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Tales from the Yarmouth Hutch:
civic identities and hidden histories in an urban archive

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All archives have a purpose; their collection, organization and deployment is never neutral. Historians take from the archive those fragments that seem to us to prove a particular case, or to enrich the story we wish to tell. But it is hard for us – in our teaching, in our writing, perhaps also in our thinking – to capture the endlessly protean nature of the archive. In this piece, I try to capture some of the ways in which an archive sustained certain stories and how it frustrated others. The tale told here is unapologetically *local*: it engages with a particular community at a particular time. My objective is that of reconstructing something of the way in which archives made sense to early modern people.

In this piece I take the town archive of Great Yarmouth - the Yarmouth Hutch - and resituate it in its original context at the heart of an urban community. We will see that the Hutch sustained a detailed sense of the past that reached back to the fourteenth century and which spawned two remarkable histories of the town, written respectively by Thomas Damet in 1594-99 and Henry Manship in 1619. I argue that rather than

representing a novel expression of early modern civic humanism, these histories were formed within a longer tradition of urban historical writing, one that reached back to the late Middle Ages. Yarmouth's corporate sense of the past was generated for a middling, bourgeois audience that was partial and, in many ways, exclusive. Urban political culture – encompassing not just political affairs, but the writing and archives within which it was recorded – thereby emerges as more elitist and divisive than recent historiography has supposed. I suggest that a closer look at both the histories and at the archive that supported them, reveals the fissures and tensions that were the reality of urban politics. In the end, these fractures in the historical record defeated the efforts of writers to shape a particular narrative of the past. The fundamental purpose of the piece, then, is to historicize, and so to expand, the boundaries of what we mean by 'the archive'.

First of all, the context. Located at the mouth of the River Bure, Yarmouth was an important part of the North Sea economy.¹ In 1588, it was estimated that there were 1,000 houses in the town. A 1565 census of Norfolk ports guessed that 400 Yarmouth people were employed by fishing.² The town was governed by two bailiffs, elected by twenty-four aldermen. The cutting of a new deep harbour in the 1560s allowed ships of up to 250 tonnes to berth, ushering in a sustained period of prosperity.³ Prior to this, the harbour was constantly silting up and required dredging or the creation of new harbours. Funding this work entailed appeals to the Crown for finances and relief from tolls and subsidies. The town held jurisdiction over the local herring trade: every year, between 29 September and 10 November, the Herring Fair took place, in which

¹ The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), E159/350/337.

² *HMC, Salisbury*, xiii, 369. See TNA, SP12/38, fos. 15v-16r.

³ D.M. Dean, 'Parliament, Privy Council and Local Politics in Elizabethan England: the Yarmouth-Lowestoft Fishing Dispute', *Albion*, xxii, 1 (1990), 42-3.

the Yarmouth authorities upheld the law, collected revenues and controlled processing. Since the thirteenth century, this monopoly had been challenged by the Wardens of the Cinque Ports.⁴ Yarmouth also came into regular conflict with its neighbours. The inhabitants of Caistor, Gorleston and the Hundred of Lothingland threatened its land boundaries, while Kirkley Roads, the sea approaches to Yarmouth, were challenged by Lowestoft.⁵

The governors of early modern Yarmouth inherited a tradition of victory over opponents to their rights, a tradition that had much to do with its easily accessible town archives.⁶ This archival turn was underwritten by a sense of the town's history that stretched back to the mid-fourteenth century. By 1386, a 'chronographical table' chronicling the town's history had been installed in St Nicholas's church. This dwelt heavily upon the recent impact of the Black Death, which had carried away 7,052 people. In 1587, the table was still hanging in the church; by 1612 it had been replaced with a newer version. This 'chronographical table' represented the Ur-text for subsequent representations of the town's history.⁷

⁴ R. Tittler, 'The English Fishing Industry in the Sixteenth Century: the Case of Great Yarmouth', *Albion*, ix, 1 (1977), 40-60.

⁵ For Gorleston, see TNA, STAC5/Y2/11; for Kirkley Roads, see TNA, STAC5/Y1/14; for the Cinque Ports, see NRO, Y/C45/7, 8; for Caistor-on-Sea, see TNA, SP1/41, fo. 161r. The dispute with Caistor was temporarily settled through arbitration in 1545. See H. Swinden, *History and Antiquities of the Ancient Burgh of Great Yarmouth* (Norwich 1772), 367-72. Star Chamber action in the 1570s settled the boundary with Lowestoft in Yarmouth's favour. See C.J. Palmer (ed.), *The History of Great Yarmouth by Henry Manship esq., Temp. Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1854), 164-5; TNA, STAC5/Y4/2; TNA, STAC5/U3/2.

⁶ G.R. Elton, 'Piscatorial politics in the early Parliaments of Elizabeth I', in Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (eds.), *Business life and public policy: essays in honour of D.C. Coleman* (Cambridge, 1986), 1-20.

⁷ Rutledge, 'Thomas Damet', 124; P. Gauci, *Politics and Society in Great Yarmouth, 1660-1722* (Oxford, 1996), 38; Palmer (ed.), *History*, 5, 22, 33; Nashe, *Unfortunate Traveller*, 386; J. Brome, *Travels over England, Scotland and Wales* (London, 1700),

The later fifteenth century saw the increased use of vernacular English at all levels of the polity.⁸ Yarmouth shared in this: in 1491, when the borough's constitutional arrangements were reconfigured, an 'olde boke of the laws & customes of yermouth' was 't[ra]nslated oute of French in to Englissh by Thomas Canaryd' and entered into the archive. Canaryd noted that 'variances & disorders' had 'ben moved amongs[t] the burgesses & co[mon]altie', and that consequently there was a need that that 'the peple may be ruled a[nd] lesse offende'. Noting that oral tradition concerning the town's governmental arrangements provided insufficient authority for the town's power – 'the mende of man passyth lytely' – it was 'nedefull to have remembrance' of the town's governance. That the resultant document appeared in the vernacular is suggestive of a desire to reach deep into the layers of literate society, grounding a document-conscious sense of the town's constitutional history. Canaryd's translation was stitched into a compilation of documents relating to the town's constitutional history.⁹ The succeeding document in this volume is a 1502 appeal from the town to Henry VII requesting financial aid in dredging its silted-up harbour. Significantly, it was built upon a clear narrative of the town's history.¹⁰

Yarmouth's historical struggles with the sea, with its neighbours and with the Cinque Ports generated an ever-expanding corpus of documentation: petitions, legal papers,

38. For partial synopses of the second table, see British Library, London (hereafter BL), Add Ms 12505, fos. 280r-1r; BL, Landsdowne, 101, fos. 6r-v (no. 3).

⁸ David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People: Popular Politics and England's Long Social Revolution, 1066–1649* (Cambridge, 2009)

⁹ For the 1491 translation, see NRO, Y/C18/1, fos. 26r-31r, reproduced in Swinden, *Yarmouth*, 136-154. Significantly, Canaryd's document was annotated by Thomas Damet.

¹⁰ Norfolk Record Office, (hereafter NRO), Y/C18/1, fos. 32r-v. I am grateful to Christian Liddy for bringing this document to my attention.

charters, grants, correspondence, abstracts, indentures, licences, accounts, court rolls, surveys and maps. These were deployed in the legal defence of the town's liberties and in a carefully crafted version of Yarmouth's history, articulated in petitions, legal papers and in two narrative histories. The first was written in 1594-99 by the leading townsman Thomas Damet, the second in 1619 by his enemy Henry Manship.¹¹ The histories provided what I call an *authorized narrative* that emphasized Yarmouth's loyalty to the Crown and the protestant religion. The contribution of the town's maritime assets in the maritime defence of the realm and its economic significance as a fishing town and a port underwrote its national significance. Particular emphasis was placed upon the mid-Tudor crisis. Yarmouth's hostility to Kett's rebellion and its allegiance to Queen Mary during her seizure of power was (contradictorily) cited alongside its loyalty to the protestant religion during the Marian persecution. We will probe these latter questions later in this essay.

All of these aspects of the town's social, economic and constitutional history were documented in the Yarmouth Hutch. As it had developed by the later sixteenth century, the Hutch comprised an iron-bound oaken trunk and an array of boxes, compartments and shelves located in the vestry of St Nicholas's church. The exact origins of the Hutch remain obscure. From 1542, (the earliest point from which council proceedings survive) reference was made to 'the common hutche' which contained 'Charters Recordes & wrytynges'. By the late sixteenth century, a Hutch

¹¹ For the appearance of the town's authorized narratives in petitions to Elizabeth I, see Swinden, *History*, 401-2, 413, 446-9; for its appearance in Elizabethan legal cases, see TNA, STAC5/Y2/4, m.1; TNA, STAC5/Y1/14. This reference to the town's opposition to the rebels appears in the letter from Norfolk magistracy to the Privy Council, 1594, in support of the town's request for help financing the maintenance of its harbour. See *HMC, Salisbury*, iv, 471.

book was in existence, which recorded loans of documents from and additions to the Hutch.¹²

In 1612, a ‘summary reporte’ of the contents of the Hutch was drawn up by a committee led by Henry Manship.¹³ He was a disputatious man, caught up in the factional struggles amongst the governors of early Stuart Yarmouth.¹⁴ Retained by the town as an attorney, Manship was typical of lesser gentlemen who elsewhere found employment as estate stewards or bailiffs. They were possessed of at least a grammar school education; in order to facilitate their work, these men sometimes built up collections of local manuscripts. Occasionally, as with Manship, this led them into antiquarian studies.¹⁵

Henry Manship despised Thomas Damet, whom he called a ‘dunce’ and a ‘sheep’.¹⁶ Manship chose his opponents poorly: Damet was a prosperous merchant who served as member for the borough in four parliaments and as bailiff on three occasions. Damet wrote the first history of the town, entitled ‘Greate yermouthe A boke of the Foundacion and Antiquitye of the saide Towne and of diverse specialle matters

¹² For this volume, see NRO, Y/C20/1.

¹³ P. Rutledge, ‘Archive Management at Great Yarmouth since 1540’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, iii, 2 (1965), 89-90.

¹⁴ For the animus, see TNA, STAC 8/85/15. I am grateful to Hillary Taylor for this reference.

¹⁵ For an example, see David Rollison, ‘The bourgeois soul of John Smyth of Nibley’, *Social History*, 12, 3 (1987), 309-330. For the phenomenon more widely, see C. W. Brooks, *Pettyfoggers and Vipers of the Commonwealth: the ‘Lower Branch’ of the Legal Profession in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986).

¹⁶ For Damet, see P. Rutledge, ‘Damet, Thomas (c.1542–1618)’, in oxforddnb.com; see also TNA, STAC8/127/12.

concerning the same'.¹⁷ Thanks to the insult he had given Damet, Manship was expelled from the common council 'as not fit to be of that society'. Manship's way back into ruling circles in the town, he hoped, was through his legal-historical knowledge. After authoring the 'sumary reporte' of 1612, he produced a copy of the medieval cartulary of the town's former hospital and, in 1619, a major work entitled 'The history of Great Yarmouth'.¹⁸

Henry Manship would have been pleased to find that his 1619 history of Yarmouth has cast Damet's work into the shadow. Phil Withington has read Manship's history as a bold statement of civic humanism. In contrast to such grand attributions, Damet's book has received little attention. Paul Rutledge perceives in Damet's 'Foundacion' merely an aid to the business of 'preparing petitions to lay before the central

¹⁷ The original survives as NRO, Y/D41/104. For Damet's authorship see P. Rutledge, 'Short notice: Thomas Damet and the Historiography of Great Yarmouth', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xxxiv, 3 (1968), 332-3. All quotations here are from the manuscript original. On dating Damet's history, see Robert Tittler, *Townspeople and Nation: English Urban Experiences, 1540-1640* (Stanford: Calif., 2001), 125.

¹⁸ For Henry Manship, see Tittler, *Townspeople*, 121-39; C. Rawcliffe, 'The Cartulary of St Mary's Hospital, Great Yarmouth', in M. Bailey, M. Jurkowski and C. Rawcliffe (eds.), *Poverty and Wealth: Sheep, Taxation and Charity in Late Medieval Norfolk*, (Norfolk Record Society, lxxi [Norfolk], 2007), 171-6. For allegations of corruption against Manship, see TNA, STAC8/182/10. For Manship's activities as attorney and public notary, see NRO, HMN7/195/21; NRO, COL/1/195; NRO, Y/C34/5/1; NRO, Y/C36/11. The earliest surviving transcription of Manship's history is dated 1723. This is NRO, MS 4593, transcribed by John Andrewes, who is likely to have transcribed the history during a legal case concerning Yarmouth's liberties: see TNA, E134/2GeoII/East16; TNA, E134/2GeoII/Mich26. The next earliest is NRO, MC1987/1, 897x8, which is described as 'Manship's History of Great Yarmouth, Property of William Manning, taken from a copy of Mr John Morse, 1763, which he took from the Original, 1736'. The last manuscript transcription, on paper watermarked in the 1820s, is NRO, COL8/18. In each case, the earlier manuscript versions also contain transcriptions of town documents. Two printed versions exist: Palmer (ed.), *History*, and the far inferior A.W. Ecclestone (ed.), *Henry Manship's Great Yarmouth* (Great Yarmouth, 1971).

authority'.¹⁹ Damet's history is to the point, avoiding the rhetorical flourishes and classical allusions of Manship's work. Yet both manuscripts have their utilitarian qualities, providing an historical spine to Yarmouth's legal and constitutional claims.

Thomas Damet was clear about the function of his book: he had written a chronological narrative that would provide an historical context for the defence of the town's interests:

to the Intent that thes thinges mighte Remayne for a Memoriall to all of this corporacion which nowe be and that hereafter shall succede to be provident for the upholdinge of the state of the Towne ... And to the intent there maye be some good Presidentes lefte unto them in the tyme of there necessities to make and frame there sutes and petitions ... The wrighter hereof hathe taken some paynes to sette downe in this booke Some good Instruction for the better direction and more needye and speedier dispatch of those Busynes, whiche muste needes be taken in hand & followed by those carefuller travayles of some good men of the same Towne ... And suche he doubteth not but God wille rayse upp even of that corporacion that shalbe meete and willinge to doe good unto there native cuntrye and Towne in the whiche they have bene bredd and borne (as the said wryghter hereof was, whoe manye tymes travayled in and about thees busynes)²⁰

Damet's story has three themes: Yarmouth's struggle with the sea; its legal conflicts; and its relationship with the Crown, particularly as regards financial matters and the

¹⁹ P. Rutledge, 'Thomas Damet and the Historiography of Great Yarmouth', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xxxiii, 2 (1963), 122; P. Withington *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), 12.

²⁰ NRO, Y/D41/104, fos. 4v-5r.

grant of charters and privileges. It is not far into Damet's manuscript that his historical imagination imposes itself. Within the first few folios, Damet discusses the early environment of what would become Yarmouth, claiming that in the reign of Canute its location emerged from the sea as an isolated sandbank. At that time, Damet believed that much of modern-day Broadland lay underwater, with the sea lapping at the eastern edge of Norwich. To support his argument, a detailed coloured map was deposited in the Yarmouth Hutch purporting to show the area between Yarmouth and Norwich in the year 1000.²¹

Damet explained how, by the time of the Norman Conquest, a fishing community had grown up on this narrow spit, its French, English, Flemish and Dutch population attracted by the autumn teeming of the herrings. In the reign of William Rufus, a chapel was established which grew into the parish church of St Nicholas. King John granted the rapidly-expanding town its first charter. Damet detailed the town's subsequent relations with the Crown, its struggle with the Cinque Ports, controversies with Lowestoft, Gorleston and Caistor, the Black Death and other local disasters. A key moment came in 1340, when Yarmouth's contribution to the English victory at the Battle of Sluys cemented its relationship with the Crown. Setting a precedent for later monarchs, Edward III rewarded Yarmouth by financing the cutting of a new harbour. Improvements to Yarmouth's townscape were noted: the paving of the market square, the construction of town walls, the erection of a market cross, the

²¹ NRO, Y/C37/1. Yarmouth's rich cartographic inheritance is worth further study. For now, see Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller and other works* (London, 1971), 381, 384; Palmer (ed.), *History*, 14; NRO, Y/C20/1, fos. 3r, 10r. Maps of Yarmouth in the late sixteenth century survive at Hatfield House (for which see B.H. St. J. O'Neil and W.E. Stephens, 'A plan of the fortifications of Yarmouth in 1588', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xxviii (1941), 1-6) and in BL, Cotton MS, Augustus I. i. no. 74.

establishment of a guildhall and the building of chapels by the religious orders explained the emergence of a civilized, urban environment. As Damet drew closer to his own time, his narrative became richer, noting Crown support for the cutting of new harbours in 1529, 1548 and 1567; military successses against the French; the loyal defence of the town against Kett's rebels; support for Princess Mary's coup in 1553; the settlement of disputes in Yarmouth's favour; the strengthening of its defences; periodic high food prices and attacks of the plague.

Damet's history, then, provides much more than a narrative of the growth of the town's liberties. Although the legal-constitutional story lies at its core, the book provides rich detail about economic, environmental and social history. Damet tells the story of a loyal, hard-working people struggling against foreign navies, violent rebels, avaricious neighbours and a harsh enviroment. Significantly, the opening section concerning the initial establishment of a fishing village on the sandbank emphasized its multi-national character: this was important when the population of Damet's Yarmouth was so ethnically diverse.²²

The contrast between Thomas Damet's work of 1594-99 and the 1619 history authored by Henry Manship has been overstated. Manship's history differed from that written by his rival not in its basic message, but in its greater empirical richness; in his clarity in use of sources; and in his awareness of the wider context within which his history might make sense. Like a generation of Elizabethan middling-sort men, Manship made creative use of what is likely to have been a grammar school

²² B. Lambert and C.D. Liddy, "They Act as Burgesses, but They Are Not": The Regulation of Aliens in Fifteenth-Century Great Yarmouth', in N. McDonald, W.M. Ormrod and C. Taylor (eds.), *Resident Aliens in Later Medieval England*, (Brepols, forthcoming 2016); see also <https://www.englishimmigrants.com>

education. He found in the writings of Aristotle, Cicero, Plato, Pliny, Sophocles, Thucydides, Virgil, Seneca, Horace, Ovid and Demosthenes a way of conceptualizing Yarmouth as a civic entity.²³ This provided him with an interpretive framework and wider vision that was much wider than Damet's.

Phil Withington has seen Manship's vision as verging upon the republican, arguing that he 'developed an intensely humanist portrayal of civic life'.²⁴ Withington's Manship developed a 'notion of aristocratic civility' founded on 'civic rather than commercial discourse'.²⁵ Yet, for all their personal rivalry, the organizing principle of Damet and Manship's books lay in the defence of Yarmouth's distinctly *local* privileges and material resources and, in particular, in its relationship with the Crown. Manship's civic humanism was really a grandiose flourish. The emphasis placed by both Damet and Manship upon commercial discourse and environment confirm Keith Thomas's assessment of the early-modern sense of the past: that it was functional, designed to support interests in the present.²⁶

Damet and Manship's histories were products of a localized environment, telling the story of a place that they had known from their childhood. Their histories were heavily dependent upon archival sources – especially the material contained within the Yarmouth Hutch. In the mid-1590s, Thomas Damet led Yarmouth's case against Lowestoft over Kirkley Roads. It was at this time that he was writing his history. Notes in Damet's hand can be found all over the borough's court rolls and

²³ This is especially evident in Palmer (ed.), *History*, 55-6, 190-3.

²⁴ Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, 59, 67, 77.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 140.

²⁶ Keith Thomas, *The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England*, Creighton Tust Lecture, 1983 (London, 1983), 3.

cartularies.²⁷ In 1578 and again in 1595, Damet presented the town's case before the Privy Council, equipped with manuscripts drawn from the Hutch. These included a 'very fair book of parchment', a body of vernacular transcriptions of key Latin documents which later became known as 'Damet's Book'.²⁸ Thomas Damet, then, was not just exploiting the Yarmouth Hutch: he was adding to it and organizing it in such a way as to give it a distinct *meaning* and *utility*.

More so than Manship, Damet both added to the Hutch and provided an interpretive spine that gave meaning to the town archive.²⁹ Just as Manship and Damet's historical writings serviced the interest of the town in the present, so did the contents of the Hutch. Manship was well aware of this when he drew up his 'sumary reporte' on the Hutch in 1612. The archival riches uncovered by his committee were extensive but, Manship thought, insufficiently organized. He observed that the

Charters Rolls and evidences wch doo remayne in the vestry, Guildhall and other places doe lye not onely disp[er]sedly but also very disorderly and have not theise great number of yeres been p[er]used and read to the no little damage of the whole Incoporacon

Manship envisaged a role for the Hutch not only in the successful defence of the town's rights, but also in the maintenance of a distinctly *urban* political culture. The

²⁷ NRO, Y/C45/7, 8, 9, 10; NRO, Y/C36/7.

²⁸ Dean, 'Parliament', 45. The book is NRO, Y/C18/4; a note at the end of the work dates its completion to 1580.

²⁹ For the use of the town's archives, and the articulation of its history, in assertion of its rights before the Privy Council and other authorities see TNA, SP12/8/78; TNA, SP12/16/113; TNA, SP12/128/26, 30; BL, Add Ms 48028, fos. 241r-5r; BL, Lansdowne Ms 78, fol. 174r (no. 70); *HMC, Salisbury*, vi, p. 319, 476; vii, 540. For a 1588 summary of the town's rights, in which Damet surely had some hand, see *HMC, Salisbury*, xiii, p. 369.

proper preservation of the town archives, Manship felt, would ensure that ‘every one of the Comon assembly and every other good and well affected Townsmen may be further instructed w[i]th knowledge whereby they may bee the better able to doe more good to the estate of this Township in future tyme’.³⁰ This documentary and historical consciousness, more than civic humanism, was what gave Manship’s work its significance: it provided powerful empirical underpinnings for an historical vision that supported Yarmouth’s commercial and constitutional interests in the present.

There is a wider point here, one that bears upon the historical understanding of urban authority in early modern England. Robert Tittler has noted the increasing tendency of urban authorities, starting in the early sixteenth century, to reorganize and protect their archives.³¹ Paul Griffiths has shown that in some towns and cities, the assertion of authority entailed a growing dependence upon record keeping and a culture of secrecy.³² In London in particular, Griffiths shows that access to archives was dictated by one’s position within the political hierarchy.³³ Yet in Yarmouth there was a

³⁰ NRO, Y/C1/1.

³¹ Robert Tittler, ‘Reformation, Civic Culture and Collective Memory in English Provincial Towns’, *Urban History*, xxiv, 3 (1997), 283-300.

³² P. Griffiths, ‘Inhabitants’, in C. Rawcliffe and R. Wilson (eds), *Norwich since 1550* (London, 2004), 63-88; P. Griffiths, ‘Secrecy and authority in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London’, *Historical Journal*, xl, 4 (1997), 925-51. For provincial towns’ worries about secrecy, see Essex RO, T/A104/1; East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Records Services, BC/II/3 Beverley, fos. 36v, 37r, 95v; W.J. Petchy, *A Prospect of Maldon, 1500-1689* (Chelmsford, 1991), 164; K.S. Martin (ed.), *Records of Maidstone: being selections from the documents in the possession of the Corporation* (Maidstone, 1928), 22.

³³ For the renewed interest of the central state in its archives, see N. Popper, ‘From Abbey to Archive: Managing Texts and Records in Early Modern England’, *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), 249-66; P. Cain, ‘Robert Smith and the Reform of the Archives of the City of London, 1580-1623’, *London Journal*, 13, 1 (1987-8), 3-16. For town authorities’ concerns with their records, see for instance East Sussex Record Office, WIN/53, fos. 231v, 255r, 259r, 267v-8r, 271r, 276r; R.S. Ferguson and W. Nanson (eds), *Some Municipal Records of the City of Carlisle*, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 4 (Carlisle, 1887), 58, 59, 72. For the

different mode of urban governance. Whereas in Griffiths' London the authorities sought to restrict access to its records, in Yarmouth there was a deliberate effort to render the borough's past both accessible (in vernacular English) and comprehensible (in Damet and Manship's histories). Damet's Book therefore represents the clearest expression of the desire to see that the town's archival heritage be employed 'to doe more good to the estate of this Township'. Written in the clear hand of a professional scrivener, and validated by Thomas Damet's signature at the base of each folio, the volume was completed by 1580. It is a beautiful work, the product of a considerable expenditure of time, care and money.

Along with the histories and the Hutch, Damet's Book formed part of a local, bourgeois public sphere. It rendered the past usable and comprehensible to a middling – but not necessarily extensively schooled – readership: the 'good and well affected Townsmen'. Such people were the inheritors of the 'olde wyse & discrete men burgeyses' on whose behalf Thomas Canyard had produced his 1491 translations of the borough by-laws with the intention that thereby 'the peple may be ruled a[nd] lesse offende'.³⁴ Lauding the town's bourgeoisie, Thomas Nashe declared that 'Here I could break out into a boundless race of oratory, in shrill trumpeting and concelebrating the royal magnificence of her government, that for state and strict civil ordering scant admitteth any rivals'.³⁵ Critically, Nashe could see that institutional power was included only the wealthy: describing Yarmouth as a 'Commune bonum', Nashe saw that 'its [not] ... cater-cousins to any mongrel Democratia, in which one is

broader context, see E. Ketelaar, 'Records Out and Archives in: Early Modern Cities as Creators of Records and as Communities of Archives', *Archival Science*, x (2010), 201-10.

³⁴ NRO, Y/C/18/1, fo. 26r.

³⁵ Nashe, *Unfortunate Traveller*, 383.

all and all is one, but that in her, as they are not all one'.³⁶

This was, then, a borough dominated by middling people, whose knowledge of their town's liberties was freely available to them in the Hutch, comprehensible to any person capable of reading English. Many years later, the authorized narrative yet held, legitimating its government amongst that social fraction defined in 1729 as the town's 'most substantiall inh[ab]itants' coupled with 'persons of pretty good Circumstances'.³⁷

It should not be surprising that the Yarmouth's historically-conscious public sphere should irritate the national elite.³⁸ In 1629, the Attorney-General, Sir Robert Heath noted that 'Ther is a great party in this towne of sectaryes, averse to all government but ther owne popular way, which must be reformed'. As Richard Cust has observed, when Charles I intervened in quarrels between Yarmouth's puritan and Laudian factions, the monarch described the town's constitutional arrangements in a language that he 'tended to adopt ... when he felt that fundamental principles of order and obedience were being challenged'.³⁹ In this formulation, it is no surprise that when the common council decided to eject Manship from its number, they branded him 'as not fit to be of that society' (my emphasis). In their response to royal criticism, the town's

³⁶ *ibid.*, 383, 394.

³⁷ TNA, E134/2GeoII/East16; see also TNA, E134/2GeoII/Mich26.

³⁸ The religious and political disputes of the 1620s are covered in Swinden, *History*, 477-530; R. Cust, 'Anti-Puritanism and Urban Politics: Charles I and Great Yarmouth', *Historical Journal*, xxxv, 1 (1992), 1-26; R. Cust, 'Parliamentary Elections in the 1620s: the Case of Great Yarmouth', *Parliamentary History*, 11, 2 (1992), 179-91.

³⁹ Cust, 'Anti-puritanism', 2.

governors constantly used the term society in describing their collective being.⁴⁰ Withington writes of the word that “‘Society’” was a product of renaissance modernity ... it was ... redolent with civic idealism ... at once enabled and ennobled by those who claimed to be acting under its auspices’.⁴¹ Some version of civic humanism was at work here; but it was one grafted onto material interests and a sense of the local past.

Understood historically, both Damet and Manship’s historical works remain fundamentally bourgeois texts, appealing to the same kind of audience as Holinshed’s *Chronicles* – what Annabel Paterson has identified (however anachronistically) as an urban middle class.⁴² It is therefore significant that Manship’s Aristotelian vision of the urban community is interlaced with an anxiety about the nature of the urban polity. Providing a Biblical gloss on classical humanism, in the closing remarks to his history, Manship observes that

it is evident that all living creatures do live by ruling and obeying: whereupon, St Peter saith ... to command and obey is agreeable to the laws of God’s nature and nations: without which, a commonwealth were a monster, like unto a body without a head, and the head without members duly composed and knit to it.⁴³

⁴⁰ Swinden, *History*, 477-520. The godly majority on the aldermanic council also legitimated their authority on the basis of appeals to custom: stating a wish ‘to have that former government continued unto us, under which our ancestors have for so many ages past peaceably prospered and flourished ... Custom we acknowledge hath somewhat endeared our ancient government unto us’.

⁴¹ P. Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: the Vernacular Origins of some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge, 2010), 130-1.

⁴² Anabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's chronicles* (Chicago, 1994), 15-21. For the continued power of the town’s authorized narrative at the end of the seventeenth century, see Anon, *The Case of the Town of Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, against South-Town* (London, 1699).

⁴³ Palmer (ed.), *History*, 192.

Why did Manship conclude his history on this destabilizing note? What was it about the history of Yarmouth that suggested that some ‘monster, like unto a body without a head’ might stalk the historical landscape he had drawn with such accuracy? The answer may lie in the exclusions upon which his apparent civic humanism was based. That exclusion was both political and textual, based as much in the separation of Yarmouth’s poorer people from their past as much as they were cut off from institutional authority in the present. This is clearest in Manship and Damet’s discussion of the events of 1549.⁴⁴ As we have seen, both men played upon 1549 as a key moment. In their accounts, Kett’s rebels stormed Lowestoft, seizing its artillery, which was then deployed against Yarmouth. When the loyal men of Yarmouth drove off the rebels, the insurrectionaries left behind the ordnance seized from Lowestoft. The artillery pieces positioned on Yarmouth’s walls, rendered prominent upon a map of the late sixteenth century, therefore, represented physical embodiments both of Lowestoft’s incompetence and of Yarmouth’s continued loyalty.

Manship and Damet had good reasons to play up the events of 1549. But here their joint narrative met its most fragile point. At the very place that the town’s authorized narrative seemed at its strongest – its dependence upon an effective harbour, its contest with its neighbours and its loyalty to the Crown – its authorized narrative collapsed. Manship paused in his narrative of 1549 to present a series of documents concerning the rebellion. These included four warrants from Robert Kett to his subordinates to collect supplies and recruit men from Yarmouth; a letter from the Council congratulating the bailiffs on securing Yarmouth; a similar letter from

⁴⁴ For Damet’s account of Kett’s rebellion, see NRO, Y/D41/104, fos. 43r-45r; for Manship’s account, see Palmer (ed.), *History*, 85-6, 144-58.

Edward VI; and a set of orders enforced by the bailiffs for the defence of the town.⁴⁵

Damet's account of the rebellion is straightforward: the rebels seize Lowestoft, steal its artillery, bombard Yarmouth and are driven off in a battle with the Yarmouth men. In their fury, the rebels destroy the harbour works that had only just been completed in 1548. Yarmouth's loyalty was, to Damet, self-evident: 'the Towne and Townesmen wold not suffer or consent unto' the rebels' demands, 'but kept the Towne for the kinges majestie accordinge to there allegeance'.⁴⁶ On the surface, Manship seemed to tell the same story, albeit with greater detail, concluding that the defeat of the rebels led 'The whole town of Yarmouth' to 'rejoicing and giving God thanks for so great a victory'.⁴⁷ But neither the source material that Manship transcribed in his history, nor the details of his account, support his contention that 'The whole town' was united against Robert Kett.

Manship's material concerning 1549 suggests exactly the opposite of his interpretation. One of the rebel leaders to whom Kett sent his warrants was John Rotheram, a cooper who in the winter of 1548/9 had led popular agitation concerning the enclosure of Yarmouth's commons, corruption in the fish market, and the town's constitutional arrangements.⁴⁸ During the 1549 rebellion, Rotheram was able to come and go in Yarmouth, seemingly at his pleasure. That there was a rebel faction within

⁴⁵ Palmer (ed.), *History*, 145-56; Ecclestone, *Henry Manship's Great Yarmouth*, 88-93.

⁴⁶ NRO, Y/D41/104, fo. 43r.

⁴⁷ Palmer (ed.), *History*, 153. The 1381 rebellion was treated in similar terms: see *ibid.*, 143-4.

⁴⁸ TNA, STAC3/7/32; TNA, STAC5/Y2/4, m.3. (this part of the 1548/9 action is misfiled in Elizabethan Star Chamber). For earlier conflict within the town over the spoils of the Reformation, see TNA, STAC3/5/78.

the town is clear enough from another of Manship's sources, the list of articles for the government of the town during the rebel siege of Yarmouth, which obliged the watch to listen for seditious speech and to list 'what Townesmen are now in the camp [that is, the rebel camp at Mousehold Heath]... and ... to give knowledge how many of the rebels' wives be in the camp'. Manship's commentary on the document observes that there were rebels within the town: he notes that the magistrates were 'enforced to keep strong watch and ward: not only to defend the town against the said rebels without, but also, against their partakers (which were more dangerous) within, defeating them (praised be God) of their rebellious intendments'.⁴⁹ Nor were the rebels entirely unsuccessful: Yarmouth's commons, whose enclosure John Rotheram had denounced in January 1549, were set open in 1552 and were still (to Manship's annoyance) available as a resource for the town's poor in 1619.⁵⁰ All of this contradicted the crafted narrative that the town authorities developed concerning the events of the 1549 depicting Yarmouth as a bulwark against insurrection.⁵¹

If Damet and Manship had difficulty trying to constrain the complexity of the events of 1549 within their straightforward narrative of Yarmouth's loyalty to the Crown, they had still greater difficulties with the response of the town's governors to Princess Mary's bid for the throne in 1553. This Damet presented as straightforwardly supportive of the Tudor candidate, stating that

when as that the duke of northumberland had proclaymed L. Jane to be quene of England, The Towne of greate yermouthe did holde and kepe the Towne for Quene marye ... the Towne sent one of their Balifes to her ma[jes]tie, to

⁴⁹ Palmer (ed.), *History*, 86. 155. On the rebel faction in Yarmouth, see TNA, SP10/8/100.

⁵⁰ Palmer (ed.), *History*, 123.

⁵¹ See, for instance, *HMC, Salisbury* iv, 471.

signifye the Townes Faythfullness and Allegeance whiche the saide Quene tooke in verye good parte ... promiseinge to requite this the Townes dutifulle kyndenes.⁵²

Once again, the reality was more complex. As Tittler and Battley have shown, investigation of the town's books for 1553 – by Damet's day, housed in the Yarmouth Hutch – reveal not only that the town authorities initially supported Lady Jane Grey's candidature but that they subsequently (rather clumsily) deleted those sections of their records that demonstrated this fact.⁵³

Just as striking as the new-modelling of the history of Yarmouth's governors and people in the mid-Tudor crisis is the lack of attention paid by Damet and Manship to oral tradition and the landscape.⁵⁴ In a semi-literate society, what was heard and what was seen concerning the local past were, for many Yarmouth people, more important than the written material held in the Yarmouth Hutch.⁵⁵ A dispute concerning the northern boundary of the town that resulted in Star Chamber action in 1525 illustrates the richness of oral memory.⁵⁶ The case concerned the northern boundary with Caistor

⁵² NRO, Y/D41/104, fo. 46r.

⁵³ Robert Tittler, and S.L. Battley, 'The Local Community and the Crown in 1553: the Accession of Mary Tudor Revisited', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 57 (1984), 131-9.

⁵⁴ For Manship's brief references to oral sources, see much of it concerned with the parish church, see Palmer (ed.), *History*, 14, 33, 35, 40. Given the significance of oral testimony to antiquarians elsewhere, this lack of stated reliance upon oral sources is surprising. For that significance, see D. R. Woolf, 'The "Common Voice": History, Folklore and Oral Tradition in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, cxx (1988), 26-52.

⁵⁵ For the importance of landscape and oral tradition to early modern popular memory, see Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013); For the wider context, see P. Nora, 'Between memory and history: Les lieux de memoire', *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24.

⁵⁶ H. Swinden, *History and antiquities of the ancient burgh of Great Yarmouth* (Norwich 1772), 360-7.

and turned on the significance of one particular spot – a silted-up inlet known as Grub’s Haven or Cocklewater, known by the town’s inhabitants as the location of Yarmouth’s first harbour.⁵⁷ Intriguingly, Manship’s 1612 ‘sumary reporte’ does not reference the depositions. Moreover, neither Manship nor Damet’s histories refer to the depositions; yet they provide detailed insight into the richness of oral tradition in the town and the significance of the landscape to readings of its past. In these respects, the old men’s memories that are collected in the depositions represent a different form of archiving from that of the Yarmouth Hutch: a process that carved meaning from the ‘intangible archive’ of oral tradition’.⁵⁸

Richard Russe, aged 74 years when he gave evidence to Star Chamber in 1525, recalled how in 1469 he and his father had watched ‘dyvers men hangyng upon the same gallows’ and that his father had turned to him and said ‘Thow se[e]st how theys be served, therfor be thow ware by them’.⁵⁹ In witnessing the gruesome execution, the young Richard Russe thereby had the northern boundary of the town imprinted upon his mind. The gallows also represented a marker of the town’s authority: unusually for a borough, the town court was able to impose capital penalties. It was expected that leaders of the town should pay attention to the bounds: in 1523, the 20 bailiffs who served between 1511 and 1520 were fined for failing to maintain with the northern boundary. Their failure had implications for local memory: it was that ‘the precincts, limits and boundaries ... have not been noted, and used, according to the ancient custom and ordinances ... so that they run out of memory’. Much of the

⁵⁷ Palmer (ed.), *History*, 11; Nashe, *Unfortunate traveller*, 385.

⁵⁸ For ‘intangible archives’, see S. Adams, ‘People have three eyes: ephemeral art and the archive in southeastern Nigeria’, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 48 (2005), 17.

⁵⁹ Swinden, *History*, 367.

testimony turned on the location of Grubb's Haven, and a nearby set of gallows that had replaced some earlier set around 1460. The significance of both locations lay in oral tradition. The 83 year-old John Dobleday had learnt of the significance of Grubb's Haven from what was 'comenly reported and spoken by old men'.⁶⁰ Other old men recalled how, in the mid-fifteenth century, 14 pirates had been hanged there on one occasion, save for a Moorish cabin boy, who afterwards set up home in Yarmouth.

Landscape mattered: the location of the gallows not accidental. For obvious reasons, the executions that took place on the gallows imprinted themselves in the audience's memories. Like the location of suicides' graves at parish boundaries, the gallows marked a key site key site in the limits of the town.⁶¹ The old Yarmouth men of 1525 were clear that they inhabited an ancient landscape, one whose meaning had long been defined by earlier townspeople. Henry Watson, aged 50, testified that when he and other headboroughs went the bounds with 'dyvers olde men', they were shown some crosses that were carved deeply into the ground at the boundary between Caistor and Yarmouth and were told that they 'were made and had ben continued of olde tyme, that is to sey, by III or IIII hundrid yeerys passed'.⁶²

If, as has been argued here, Yarmouth's archives were ordered, transcribed and rendered accessible in order to sustain a usable past for the town's commercial middling sort – that is, that the archives represented the historiographical expression

⁶⁰ Swinden, *History*, 361.

⁶¹ N. Whyte, 'The deviant dead in the Norfolk landscape, *Landscapes*, 4, 1 (2003), 24-39.

⁶² Swinden, *History*, p. 362.

of a bourgeois public sphere – then the censoring of the town’s history points towards the ways in which the textual exclusion of popular politics enabled its continuing institutional exclusiveness. In one respect, the issue is straightforward: John Rotheram and his fellows didn’t feature in the official histories and public archives of Yarmouth because they represented an aspect of local history that was uncomfortable to the town’s elite. This helped to enable the continuing separation of poorer people from political power in the present. Historians of urban politics have not shown great interest to this process of exclusion. But for all the studies of the emergence in English towns of a republican discourse, or of civic humanism, or of a broad public sphere, all of it was built upon *exclusion* – of poorer people, outsiders, migrants, possibly also women and foreign communities. The potential for a new history of urban political culture that engages with economics, social structure and inequalities of wealth and power is huge; but it has yet to be written.⁶³

All of this sustains the view that archives are ‘socially constructed entities’.⁶⁴ Tittler calls the editing of the town’s record of July 1553 a ‘disremembering’ of its history.⁶⁵ We might make a similar case for the treatment of the events of 1549 – but with an important qualification. The sources that Manship uncovered from 1549 did more than simply contradict his interpretation of events: they *destabilized* that narrative.

⁶³ Work on inequalities of wealth and power in English urban centres, while in itself often striking, has tended not to engage with political culture. Contrast, for instance, the world of idealized civic politeness evoked in Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth* with the harsh, gritty London evoked in Laura Gowing *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996) and in Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime and Control in the Capital City, 1550-1660* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁶⁴ T. Cook and J.M. Schwartz, ‘Archives, Records and Power: from (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance’, *Archival Science*, ii (2002), 178.

⁶⁵ Tittler, *Townspeople*, 138.

What is at stake here is not just a process by which dominant groups choose to delete those aspects of the historical past that they find inconvenient. Manship's handling of 1549 points also the difficulties of so doing: it points to the teeming *complexity* of the archive. As Allan Sekula has suggested, 'In structural terms, the archive is both an abstract paradigmatic entity and a concrete institution'. So the Yarmouth Hutch seems on first scrutiny. But once we start to dig away at it, the archive becomes less concrete: what Sekula calls the 'archival promise' of hard, certain knowledge is so quickly 'frustrated ... by the messy contingency' of its contents.⁶⁶ As Henry Manship wrote, as he thought about what he was finding, and as he tried to fight with the evidence he was uncovering, he became ever more mired in that mess. In the end, Henry Manship wrote a history that was far more multivocal than he intended. Expecting to encounter the archive as a source of legitimation, Manship found instead a protean, unstable, unpredictable richness. As Manship wrote, his didactic civic humanism died away in the face of the unexpected, unpredictable, *interesting* things that he found. In the end, it was the teeming unpredictable archive that won out over the ordering hand of the historian.

⁶⁶ Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, xxxix (1986), 17. See also Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham, NC, 2010).