Reinforcing the Family?: Urban Expansion, Social Relations and Parochial Government in London’s Eastern Suburb, c. 1550—c. 1700

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Introduction

The everyday lives of the inhabitants of early modern London revolved around a complex matrix of relationships. This included interactions with members of the immediate family and household; with extended kin and family relations; with the institutions of local and perhaps even national government; with the church and religious organisations; and with a wide variety of associational groups. A vast amount, of course, has been written about such relationships, but most authors have been content to adopt a thematic approach and to limit their investigations to specific forms of sociability. It is, for example, still comparatively rare in a single study to discuss the full range of these interactions and how and whether their impact on social relations in general fluctuated over time. A recent exception to this rule is Katherine Lynch’s book, *Individuals, families and communities in Europe, 1200-1800*. In this influential study, Lynch argues that in urban areas during this period, demographic growth, higher mortality rates and the increasing presence of migrants led to the rise of civil society and the displacement of kinship solidarities by associational life.¹ Given its ambitious chronological and geographical scope, the focus of Lynch’s book, quite understandably, is what she considers to be the key general trends and patterns in western European family and society between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century. This paper, by contrast, adopts a micro-history approach, exploring community life within a single area of early modern London at the very time it experienced what Lynch argues were the key factors behind the emergence of civil society.

My main focus will be the nature of social relations within the large suburban parish of St Botolph Aldgate, which lay to the east of the city and outside its walls, between the mid-sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries (see Figure 1). But the paper will also draw on evidence for London as a whole and refer to the national situation in order to more fully contextualise its findings. These suggest that the impact of associational life in London did

not follow a simple linear trajectory, but rather undulated during the course of the early modern period under the influence of both local and national events. But it is also argued that within St Botolph’s at least, it was the traditional institution of the parish, not the organisations of civil society, which was the pivotal forum of contemporary social relations. Although associational life certainly played a part in the lives of some local residents, it never supplanted the bonds of kinship and neighbourhood around which the everyday experiences of the majority of inhabitants continued to revolve. As such, we will see that efforts to preserve and reinforce the essential components of the parochial community – its families and households – through ritual and ceremony and later the mechanism of poor relief, remained central to the way of life in St Botolph’s throughout this period.

*Urban expansion and Reformation*

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the City of London during the early modern period is the sheer scale of its population growth, from possibly 80,000 inhabitants in 1550 to more...
than 500,000 by 1700. Much of this growth was suburban, in parishes like St Botolph Aldgate. Covering an area of just under 80 acres which ran south down to the River Thames, just under half of the parish was conterminous with the London ward of Portsoken, while the remaining area, the liberty of East Smithfield, was part of the county of Middlesex (see Figure 2). In the mid-sixteenth century, St Botolph’s was characterised by its gardens and wasteland and housed less than 2000 people. Its residents then included a knight and other wealthy individuals, who were attracted by the clean air and cheap land prices, which allowed them to build comfortable residences. But numbers of poorer inhabitants, living at a suitable

Figure 2 – The city and Middlesex areas of St Botolph Aldgate

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distance from their richer neighbours, were also a notable feature of the parish. By 1700 and as a consequence almost entirely of in-migration, the whole parish was densely built-up with a population approaching 20,000, its once open spaces having long disappeared under networks of proliferating alleys and closes. Although a few wealthy residents remained, they were now a much smaller proportion of the overall population, which contained large numbers of the poor.

At the start of our period, London, and England generally, was experiencing the radical changes brought about by the Edwardian Protestant Reformation. This undoubtedly had a major impact on the nation’s associational and community life and highlights how confessional change could directly affect social relations. In this context, the single most important piece of legislation was the 1547 Chantryes Act, which led to the dissolution of the country’s religious and social fraternities, which may have numbered as many as 30,000 at their height in the fifteenth century. These voluntary associations of laymen and -women existed to provide charitable support for brethren who fell on hard times and also to pray for both their dead and living members. They were established within individual parishes, from which their membership was almost exclusively drawn, and are viewed by some historians as institutions that helped bind the local community together in a form of civil society. Far from weakening the immediate ties of parish and neighbourhood, then, they may, as a form of associATIONAL life, have actually strengthened them. Fraternities had existed since at least the fourteenth century and their formation is often attributed to population growth and the consequent personal mobility creating a need for surrogate families in the absence of accessible kin. But there is also evidence that they grew out of the family, with the process of founding or joining them being a means by which kinship bonds could be promoted or

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4 The population total is based on the family reconstitution of St Botolph’s undertaken by my colleague, Gill Newton, to whom I express my thanks. Documents relating to the local collection of the marriage duty tax at the end of the seventeenth century reveal, in comparison with city-wide figures, an exceptionally low percentage of surtax paying households and high numbers of those unable to pay the tax: L[ondon] M[etropolitan] A[rchives], COL/CHD/LA/04/01/102; COL/CHD/LA/03/28, 30, 39.
reinforced. Thus, as an example of the vitality of associational life, the existence of fraternities might suggest, at the same time, the actual strength of contemporary family relations. However, comparisons between the two kinds of network should not be pushed too far; it should be kept in mind that a degree of voluntarism always informed fraternity membership.\(^5\)

Evidence points to the existence of almost 200 fraternities in London between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. They were a notable feature in the city’s suburban parishes, where they were numerous and well-established, with the single exception of St Botolph Aldgate, which appears not to have had a fraternity at all.\(^6\) Although we can only speculate about the reasons for this, it is possible to suggest why the parish may not have been predisposed to this type of association based on what we know about its residents and about London’s fraternities. As already indicated, St Botolph’s housed a mixture of rich and poor. On the one hand, the 1541 subsidy assessed almost a quarter of Portsoken’s households as (at least) relatively wealthy; on the other hand, the London chronicler John Stow (1525-1605) recalled that in his youth one of the parish’s main streets, Houndsditch, housed ‘poor bedred people [and] ... none other’.\(^7\) Neither the wealthy nor the poor were prominent among the membership of the fraternities. The city’s wealthier residents had their own, more exclusive, organisations in the trade guilds and the court of aldermen, while many of the poor were probably simply unable to afford the quarterage fees for membership. Instead, the fraternity movement is primarily seen as a phenomenon of the middle rank of London society, of its artisans and members of the craft guilds.\(^8\) Perhaps this particular social group was simply too small, or too widely dispersed across the parish, to found a fraternity. As we

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shall see, evidence from the mid-sixteenth century onwards certainly suggests that the proportion of city freemen in St Botolph’s was never high.

But if the dissolution of the fraternities had little direct bearing on the parish, other changes of the Reformation clearly had a profound impact on the social relations of its inhabitants. Although it was often a gradual process, the fall of ‘merry England’ – of local church ales, plays, maypoles and processions – brought an end to a majority of the socially inclusive rituals which annually united parishioners. In the place of these celebrations (and the fraternities, too) came the displays attached to the local government institutions of the vestry and the wardmote, ceremonies of a very different nature with their emphasis on exclusivity and hierarchy. In St Botolph’s in the late sixteenth century, the visit of the archdeacon of St Paul’s and the consecration of a new burial ground were obvious cause for celebration; but these events were commemorated by the parish elite alone at exclusive (and expensive) feasts. Similarly, the only local procession to survive the Reformation, the annual perambulation of the parish bounds, was an event primarily for St Botolph’s rulers and the children of its leading families. Ceremonies involving the poor, meanwhile, tended to emphasise their subservient position, as with the recipients of Robert Dow’s charitable bequest, who were forced to kneel and pray in the parish church every Sunday to receive their alms.9

These instances of post-Reformation ceremonial, which were repeated in identical fashion across London and the country as a whole, still reinforced the parochial community, albeit in new and different ways. But in the aftermath of the royal injunctions, the sphere of influence for associational life was very clearly and heavily curtailed. In contrast to the voluntary nature of the fraternities, vestries and wardmotes were part of the formal apparatus of local government, and the official poor relief system was run and collected through the parish. Perhaps most importantly of all, the institutions of parochial life were now exclusively male. Women, including single women, were avid members of the fraternities, which they joined on equal terms with men, and, while they never held office, there is evidence that they

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occasionally helped co-found them.\textsuperscript{10} Formally excluded from attending wardmotes and vestries, it was not perhaps until a century later, with the emergence of the radical nonconformist religious sects of the civil war, that albeit small numbers of women once again held equal status with men in a form of voluntary association. And this was certainly an experience with which some of St Botolph’s female residents would have been familiar. To cite but two examples: separatists preached to large congregations in the parish during the early 1640s; and by the end of the seventeenth century, there were a number of Quaker families resident in the area.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Guilds and community life}

Of course, not every type of association was swept away at the Reformation. In London and other cities and towns, the numerous trade and craft guilds, many of which started out as fraternities, survived and entrenched themselves fully into corporate urban life. Guilds, too, are often seen as examples, or at least as precursors, of a form of civil society; but this identification ignores a number of apparent distinctions. First of all, from the early fourteenth century, it was necessary to be a member of a London guild to be a city freemen and thus to enjoy the full political, economic and legal benefits of citizenship. On this basis, the degree to which guilds were true voluntary associations might be questioned. Second, since at least the fifteenth century, guild members (of varying status over time) had an institutionalised role in the government of London as they constituted the membership of common hall. Through this body, they indirectly elected the capital’s parliament-men and a host of other important city officials. Hence London’s guilds hardly operated in a sphere that was entirely separate from formal political life, one of the supposed hallmarks of the social organisations of civil society.

With these provisos in mind, we can turn to consider the influence of guilds on social relations in London, beginning at the general level. In many respects, guilds always had and indeed continued to perform a number of the social functions of the fraternities – no doubt, in part, as a legacy of their origins. They operated as centres of justice, in which members could settle disputes between one another; they served as centres of sociability, in which members were entertained and feasted and drank together; and they provided forms of charity, such as

\textsuperscript{10} Barron, ‘Parish fraternities’, pp. 30-1.
the payment of pensions and the provision of almshouses for those both within and without their ‘brotherhoods’. But unlike fraternities, they were also institutions around which the city’s business life could be organised by facilitating commercial exchange. As a result of the historic propensity for men of the same craft to live near one another, the early guilds functioned almost as parish associations; and although these geographical links weakened over time, they had not entirely disappeared by the end of our period. If this meant that guild and neighbourhood ties continued to complement and even reinforce one another, family relations might also be added to this equation, most obviously through the existence of the household-economy. In those instances where all members of the domestic unit contributed to the production or sale of goods, wives, servants and even children might be seen as informal affiliates of the guild system.

The guilds’ centrality to life in the capital is powerfully reflected in the number of freemen among its population. It has been calculated that approximately three-quarters of the city’s adult males were freemen in the mid-sixteenth century and that that proportion declined by less than ten per cent by 1600.\textsuperscript{12} By the mid-seventeenth century, the number of freemen among adult males has been estimated at between forty and fifty per cent, and although the equivalent figure by the end of the century may have been around ten per cent, primarily as a result of the city’s demographic growth, that still amounted to perhaps 50,000 individuals.\textsuperscript{13} Work on the records of a number of guilds has demonstrated that their membership was often less densely settled in the city’s suburbs, where the reach of their authority was also perhaps less effective, if not entirely absent.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, the relative absence of guild records that detail the topographical distribution of the city’s freemen means it is difficult to assess their number in St Botolph Aldgate. One possible solution is to use the information given about individuals in the parish registers. Although this data can only give an impression of the number of resident freemen, it is worth emphasising that St Botolph’s registers are especially


\textsuperscript{14} J. P. Ward, \textit{Metropolitan communities: trade guilds, identity and change in early modern London} (Stanford, Ca., 1997).
informative on this point between the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, when they also provide details on cause of and age at death, and location of residence.

Figure 3: Freemen as a proportion of the adult male population, London and St Botolph Aldgate, 1570-1650

Figure 3 shows the proportion of freemen among the adult male population in London and St Botolph Aldgate (based on freemen burials as a percentage of total adult male burials) between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. Although the data derives from a time when St Botolph’s experienced outbreaks of plague and massive population growth, it can be used as a rough indicator of the proportion of resident freemen within the total adult male population. The graph suggests that the proportion of freemen in the parish was consistently well below that of the proportion within London as a whole. The gap is particularly marked in the period leading up to the turn of the seventeenth century, when it is estimated that almost two thirds of the city’s adult males were freemen. Even at a peak of thirty-two per cent in 1633, the proportion of freemen in the parish is still over ten per cent lower than the bottom end of the estimated figure for London. All this suggests that the influence of the guilds was considerably weaker in St Botolph’s than it was in other areas of the capital. Indeed, it would seem that during this period, the vast majority of St Botolph’s

15 Sources: Rappaport, Worlds within worlds, pp. 49, 53 and appendix 1; Boulton, Neighbourhood and society, p. 151 and n. 62; L.M.A., P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09222/001-002.
adult males, and hence their families and households, lived outside the guild structure and its form of associational life.

Table 1: Bequests to guilds in London and St Botolph Aldgate wills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of wills</th>
<th>Bequests to guilds</th>
<th>Bequests to parish poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London freemens’ wills, 1570-1573</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London freemens’ wills, 1636-1638</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Botolph’s freemens’ will sample, 1548-1690</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Botolph’s residents’ will sample, 1548-1690</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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How might we further test this thesis? Patterns of testamentary giving can be used to explore the relationship between associational or institutional attachments and charitable impulses. For example, work on London’s fraternities revealed that of the 666 wills enrolled in the commissary court between 1522 and 1538, twenty-two per cent record bequests to parish fraternities, signalling their popularity at that time. Meanwhile, Ian Archer found that of the 218 wills proved by London freemen in the prerogative court of Canterbury between 1570 and 1573, thirty-six per cent left some form of bequest or gift to their guild, whereas of the 383 wills of freemen proved in that jurisdiction between 1636 and 1638, the equivalent figure had dropped to twenty-two per cent (see Table 1). Comparable data for St Botolph Aldgate suggests again that ties to guild life were comparatively weak in the area. Table 1 records that of a sample of 118 wills of parish residents proved in the prerogative court of Canterbury between 1548 and 1690, only 21 (eighteen per cent) were described as freemen, of whom

only ten per cent (2 testators) left any kind of bequest to a London guild; one non-freeman also left such a bequest. 18

Interestingly, Archer found that both his sample groups were around twice as likely to bequeath a gift to the parish poor, the relevant figures being seventy-two per cent for the 1570-3 sample and fifty-two per cent for that of 1636-8. 19 Table 1 demonstrates that proportionally the preference of the inhabitants of St Botolph’s to bequeath a gift to the parish poor rather than a London guild was even more pronounced, with such bequests found in 28 wills (twenty-four per cent) of the total sample and 6 of the freemen’s wills sample (twenty-nine per cent). 20 This very strongly suggests that it was the parish and the local community, rather than ‘external’ bodies such as guilds, which were at the heart of the charitable impulses of the residents of St Botolph Aldgate, and the final section of this paper contemplates the reasons for their attachment to their neighbourhood.

The parish, poor relief and community life

On a first impression, it is far from obvious why the inhabitants of St Botolph’s should have felt any sense of loyalty towards their parish. By any account, it appears to have been a deeply troubled society. The detailed parish records are littered with accounts of abandoned children, murder, illegitimate births, rape, absconded husbands, burglaries and thefts, and bawdy houses and their clients. As in other areas of London at this time, mortality and especially infant mortality was high. European migrants were a notable feature of the local population and were especially prominent among developing industries, such as gun making, which had a negative environmental impact on the community. 21 But of all St Botolph’s problems, the most pressing and immediate was that of its resident poor. Reflecting on the condition of the area in 1618, the parish clerk bemoaned the influx of:

18 Figures derived from the ‘Life in the Suburbs’ project’s wills database at the Centre for Metropolitan History, London.
19 Archer, ‘Livery companies’, p. 20.
20 Figures derived from the ‘Life in the Suburbs’ project’s wills database at the Centre for Metropolitan History, London.
manie verie pore ... most of them having neither trades nor meanes to live on, but by
their handy labour, as porters carrmen waterbearers, chymney sweepers, servants in
silk mylls bruers servants lyving for ye most part in allies having wyves, & most of
them many children ... wch poore are & dayly doeth soe increase … that they are
ready to eate out, or els to dryve out the better sort of the inhabitants … who at this
time are very fewe, & in short time wilbe fewer if there be not some remedye
founde.²²

Things were no better by 1655, when the vestry lamented that they ‘hath bine Continually
very Much Surcharged and over burdened wth miserabl e pore People, and hundreds of pore
distressed Children & orphanes, the number of whom is now much more than euer
Increased’.²³ And the long lists of those unable to pay their taxes at the end of the seventeenth
century – variously described as ‘poor’, ‘very poor’ and even ‘miserably poor’ – reveal that
such people were a consistent feature of the local population.²⁴

St Botolph’s, then, was desperately in need of charity above and beyond the local and city-
wide provision of poor relief. In Portsoken ward, the money brought in by the poor rate
varied between £12 and £22 in the late sixteenth century, and £81 and £116 between 1616
and 1622.²⁵ These were comparatively small amounts and as a result St Botolph’s was one of
the parishes that drew aid from the wealthier parishes in London. However, this, too,
provided a fluctuating source of annual income, one that rose from £7 to £91 in the late
sixteenth century, but brought in only around £35 for most of the seventeenth century.²⁶
Unsurprisingly, therefore, virtually every vestry meeting was concerned with dealing with the
local poor in some respect. Indeed, the record keeping of relief and charity was such that a
separate set of poor accounts was generated from the churchwardens’ normal accounts in the

²² Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson D796B fo. [86].
²³ L.M.A., P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, unfol. entry for 1655.
²⁴ L.M.A., COL/CHD/LA/03/28, 30, 39.
²⁵ L.M.A., P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/001-007; Bodl. Libr., MS Rawl. D796B fos. [86],
[88], [90], [92], [98v].
²⁶ I. W. Archer, The pursuit of stability: social relations in Elizabethan London (Cambridge,
1620s, which was used to capture the precise nature of receipts and disbursements until the last quarter of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{27}

The role of the parish in the administration of poor relief was part of the process by which the powers of local government were considerably extended following the Reformation. This initially set England apart from the rest of Europe. After 1572, the country had an institutionalised poor rate, which saw the compulsory raising of tax on a parochial basis and its distribution in money as a form of outdoor relief for the local poor. Some contemporaries opposed or only grudgingly accepted parts of this system, and a number of historians see the associated ritualised subjection of the poor as part of a growing social differentiation of post-Reformation urban society.\textsuperscript{28} Alternatively, other scholars suggest that the provision of poor relief positively helped to construct and shape local communities – and in ways that benefited society as a whole.\textsuperscript{29} The most obvious of those benefits was the preservation of social order, in which the parish authorities who ran poor relief systems clearly had a vested interest. And in the frontline of contemporary notions of the ordered and harmonious society were the institutions of the family and household.\textsuperscript{30}

Yet as we have seen, in St Botolph Aldgate the stability of these institutions, and of the parish itself – the ‘crucial nexus of urban existence’\textsuperscript{31} – was under threat from the processes of mass immigration, demographic growth and urbanisation, all of which only exacerbated the underlying problem of the poor. There was, in short, an urgent need to offer financial support and aid to a significant proportion of its residents in order to preserve the local social fabric. This need was realised through the formal poor relief system, which implicated the parish authorities and those inhabitants above the poverty line in the creation of a ‘community of care’. That this impulse had a considerable influence on the nature of social relations within

\textsuperscript{27} L.M.A., P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237.
\textsuperscript{28} For example, see C. Phythian-Adams, ‘Ceremony and the citizen: the communal year at Coventry, 1450-1550’, in \textit{Crisis and order in English towns, 1500-1700}, P. Clark and P. Slack, eds. (London, 1972), pp. 57-85.
\textsuperscript{29} Lynch, \textit{Individuals, families and communities}, pp. 17 and 22.
\textsuperscript{30} For example, see Sir T. Smith, \textit{De Republica Anglorum: the maner of governement or policie of the realme of England} (London, 1583), p. 12.
\textsuperscript{31} Berlin, ‘Reordering rituals’, p. 50.
the parish seems evident from the testamentary bequests of its residents and the meticulous
detail of its poor relief records. Charitable gifts were painstakingly itemised across a number
of sources (with larger bequests celebrated in a special commemoration book), their givers
lauded in ‘guest’ sermons on the anniversary of their burial, presumably to remind
parishioners of the role of charity in their lives, and encourage subsequent giving. 32 That
impulse is most powerfully reflected, however, in the numerous instances in which the parish
and its inhabitants, in the interests of sustaining the community, directly intervened in the
domestic lives of those whose families and households had failed them.

These interventions took a number of forms. Abandoned children might be taken in by local
residents, as with ‘Marie a chylde that was founde in the streete beyond the widowe carltons
Dore in the high waye neare a Dunghill whose father and mother was not knowne beinge
nursed by henrie Mawkenewes wyfe’. 33 That there was some type of formal mechanism for
the arrangement of care in this and similar instances is indicated by the case of

a single woman delivered of ... child in the streete before the dore of the house of
Thomas harrydance ... [The mother] taking the said chyld into her lap was conducted
by dyvers women unto the house of Robert Acton ... [with] whome she did lately
dwell and the said Robert Acton at the apoyntment of the constables ... Asigned her
with her chlyd [to] lye at the house of William Cooke a smithe dwelling in pond
alley. 34

These examples were obvious attempts to provide the destitute with a form of surrogate
family or household. But if domestic units could no longer bestow the basic social and
economic support mechanism for everyday life, it was sometimes necessary to break them
up, or at least to reconstitute them, both for the sake of the individuals concerned and the
community as whole. Here the authorities could resort to binding out parish or orphan
children to local tradesmen, who, in turn, might receive a premium for taking a child into

32 See the account of local gifts in J. Stow, A survey of the cities of London and Westminster,
33 Forbes, Chronicle from Aldgate, p. 192.
34 Ibid., pp. 198-9.
their household. Alternatively, children might be sent out of the parish altogether. Some remained in London as residents of Christ’s Hospital, while the very youngest could be sent to nurse in more hospitable climes in the countryside. Indeed, in instances when children remained in the parish, the particular urban environment of St Botolph’s meant that the interventions of the authorities did not always have successful outcomes. In the case of ‘Marie Sedway the Reputed Daughter of one John Sedway... yt was Nursed in the house of one Edith Jones a poore widow of east smithfield, where it died’, the parish clerk commented that ‘There are verie few Children prosper Long in our Parish, that are Nursed in such Places’. Another girl did not survive long in a collier’s home, prompting the clerk to savagely remark that ‘hee that loveth his dogg would not put it in such a place to be brought upp’. The majority of these interventions were undertaken in an official capacity by the parish under the provisions of the poor law, with individuals receiving payment from the authorities for the provision of aid. But there is also evidence suggestive of more informal or voluntary types of care in St Botolph’s. Anthony Duffield, for example, was a large-scale beer brewer who regularly made donations to the poor during his lifetime and left a substantial gift to the local indigent in his will. Moreover, his lifetime charity may also have extended to the provision of household accommodation, providing local evidence for the persistence of the older custom of ‘hospitality’. This is suggested by an entry of 1586, which refers to a man whose ‘name Was not knowne He Was one that Went a goodinge as I was informed by serten other masterles men he had bene a cooper… This yonge fellow being sicke was taken into the oven pitt at the howse of Mt Anthony Douffeild’. Similarly, it is recorded that an unnamed vagrant was allowed to take shelter in Duffield’s storehouse in 1587. A parish clerk noted that Duffield was ‘godly bent euer vnto the poore’ – suggesting that a strong religious impulse lay behind his charity – and a clerk’s epitaph for another local lifetime-giver of aid,

35 For example, see L.M.A., P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, unfol. entries, 1623-5.
36 L.M.A., P69/BOT2/B/031/MS09237, unfol. entries for 1655 and 1678.
37 Forbes, Chronicle from Aldgate, p. 199.
38 L.M.A., P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/001[b] fos. 28v, 35v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/002[b] fo. 11v.
‘The poore lost a good Frend and the parish a good Neighbour’, strongly implies that good neighbours were indeed those who supported the poor.\textsuperscript{39}

Another individual with a prominent charitable role in St Botolph’s was the merchant taylor Robert Dow, the parish’s most celebrated formal benefactor. During his lifetime, Dow set up a fund which provided for sixty pensioners as well as a room in the Merchant Taylors’ almshouses in the parish for one (subsequently two) poor local widows, one of whom was chosen by Dow himself. His charity was run according to an extensive list of provisions, rules and requirements. This included the judgement of worthy pensioners; the election of the two almswomen; a period of continued residence in the parish as a qualifying requirement; and the expectation of stringent standards of good reputation, moral standing and neighbourly consideration.\textsuperscript{40} On the face of it, the existence of these rules enabled Dow and the administrators of his gift to discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor; and, in similar fashion, St Botolph’s vestry sought to distinguish the resident from the non-resident poor by requiring three years’ residence in the parish to consider petitions from individuals for formal relief and six years’ for consideration for entry to the almshouses.\textsuperscript{41} However, we have seen that even strangers to the parish often received some form of support, and, in spite of Dow’s rules and regulations, the recipients of his charity included those who had, in their earlier lives, given birth to illegitimate children, been presented for abusing the local minister and even excommunicated from the Church.\textsuperscript{42} Relief was given to them, nonetheless, and perhaps not simply as an attempt to preserve the stability of the local community but also because it was the neighbourly (and Christian) thing to do.

The details of Dow’s gift also give us an important insight into his attitude towards the poor, whom he bemoaned ‘in these daies are given unto to much Idlenes and litle labour … and

\textsuperscript{39} L.M.A., P69/BOT2/A/002/MS09221 unfol. entry for 23 Oct. 1589; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/008 fo. 123.

\textsuperscript{40} L.M.A., P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632. Only the almswomen funded by Dow were residents of St Botolph’s; the others were the almswomen of the Merchant Taylors’ guild from across the city.

\textsuperscript{41} Archer, \textit{Pursuit of stability}, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{42} L.M.A., P69/BOT2/B/001/MS09236 fo. 13v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/002[b] fo. 73v; P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/005[b] fo. 161v.
much seeking after Almes how little soever it be’. Those in receipt of his pension were also treated to a self-penned homily laden with moral superiority. Dow’s (possibly puritan) religious beliefs may have given some impetus to his charity, and his long-term residence in St Botolph’s (he lived there for almost thirty years) can only have reinforced his conviction in the need for social discipline on a daily basis.\footnote{L.M.A., P69/BOT2/D/005/MS02632 unfol. preamble; I. W. Archer, ‘Dowe, Robert’, \textit{Oxford dictionary of national biography} (Oxford, 2006), online edition [accessed 15 July 2010].} Nevertheless, the sheer scale of his charity stands as a testimony to his commitment to both the parish and its residents, even if that was a particular commitment to an ordered, hierarchical and, to some extent, idealised vision of his local community.

\textit{Conclusion}

This paper has examined a number of the relationships that were at the heart of everyday life in a London parish during the early modern period. Although interactions with associational groups were evidently important to many residents of the city, this was not seemingly the case in St Botolph Aldgate. Perhaps because of the composition of its population, its residents never formed a parish fraternity, and strong links with the guilds were apparent among only a small proportion of its inhabitants.

The processes of demographic growth, urbanisation and immigration were keenly and rapidly felt in St Botolph’s and created a multiplicity of social problems. The response of its rulers, and many other residents too, was to attempt to foster social cohesion through the traditional institution of the parish and the creation of a community of care, which offered relief and succour to weak or unstable local families and households. This active and formal involvement in the lives of their fellow parishioners whose domestic groups had failed them was above and beyond the informal support networks embedded in associational life.

Finally, it is not until the early eighteenth century that there is evidence for the type of club or society in St Botolph Aldgate about which Peter Clark has written, and the nature of that society is suggestive. By at least 1711, the parish was one of a number in London’s suburbs with its own ‘society of natives’ – that is a body whose express purpose was to unite current
and former residents together ‘for the promotion of charity mutual society and friendship’ (see Figure 4). Not surprisingly, the society assembled at the parish church, traditionally ‘the main hub of communal life’. In these respects, the emergence of civil society in St Botolph Aldgate was profoundly shaped by the structure of the local urban community.

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