581–82. The Wiltshire Society of Bristol feast procession included a shepherd and his dog; see John Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (n.p., 1893), 183.
40. Tho. Mannyngham, *A Sermon Preached at the Hampshire-Feast . . . Feb. 16. 1685/6* (1686), dedication; William Assheton, *A Sermon Preached . . . November the 21th, 1700* (1700), 17–18; and Thomas Willis, *The Excellency of Wisdom . . . In a Sermon Preached . . . Nov. 30. 1675* (1676), 32.
41. *Song at the Loyal Feast in Westminster-Hall, August the 6th. 1685* (1685), broadside; Cyrus Lawrence Day, ed., *The Songs of Thomas D'Urfey* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), 33. For a later Somerset Society in Bristol song (ca. 1752), see Bristol Archives Office AC/J3/13/8, cited in Barry, "Cultural Life of Bristol," 180.
42. Stephen Chapman, *A Sermon Preached before the Free-Born Citizens of Bristol, . . . August 27. 1702* (Oxford, 1703), 20–21.

historians remind us that in early modern England history could be either story or inventory: chronological or chorographical. The latter was the domain of the local antiquarian and county historian.⁴³ In natives feasts, history was deployed as a local inventory as well as a narrative of past local liberties and loyalty. County histories and chorographies began to be written in the 1570s and were legion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the late Stuart period, such antiquarian compilations, which had become quite scholarly, were being penned in increasing numbers by country parsons. Although John Harris, who preached before the Southampton "county" natives in 1706 and published *The History of Kent* in 1719, was probably the only feast preacher who also wrote a county history, others, such as George Hickes, were prominent antiquarians.⁴⁴

The rise of the London county feast roughly parallels the rise of the printed county history. Late Stuart county feast preachers took advantage of recent antiquarian scholarship and the large number of county studies and maps published in the second half of the seventeenth century. Sir William Dugdale's *The Antiquities of Warwickshire* and Daniel King's compilation, *The Vale-Royall of England. Or, The County Palatine of Chester Illustrated*, were published in 1656, the same year William Lambarde's *A Perambulation of Kent* was republished.⁴⁵ In 1679 William Basset referred obliquely to Dugdale when he preached about

43. D. R. Woolf, "Erudition and the Idea of History in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 11 (1987): 1–48, esp. 14–17; Richard Helgersen, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), 132–47; and Joseph Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987), esp. 176–77. Cf. Stan A. E. Mendyk, "Speculum Britanniae": *Regional Study, Antiquarianism, and Science in Britain to 1700* (Toronto, 1989), where this distinction is blurred (p. 14).
44. See W. G. Hoskins, *Local History in England*, 2d ed. (London, 1972), 18–21; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 96–97; and Jeremy Black, "Ideology, History, Xenophobia, and the World of Print in Eighteenth-Century England," in Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Culture, Politics, and Society in Britain, 1660–1800* (Manchester, 1991), 187.
45. King, an engraver, largely appropriated an early-seventeenth-century text for his *Vale-Royall*; see Mendyk, "Speculum Britanniae," 86. King, in *Vale-Royall*, sig. Aaaa[1], notes other county surveys besides Lambarde and Dugdale in print or forthcoming: Richard Carew *The survey of Cornwall* (first published 1602); John Norden, "The brief description of Middlesex and Hartfordshire" (*Speculum Britanniae. The first part an historicall discription [sic] of Middlesex* [first published 1593] and *1598 Speculi Britanniae pars the description of Hartfordshire* [first published 1598]); William Burton, *The Description of Leicester shire [sic]* (first published 1622); Augustin Vincent, "Description of the County of Northampton" (never completed); Sampson Erdeswick, *A Brief view of Staffordshire* (begun 1593, first published 1717). See Jack Simmons, "The Writing of English County History," *English County Historians*, 1st ser. (East Ardsley, Yorkshire, 1978): 1–21.

Warwickshire, “famous for Antiquities.”⁴⁶ Feast preachers used Thomas Fuller’s *The History of the Worthies of England*, arranged by county and published in 1662, more often as a source for country sayings than for county history.⁴⁷ During the 1650s several feast preachers referred to James Howell’s recently published *Londinopolis*.⁴⁸ Samuel Clarke drew on his own *Martyrologie* in his 1654 Warwickshire feast sermon.⁴⁹

Feast sermons inventoried local topography, buildings and institutions, and worthies. In the eighteenth century one feast sermon even celebrated Oxfordshire’s natural history, reminding natives of “the rareness of its Minerals; the richness of its Soil” and mentioning Robert Plot’s geological work, *The Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677).⁵⁰ Numerous feast preachers singled out the county’s chief churches, hospitals, and schools, especially as such “foundations for Piety and Charity” could remind listeners of the feast’s own charitable concerns.⁵¹ Such public institutions were most plentiful in the metropolis. One preacher noted, before natives of London: “Walk about London . . . tell her Markets, . . . Halls for Societies . . . consider her Bridwel . . . Bethlehem . . . Hospitals . . . and tell me if she deserves not the name Augusta.” This same preacher admitted that a full metropolitan inventory would have to include “[w]hat filthiness is in her skirts, I mean her Suburbs.”⁵² As this comment suggests, even antiquarian inventory could be polemically charged. A preacher reminded Herefordshire natives of “the venerable Old Cathedral there with the Figures, as big as the Life, of its antient Bishiops, some above 500 Years standing, yet all defac’d and mangled by sacrilegious Rebels” during the Civil Wars and Interregnum.⁵³

46. Basset, *A Sermon*, 24.

47. See, for instance, John Williams, *A Sermon Preached at the Northampton-Shire Feast, November 8. 1683* (1684), 19.

48. Edm[und] Calamy, *The City Remembrancer. Or, A Sermon Preached To the Native-Citizens, Of London . . . , the 23 June, A.D. MDCLVII* (1657), 16–17; Nathaniel Hardy, *The Olive-Branch Presented to the Native Citizens of London, In a Sermon preached . . . May 27* (1658), 28; Tho. Case, *Sensuality Dissected . . . : In a Sermon preached To divers Citizens . . . Born in the County of Kent . . . 9. of June. 1657* (1657), sig. A[3].

49. Samuel Clarke, *Christian Good-Fellowship . . . in a Sermon preached . . . before the Gentlemen, Natives of Warwickshire . . . November the 30. 1654* (1655), 9; and idem, *A Martyrologie, Containing A Collection Of all the Persecutions Which have befallen the Church of England . . . To the end of Queen Maries Reign* (1652), 64.

50. Berriman, “Sermon XI,” 1:223–24. On Plot, see Mendyk, “*Speculum Britanniae*,” chap. 11.

51. The quotation is from Williams, *A Sermon Preached*, 19–20.

52. Hardy, *The Olive-Branch Presented*, 27, 33.

53. Watts, *Social Friendship*, 24.

By recounting county worthies, feast sermons self-consciously acted as the “Publique Register of the Repairers of England’s breaches.”⁵⁴ County feast preachers listed benefactors of county hospitals and almshouses. In 1657 Thomas Case derived a list of Kentish Protestant benefactors from several historical works.⁵⁵ The county feasters themselves became part of this public inventory of local benefactors: one Warwickshire feast steward was praised for subscribing £80 “towards the placing of poor boies born in Rugbie, Apprentices in London.”⁵⁶ County benefactors probably continued to be praised in feast hall toasts. After Hickes claimed Emperor Constantine for York, the preacher concluded that “it is fitter to talk over the long Catalogue of our Worthies at the Table than in the Pulpit.”⁵⁷ Richard Helgerson’s observation that “chorographies are repositories of proper names,” and that, by the seventeenth century, “there are *only* county chorographies,” is certainly applicable to feast sermons.⁵⁸

Other lists of county worthies were more general, such as that praising “those many Brave Men Born and Bred in [Warwickshire], famous . . . in Church and State, in Court and Camp.”⁵⁹ Interregnum preachers recounted local Reformation “Saints” and martyrs in the 1650s.⁶⁰ A description of Herefordshire as “the Womb of . . . the illustrious Cliffords, Cecills, Scudamores, the very ancient Family of Croft’s Knights, with others,” was drawn from Camden’s *Britannia*.⁶¹ Peter Shelley’s Cheshire feast sermon took a different tack: “The intermixt Matches of Families (which formerly were seldom out of the County) hath so generally Allianc’d one to another as the whole is a kind of Literal Brotherhood”—observations that may remind us of some modern historians! Shelley then wedded local unity rhetoric to an argument about national loyalism, recalling Cheshire’s support both of George Booth’s 1659 rising against the republicans and of his son’s, Henry Booth’s (now Lord Delamere), support of the 1688 Revolution in the north:

54. Case, *Sensuality Dissected*, 87.

55. *Ibid.*, dedication, sigs. A[3–5]. Sources include James Howell, *Londinopolis* (1657); Fuller, *The Church-History of Britain* (1655); Andrew Willet, *Synopsis papism: that is, a general view of papistry* (1592, and numerous editions through 1634).

56. See, for instance, Clarke, *Christian Good-Fellowship*, epistle dedicatory.

57. George Hickes, *The Moral Shechinah*. . . ; *In a Sermon Preached at the last Yorkshire-Feast . . . , June 11. 1682* (1682), 31.

58. Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 133.

59. Holland *A Sermon Preach’d*, 4; only Guy of Warwick was mentioned by name.

60. Clarke, *Christian Good-Fellowship*, 9.

61. Unlike Rich. Gardiner, in “A Sermon Preached . . . On the Anniversary Meeting of Herefordshire Natives, June 24. 1658,” attached to *XVI Sermons Preached in the University of Oxford and at Court* (1659), 307, Camden did not mention the Cecils (see *Britain*, 617–22).

Your Loyalty hath been in this Age sufficiently remarkable. You were the only Persons who stood up in Defence of our Laws and Religion. . . . Nor did that Public Spirit of our Ancient gentry, under the Conduct of the Honourable Father, expire with the Fatal issue of that glorious Design: But exerted it self as Need requir'd, with equal Vigour, by assisting the no less Right Honourable Son; who did so zealously and successfully revive the Courage of our Country-Men, as very much Facilitated the late Happy Revolution.⁶²

Specific local historical narrative in county feast sermons usually recounted either events of the Saxon age or more recent incidents from the civil war. Feast sermons contain virtually no racial argument about Germanic forefathers, and even Kent feast sermons lack reference to the landing of Hengist and Horsa.⁶³ Feast preachers kept the chronology of their earliest local referents shrouded in mist. The mythical King Lucius was a popular totem at London and Kentish feasts. John Petter, for example, fancifully claimed that Lucius built the first English Christian Church at Dover—Petter was on more solid ground when he spoke of Ethelbert's encouragement of "the light of Gospel."⁶⁴ And Yorkshire's Feast Song of 1690 echoed Hickes's erroneous claim that Emperor Constantine had been born at York.⁶⁵

Kent feast preachers invariably retold at length their county's past during the late Stuart period, which was both the peak of county feast societies and "a great epoch in the history of Anglo-Saxon scholarship."⁶⁶ They emphasized Kentish "ancient liberties"—a local ancient constitution that gave the community unbroken continuity with the past.⁶⁷ "Our County, in Caesar's time," claimed one preacher, "was accounted the Civilest among the Britains, not Conquer'd, but

62. Peter Shelley, *A Sermon Preach'd before . . . the Natives Of . . . Chester . . . , December 7th 1699* (1700), 26–27.

63. Contrast with sources in Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Hanover, N.H., 1982).

64. John Petter, *A Sermon Preach'd before . . . the Natives of . . . Kent, Novemb. the 17th. 1698* (1698), 15–16. See also Calamy, *The City Remembrancer*, 13.

65. Hickes, *The Moral Shechinah*, 31.

66. David C. Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660–1730*, 2d ed. (London, 1951), chap. 3 (quotation on p. 52); T. O. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London, 1950), 101–40; Joseph Levine, *Humanism and History*, 174–77.

67. Quotation is from Samuel Prat[t], *Peace and Gratitude. A Sermon Preached before the . . . Natives . . . of Kent, Novem. 23. 1697*, 21. See also Edward Brown, *A sermon Preach'd before . . . the Natives . . . of Kent, Novemb. the 16th, 1699* (1699), 25; and Assheton, *A Sermon Preached*, 15–17.

compounded with by the Romans.”⁶⁸ And William I (“I will not call him your Conqueror”), claimed another, had given Kent special privileges, granting “to all the Inhabitants of the Province of Kent, the Preservation and free Enjoyment of all their ancient Laws and Customs under the Saxon Reigns.”⁶⁹ Preachers in 1690, 1697, and 1701 repeated the specious Swanscomb tale of Kentish respite from the Norman yoke, probably drawing directly from Lambarde’s *A Perambulation of Kent* or Camden’s *Britannia* (newly translated in 1695).⁷⁰ Supposedly, the men of Kent had marched from Swanscomb in battle dress hidden by green branches to meet the Conqueror. Upon detecting their weapons hitherto covered by shrubbery (illustrated on the feast ticket and represented by laurels at the feast), William parleyed with the men and allowed Kent to retain its original liberties and customs, including “Gavel Kind, or Give-all-Kin, whereby all lands are divided among the sons, and so all are Freeholders.”⁷¹

County feast use of local history promoted a rhetoric of country values—ancient liberties and purity—that served a national discourse. During the reign of William III (a second conqueror to some), the gallantry of Saxon Kentish men, “ever to claim the Front of the Battel,” and Swanscomb served as pleas to gird against contemporary divisions and to squelch party in the face of the external French threat.

Had [their Kentish forefathers] then divided into Parties and Factions, the Composition of Swanscomb had never found a place in our Annals, nor the Memorial of that moving Wood added to this Day’s Pomp. . . . And should . . . the Designs of our Enemies prevail so far as to get footing upon English Ground again . . . , nothing can save us but Unity.⁷²

68. Petter, *A Sermon Preach’d*, 15.

69. Assheton, *A Sermon Preached*, 14–17.

70. See Maud E. Simkins, “Political History,” in *The Victoria History of the County of Kent* (London, 1932), 3:279; William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent*, 1576 ed. (London, 1826), 20–21; and Camden, *Britain*, 324–25, 329.

71. “William the Conqueror, who having slain King Harold . . . at Battle in Sussex, marched to Dover Castle in order to subdue Kent; but the people encouraged by Stigand . . . assembled in the great Woods at Swanscomb near Gravesend, expecting D. William, with each a green bough in his Hand, who coming next day, was annoyed to see a Wood marching against him. . . . [T]he two valiant Prelates thus addressed him: ‘Most noble Prince, the Commons of Kent are come to receive you as their Sovereign in Peace, provided they shall for ever enjoy their ancient customs, liberties and estates: If not, they resolve rather to die free, than to live Slaves.’ The Conqueror, not knowing their numbers consented to their demands.” From *English Post* (22–25 November 1700), reprinted in Plomer, *Kentish Feast*, 17. See Howell, *The Kentish Note Book*, 1:41–42; and Helgersson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 136–37 (on Lambarde’s discussion of gavelkind).

72. William Wake, *A Sermon Preach’d At . . . the General Meetings of the Gentlemen and Others of . . . Dorset, . . . Decemb. the 2d. 1690* (1690), 33–34.

Following the Treaty of Ryswick, Kentish feasters were urged to guard against “Enmities at home,” now that God had “disperse[d] the dangers of a Foreign Enemy.”⁷³ Local partisanship was as great a concern as international policy. A 1701 sermon made clear how Kentish factions would serve Louis XIV’s attempt at universal monarchy:

A mighty Prince of insatiable Ambition is framing to himself everyday new pretences to justifie his Attempts of rendering his Dominions as large as his Desires. . . . [He] cannot have a more fatal Advantage put into his Hands, than the Quarrels of Them who used to check Invaders.⁷⁴

Other feast preachers marshaled recent local history, especially of the civil wars, in service of particular current political objectives. Hereford had remained a “Loyal City” against the Scots, until betrayed “by false-hearted English-Men” (an attack on Herefordshire’s former Parliamentary and Whig MP, Col. John Birch). Worcester was “famous for its Loyalty and Sufferings, having been one of the first stages of the Civil War, to fight for gasping Monarchy; and at last the Scene of that fatal Defeat.”⁷⁵ An Oxfordshire feast preacher combined an Anglo-Saxon past with recent loyalty to the monarch during both the civil war and the 1681 Oxford Parliament. Ever since King Alfred, he noted, “[t]he Kings of England . . . have made Oxford . . . their City of Refuge.”⁷⁶ In 1682, Edward Pelling recalled the Wiltshire natives’ “[l]oyal Parents [who] suffered . . . [and their] Friends [who] feared not to roll in Bloud for the King and the Church sake.”⁷⁷ The 1684 Herefordshire feast sermonizer, conflating civil war allegiances with exclusion crisis partisan ones, proposed charity relief only for “[l]oyal persons . . . who either suffered in service of the late Royal Martyr; or, of late, in their faithfull adherence to our present Sovereign; when the Tragedy of Forty-one was . . . designed to be re-acted, by some of the same men, but all of the same Principles.”⁷⁸ Thomas Cartwright’s 1684 Yorkshire feast sermon largely reviewed civil war disputes, belittled arguments underpinning recent

73. Prat[t], *Peace and Gratitude*, 20–21.

74. George Stanhope, *Christian Charity. A Sermon Preached before . . . the Natives . . . of Kent, Novemb. 20. 1701* (1701), 22–25.

75. Fra. Fox, *A Sermon Preached at the Herefordshire Feast . . . , July 3 1683* (1683), 24; Adam Littleton, *A Sermon at a Solemn Meeting of the Natives . . . of Worcester . . . , June 24. 1680* (1680), 35.

76. John Hartcliffe, *A Sermon Preached at the Oxford-shire Feast . . . Nov. 29. 1683* (1684), 29.

77. Edward Pelling, *A Sermon Preached . . . Novemb. 27. 1682. Being the Day of the Wiltshire Feast* (1683), 26.

78. William Bolton, *Joseph’s Entertainment of his Brethren in a Sermon Preached at the Herefordshire Feast . . . , June the 25th. 1684* (1684), 20.

antimonarchical tracts, and did not relate specifically to the county. But even his extended attack on the “Commonwealth Principles” of Henry Neville’s *Plato Redivivus* and other works invoked the historical memory of the feasters’ “Loyal Ancestors of Yorkshire,” who opened “Veins and Purses” for Charles I at “Marston-More” and “Tower-Hill.”⁷⁹ Feast sermons also made vague but ominous references to recent local events. For example, Thomas Bisse warned the revived Herefordshire Society in 1728 about the dire effects “[w]hen Party enters into a City or Town, and into which of these throughout the Land has it not enter’d, yea, taken possession?”⁸⁰ In 1702 Stephen Chapman felt his fellow citizen feasters at Bristol needed little reminder of “the Fatal Consequences” of “Factions and Parties”: “This our Native Country hath severly smarted under its Yoke.”⁸¹

Two aspects of county history sit uneasily next to each other in feast sermons, the county’s past peaceable unity and its loyalty. Feast preachers used county history as part of a consensual “country” rhetoric. But it was a consensus *against* others: loyalty suggested partisanship. Moreover, private partisan meetings suggested separatist conventicling; public partisan expression suggested riot and tumult. Thus, in the wake of the exclusion crisis, Rye House Plot, and Monmouth’s Rebellion, Thomas Mannyngham urged civility at the 1686 Hampshire natives feast on a day usually associated with carnival excess.

[M]y Directions about Manners . . . I hope were not altogether improper for the Moderating the Jollities of a Shrove-Tuesday. . . . The most Ungovernable thing that I perceiv’d, was in the Loud Expressions of your Loyalty: and that I suppose is now the only Tumult, which your Excellent City will allow of.⁸²

~ IV ~

Localist rhetoric—the county community myth—was deployed in a new, protopartisan political culture. County feast sermons claimed to allay “[t]empers . . . embitter’d . . . by differences of Nation, Party, or Religion.”⁸³ Feast sermons urged county

79. Tho. Cartwright, *A Sermon Preached to the Gentlemen of Yorkshire . . . , 24th of June, 1684* (1684), 20, 35.

80. Thomas Bisse, *Society recommended. A sermon preached before the . . . natives of Herefordshire . . . , February 7, 1727* (1728), 29. For Bisse, see DNB; see also Weber, *Rise of Musical Classics*, 114–15.

81. Chapman, *A Sermon Preached*, 23–24.

82. Mannyngham, *A Sermon Preached*, dedication. On Shrove Tuesday, see Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 18–19.

83. Tho. Lindesay, *A Sermon Preached at the Anniversary Meeting of the Dorset-shire Gentlemen . . . , Dec. 1. 1691* (1692), 2.

natives to avoid those who invent "Political machin[es]."⁸⁴ Merely meeting and talking were taken by some preachers to be the root of evil: "That feasting, or public eating and drinking together, were the types of Union and Confederacy amongst men, Satan knew well enough."⁸⁵ Or, as another scolded, "When [men] should be in their Shops, and about their necessary Affairs, you may find them in the Coffee-Houses, or in the Taverns, Caballing together."⁸⁶ In 1678 the *Huntington Divertisement* viewed with alarm the policy-making pretensions of a "Club" of the middling sorts, personified by the busybody townsman, Sedulous Prudent.

This attack on partisanship was in fact most intense during the period of the first Whigs and Tories, and post-Restoration preachers censured association even while they were preaching before groups meeting to further High Church Anglicanism. The county consensual ideal was oppositional rhetoric used to attack *partisan* opposition. It reflected the feasters' reluctance to admit to their own participation in the evolving political culture. As late as 1728, Bisse portrayed county feasts in just such consensual terms, remarking that "were the like Societies held among the several Natives out of every County, that inhabit or visit this our great Capital, it must have a national influence to the gradual extinction of Party."⁸⁷

During the 1680s, when the natives feast reached its peak, party sentiments created what contemporaries viewed as a dangerous expansion of the political nation. Political discussions took place at virtually all social levels and urban feasts readily turned into partisan occasions.⁸⁸ Partisan feasts, furthermore, mixed social sorts and orders. Both Tory and Whig writers scoffed at the appearance of mere apprentices among the other's ranks. Tory royalist John Nalson bemoaned the contemporary age in which "every little blue-apron boy behind the counter" boldly trades in "state-mending and church-modelling."⁸⁹ When apprentices subscribed a loyal address in 1681, however, Tory broadsheets

84. Mannyngham, *A Sermon Preached*, 7.

85. Bolton, *Joseph's Entertainment*, 2.

86. Edward Fowler, *A Sermon Preached at the General Meeting of Gloucestershire-Men . . . , December the 9th 1684* (1685), 26–27.

87. Bisse, *Society recommended*, 34.

88. Other London parish, guild, and artillery feasts were clearly partisan occasions. See, for example, Folger Library, Newdigate Newsletters, L.C. 1244 (Grocer's), 1246 ("loyal citizens"), 1251 (St. Dunstons), 1387 (Bridghouse), 1471 (Temple) (20 July 1682—29 December 1683).

89. John Nalson, *An Impartial Collection* (1682–83), quoted in Valerie Pearl, "Change and Stability in Seventeenth-Century London," in Jonathan Barry, ed., *The Tudor and Stuart Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1530–1688* (London, 1990), 144.

claimed these as “the more Genteller and better sort of young Trades-men.”⁹⁰ Whig writers took a different view, of course, and critiqued such meddling with state affairs: “Unhappy Youths! misguided by your zeal, / Come mind your Shops, and not the Commonweal.”⁹¹

Feasting exacerbated this status politics. Tories complained of the “Roaring of the Mobile” at their opponents’ feasts.⁹² In 1682, for instance, one Tory poet disparaged an intended Whig feast:

Tag, Rag, and Long-rail were all to come in,
To sit at this King of Poland’s [Shaftesbury’s] Table:
The Feast I conceive else was not worth a Pin,
Without the consent of an insolent Rabble.⁹³

In the same year, another poet attacked such social leveling at the *Tory* apprentices’ feast:

Here’s Knight and Chimney-sweeper at a board,
A Porter’s there Conjumbled with a Lord;
So’t be for th’ good o’th’ Cause what matter is’t,
Tho’ Count and Cobler’s at it Hand to Fist?⁹⁴

When a stock Tory character in the *Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* feebly tried to defend such social mixing at the apprentices’ feast—“Illustrissmo’s and Grandee’s, and Porters, and Sons of Whores, and Prentices, so sweetly mixt, you’d wonder at it!”—the Whig “Trueman” derided the participation of such “little people” and appropriated the radical symbolism of the Norman yoke by comparing the haunch of venison provided by the king with the mythical “Mess of Pottage” for which their forefathers had sold their birthright.⁹⁵ Partisan gather-

90. J. M., *A Vindication Of the Loyal London-Apprentices: Against the false and scandalous Aspersions of Richard Janeway, in his Lying Mercury publish’d June 14* [1681?]. See also *True Loyalty in its Collours: or, a Survey of the Laudable Address of the Young Men and Apprentices Of the City of London. To His Majesty. An heroic poem, broadside* (17 June 1681).

91. The quotation is from *The Boys Whipt home: or, a Rhyme Upon the Apprentices Poem, &c.* (13 August 1681). See also *A Poem upon the Prentices Feast at Merchant-Taylors-Hall* (1682), which Narcissus Luttrell labeled “a whiggish poem” (Huntington Library, Bindley Pamphlets).

92. *A Letter of Advice to the Petitioning Apprentices*, broadside (1681).

93. “The Whigs Disappointment upon their intended Feast,” in *A Choice Collection of 180 Loyal Songs*, comp. Nath. Thompson (1685), 107.

94. *War Horns, Make room for the Bucks with Green Bowes* (1682), 7.

95. *The Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome; Or, This History of Popery*, vol. 4., no. 343 (11 August 1682); see Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (Harmondsworth, England, 1958, 1990), chap. 3, “The Norman Yoke.”

ings, it should be noted, were *not* county feasts. Even so, social groups did mix at the county feasts, where attempts were made to recreate county community among *all* attending citizens. England remained a hierarchical and status-obsessed nation. Yet, the protopartisan nature of county feasts (and the construction of county community rhetoric) encouraged not a separation of a gentry elite but rather a wider participation in meetings and an expansion of the political nation.

❧ VI ❧

Twenty-five years ago one approach appeared set to dominate Stuart social and political history: the county community. In 1966, several talks on the BBC series *The English Revolution* (published in 1968) focused on “the county community.” In one of these talks, Ivan Roots argued that “stubborn local patriotism” opened a rift between London and the localities. In another, D. H. Pennington noted the struggle during the war between the “natural” county military organization and the “artificial ‘regional’” associations. In his appearance, Alan Everitt stressed the social (custom and kinship) basis of “county feeling,” which increased during the seventeenth century.⁹⁶ To prove that gentry county sentiment preceded obligation to the nation state, these and other historians repeated the maxim that in early modern England “country” meant county.⁹⁷

But such unanimity regarding the county community (or provincialist) thesis has gone. Several historians have cast doubt on “the notion of the county as a self-conscious society.”⁹⁸ Clive Holmes suggests that county awareness did *not* play a major role in shaping elite consciousness during the Stuart period. Instead, the English elite shared a common education and a common culture

96. In E. W. Ives, ed., *The English Revolution, 1600–1660* (New York, 1968), 34–75, esp. 37, 41, 48, 51, 70.

97. See, for example, J. S. Morrill, *Seventeenth-Century Britain, 1603–1714* (Hamden, Conn., 1980), 125; and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County, 1500–1600* (Oxford, 1986), pt. 1.

98. Cf. G. C. F. Forster, “Government in Provincial England under the Later Stuarts,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 33 (1983): 48; Andrew M. Coleby, *Central Government and the Localities: Hampshire 1649–1689* (Cambridge, 1987), passim; and J. D. Davies, “The Navy, Parliament, and Political Crisis in the Reign of Charles II,” *Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 288. The quotation is from Anthony Fletcher, “National and Local Awareness in County Communities,” in Howard Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War* (London, 1983), 151–74 (cf. Fletcher, *Reform in the Provinces: The Government of Stuart England* [New Haven, Conn., 1986], 365–66, for a more positive view).

centered in metropolitan London.⁹⁹ Ann Hughes claims that historians have “been seduced into an overestimation of the county’s importance”; other corporate forums and *pays* (regions demarcated by field system), she argues, had a greater pull on loyalties. She suggests, moreover, that county “localism” was at best a rhetorical tool used during civil strife, not an ingrained philosophy of a specific gentry community.¹⁰⁰ J. C. D. Clark even derisively titles two sections of his book on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English historiography “Provincialism: True but Unimportant?” and “Provincialism: Important but Untrue?”¹⁰¹

A middle way lies between the proponents of the county community thesis and its detractors. The county community was indeed a myth, but seventeenth-century Englishmen created it. Victor Morgan, who argues that even within the universities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries county identity and local consciousness were reinforced, points to a culture of regionalism or provincialism.¹⁰² A relationship between provincialism and nascent partisan politics can be seen in the materials generated by county feasts in London. These natives feasts were an invented tradition, one with a purpose.¹⁰³ The myths they created and deployed not only reflected simultaneous expansion of both local and national consciousness but also helped shape early English nationalism.

County community mythmaking is evident throughout the late Stuart period, but especially during times of crisis. During the 1650s, country gentry showed their disapproval of national government by focusing on the “ties of neighbourhood and commensality and by the development of a common piety.”¹⁰⁴ The

99. Clive Holmes, “The County Community in Stuart Historiography,” *Journal of British Studies* 19 (1980): 54–73; see also J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, 115–16; and Heal and Holmes, *Gentry in England*, 199–228.
100. Ann Hughes, “Local History and the Origins of the Civil War,” in Ann Hughes and Richard Cust, eds., *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603–42* (London, 1989), 224–53, esp. 229; and Hughes, “Militancy and Localism: Warwickshire Politics and Westminster Politics, 1643–47,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 31 (1981): 51–68.
101. *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1986), chap. 4, esp. 64–65.
102. Victor Morgan, “Cambridge University and ‘The Country,’ 1560–1640,” in Lawrence Stone, ed., *The University in Society* (Princeton, N.J., 1974), 1:183–246; and Morgan, “The Cartographic Image of ‘The Country’ in Early Modern England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 29 (1979): 129–54.
103. Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 12.
104. Heal and Holmes, *Gentry in England*, 226.

county feasts and feast sermons clearly performed the same function in London. During the anarchy of 1659–60, Thomas Fuller, the great compiler of “worthies” for each county, naturally turned to the several county communities for political action, even when urging common cause against the republicans: “Let the two and fifty Shires of England and Wales . . . be all as one, and unanimously advance the Worke, and not do as they dealt with poore Cheshire.”¹⁰⁵ Countrymen re-embraced the myth of separate county communities. Petitions and addresses flowed from the counties in the 1640s, 1659–60, and from 1679 to 1683. The Interregnum county committees, Everitt argues, were in effect so many “‘parliaments’ in England.” The same can be said of the county feasts—indeed, Annesley called his fellow feasters of 1654 “the Wil-shire Parliament.”¹⁰⁶

Lawrence E. Klein recently noted that “one locus for eighteenth-century historical self-understanding was the city.”¹⁰⁷ Another locus that was important in the seventeenth century, but of decreasing importance in the eighteenth, was the court.¹⁰⁸ A third locus, the importance of which spans both centuries, was the country. And, at least to the natives feast societies, country meant country. Although these societies were paradoxically the product of London, the country/county was of continued broad importance to early modern political and social identity.¹⁰⁹ Like the city and the court, it had reference to tangible places that were equally the site of constructed relationships and centers of self-fashioning. It should not surprise us if historical categories were social as much or more than geographical.¹¹⁰

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105. Thomas Fuller, *An Alarum to the Counties of England and Wales, with the Oath, of Abjuration, For ever to be abjur'd. . . . By a lover of his native country* (1660), 13.

106. Everitt, *The County Committee of Kent*, 7; Samuel Annesley, *The First Dish at the Wil-shire Feast, Novemb. 9. 1654* (1655), 16.

107. Lawrence E. Klein, “A Time of Progress?” (review article), *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 294–300.

108. See the argument in R. O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (Stanford, Calif., 1993).

109. Compare the mythic county community past deployed by the citizen younger sons of gentry in late Stuart London with the invented traditions of a new “antique” gentry in Late Hanoverian Wales, in Philip Jenkins, “The Creation of an ‘Ancient Gentry’: Glamorgan 1760–1840,” *Welsh Historical Review* 12 (1984): 29–49.

110. See also Michael Braddick, “State Formation and Social Change in Early Modern England: A Problem Stated and Approaches Suggested,” *Social History* 16 (1991): 1–17, esp. 5.