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Introduction

On New Year's Eve, 1610, Margaret Willshere played a prank on the local constable. She was working as a servant in the Worcestershire village of Chaceley and plotted the enterprise with the help of her mistress and master. As night fell, she 'attired herself in man's apparrell', tore a sheet of paper from a book at random, and set off with 'a pike staffe on her shoulder'. When she knocked at the constable's door, Willshere claimed to have come from the nearby village of Bushley with news of 'a great robbery' and instructions (here she handed over the folded paper covered in writing) to raise the neighbourhood in pursuit of the thieves. There was, of course, no such robbery. Leaving the constable's door, she returned laughing to her accomplices, who 'made themselves merry thereat'.[1] It was not the most sophisticated joke, but it provides a striking illustration of the nature of law enforcement in early modern England. Margaret Willshere's instruments of disguise – the torn page, the staff, the men's clothes – were also, by necessity, the instruments of genuine policing. As a female servant, she was near the bottom of the social hierarchy and cut off from most sources of formal authority. The worlds of law enforcement and officeholding were not her worlds. To enter them, she thought, you needed special scraps of paper and special bits of wood, and you had to be a man.

Law enforcement was a male dominated activity in early modern England. Almost all of those tasked with keeping the peace or apprehending suspected offenders were men. This may seem quite obvious. There is a long history of entanglement between state power and male power. Male domination in this area might appear to be just another aspect of the broader male domination of early modern society. It might even be seen as inevitable, a universal feature of societies which have not undergone feminist revolution. But gendered hierarchy is not inevitable, and it is not

[1] J. W. Willis Bund (ed.), *Worcestershire County Records: Calendar of the Quarter Sessions Papers 1591–1643* (Worcester, 1900), 161.

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always the same.[2] The predominance of men in the offices and activities of law enforcement was produced and sustained by particular circumstances, ideas, and practices. More importantly, the relationship between manhood and this kind of state power was not constant. Over the course of the early modern period, new forms of office were created with new and different links to masculinity. These changes gave rise to practices of policing which continue to cast long shadows over the present.

This book traces the emergence of a distinctive kind of gendered policing out of older structures of law enforcement and local government, a process which took place in fits and starts over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It does not provide a comprehensive account of the ways in which early modern law enforcement was shaped by gender. The focus is narrower but it is set in a wide analytical frame, drawing inspiration from feminist scholarship on the shifting relationship between gender and the state, especially Carole Pateman's idea of a transition from paternal to fraternal forms of male power.[3] The history of policing is part – a crucial part – of wider histories of state formation. For much of the early modern period, policing was not clearly distinguished from other aspects of local government. Local government itself was not clearly distinguished from the operation of other kinds of social power – the power of landlords over tenants, husbands over wives, parents over children, mistresses or masters over servants. All of these structures combined to form a wide and complex system of patriarchy.[4] The process of differentiating one form of power from another involved increased specialisation and a move away from patriarchy towards fraternal models of male authority. Policing was not the only aspect of government to undergo this transformation, but it was one of the most consequential. The new style of specialised fraternal policing only emerged towards the end of the period – in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – and was concentrated in London. Its roots, however, stretched back to the

[2] Judith M. Bennett, 'Confronting Continuity', *Journal of Women's History* 9.3 (1997); Terry Lovell, 'Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu', *Feminist Theory* 1.1 (2000); Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 2001).

[3] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, 1988); Hilda Smith (ed.), *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (Cambridge, 1998). For an illustration of how these models can be applied to social history, see Karen Harvey, 'Ritual Encounters: Punch Parties and Masculinity in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present* 214.1 (2012). For a recent application of the model to the history of policing from the perspective of social and criminological theory, see Francis Dodsworth, *The Security Society: History, Patriarchy, Protection* (London, 2019).

[4] Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988); Antony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven, 1995). On the use of 'patriarchy' to describe early modern power dynamics, see the essays in 'Forum: Early Modern Patriarchy', *Gender & History* 30.2 (2018).

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earlier seventeenth century, while its legacies stretched forward into the decades and centuries that followed, as practices originating in the capital came to characterise policing across much of urban Britain.

The central argument of *Gender and Policing in Early Modern England* can be understood in two ways. First, it provides a new origin story for certain aspects of modern policing in which gender plays a central role. Second, it presents that story as an integral part of a much bigger process: the gendered differentiation of the state from other forms of social authority. This is clearly a more abstract argument and is set out in more detail below. Policing is a practice in which grand abstractions and concrete realities come together, or, sometimes, crash into one another.[5] On the one hand, policing is about government, law, political ideas, and the state. On the other, it is about individuals, bodies, and their experiences of power. Historians of early modern England have been aware of these connections for some time, but they tend to organise their analysis around a different concept: not policing but officeholding.

Policing and Officeholding

The history of early modern policing overlaps extensively with the history of officeholding. The most recognisable law enforcement officers of the period – constables and night watchmen – were part of an officeholding system which covered all aspects of local government. In the absence of a professional police force and large central bureaucracy, many routine activities of government could only be carried out by recruiting large numbers of people to hold office at a local level.[6] Just as constables and night watchmen kept the peace and enforced the law, so churchwardens and overseers of the

[5] Jonah Miller, 'The Touch of the State: Stop and Search in England, c.1660–1750', *History Workshop Journal* 87 (2019).

[6] This was not, as is sometimes suggested, a specifically English phenomenon. Government relied on widespread local officeholding across later medieval and early modern Europe: Beat A. Kümin, 'The English Parish in a European Perspective' in Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin (eds.), *The Parish in English Life 1400–1600* (Manchester, 1997); Cristina Julian Perez-Alfaro, 'The King's Face on the Territory: Royal Officers, Discourse and Legitimating Practices in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Castile' in Isabel Alfonso Anton, Hugh Kennedy, and Julio Escalona Monge (eds.), *Building Legitimacy: Political Discourses and Forms of Legitimation in Medieval Societies* (Leiden, 2004); Joachim Eibach, 'Burghers or Town Council: Who Was Responsible for Urban Stability in Early Modern German Towns?', *Urban History* 34.01 (2007); Glenn Burgess, 'Office-Holding, Participation and England's "Monarchical Republic"' in Jan Hartman, Jaap Nieuwstraten, and Michel Reinders (eds.), *Public Offices, Personal Demands: Capability in Governance in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2009); María Ángeles, Martín Romera, and Hannes Ziegler (eds.), *The Officer and the People: Accountability and Authority in Pre-Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2021).

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poor raised and distributed poor relief, surveyors of the highways kept roads in good repair, scavengers cleaned the streets, sextons dug graves, and swineherds prevented pigs from damaging private property. The list goes on, from beadles to bailiffs and pinders to parish clerks. The activities of these officers at the level of parish, manor, and ward were supervised and coordinated by a pyramid of official managers operating at city or county level, who also held various kinds of courts. These were sheriffs, mayors, coroners, royal commissioners of one sort or another, and justices of the peace. From the top of this system to the bottom, many tasks were shared between different groups of officers. Officers responsible for a particular aspect of government enforced laws relating to that area. No single set of officers held a monopoly on early modern policing, which can be best understood as a diffuse set of practices embedded in wider structures of local government.

Taken together, this panoply of officeholders comprised the early modern English state. If 'the state' is an abstraction, officers were the physical manifestation of it. Monarchs and chief ministers came and went, parliaments gathered and dispersed, but through interregnums, prorogations, revolutions, and all manner of constitutional crises what remained constant was the presence of thousands of officeholders, doing the business of government at ground level. This is both a way to understand the early modern state historically and a view held by some people at the time. The day after Elizabeth I died in 1603, a Catholic gentleman went to his local parish church and attempted to persuade his neighbours that they should not attend divine service until James VI&I had arrived in England and settled his religious policy. For this, he was summoned to the court of Star Chamber and condemned for committing such a heinous offence 'againste the state'. As the judges informed him, 'there is no *interregnum*, as the ignoraunte dothe suppose'; the state and its laws persisted beyond Elizabeth's death for two reasons. One, familiar to political historians, was that 'the verye instaunte that the breathe was oute of her Ma[jes]tie's bodye, Kinge James was lawfull & rightefull kinge'. The second was that although the crown was temporarily without a head to rest on there were still large numbers of officers carrying out their duties and embodying the state at a local level: 'Justices of peace are determyned' and 'Constables & Coroners, & suche pettie officers, remaine still'.[7] It is with constables and other such petty officers that this book is concerned.

[7] Attorney-General v Carew (1603) in William Paley Baildon (ed.), *Les reportes del cases in Camera Stellata, 1593 to 1609: from the Original MS. of John Hawarde* (London, 1894), 163–4. On the disruption of local government during the royal succession of 1603, see Susan Doran, '1603: A Jagged Succession', *Historical Research* 93.261 (2020).

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Historians of officeholding have argued that the particular forms of early modern offices indicate particular features of the early modern state. As Michael Braddick put it, 'the state is embodied in offices, and differences between states over time and between places are differences in the forms of office'.[8] To modern eyes, it is the low-level officers of this period who are especially distinctive. Constables, churchwardens, overseers of the poor, and others who kept the wheels of government turning were unsalaried, untrained, part-time amateurs. Many were elected by their communities rather than appointed from above. Most held office for just a year or two, without payment beyond compensation for expenses and the occasional fee, before passing on their duties to a neighbour and returning to their ordinary lives. In fact, they never ceased to live their ordinary lives, serving as officers while simultaneously producing goods, farming land, running shops, or pursuing whatever means of getting a livelihood they happened to have. This system of short-term amateur service meant that significant numbers of people in any given village, town, or city held office at one time or another. As one pamphleteer wrote, 'tis hard to find a Man who has not sometime been call'd to bear Office in his Parish or Borough'.[9] Several historians have suggested that local officeholding was a powerfully participatory form of government, or rather self-government. According to Patrick Collinson and Mark Goldie, whatever the pretensions of English monarchs, the realities of rule bore less resemblance to absolutism than to a kind of 'monarchical republic', or 'self-government at the king's command'.[10] There has been some dispute about exactly what proportion of the population held office: was it one in twenty men per year, one in ten householders, one in four ratepayers, half of all men over the course of a lifetime?[11] Regardless, it is clear that early modern government required the participation of large numbers of officeholding amateurs.

[8] Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c.1550–1700* (Cambridge, 2000), 21.

[9] *The Claims of the People of England, Essayed. In a Letter from the Country* (London, 1701), 16.

[10] Patrick Collinson, 'The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 69 (1987); Mark Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England' in Tim Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 2001). These studies represent a more sophisticated revival of an older tradition which presented medieval and early modern local government as proto-democratic: Eleanor Trotter, *Seventeenth Century Life in the Country Parish, with Special Reference to Local Government* (Cambridge, 1919); Albert Beebe White, *Self-Government at the King's Command: A Study in the Beginnings of English Democracy* (London, 1933); Arthur Bryant, *Humanity in Politics* (London, 1937), 86.

[11] Valerie Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1961), Chapter 2; Valerie Pearl, 'Change and Stability in Seventeenth-Century London', *The London Journal* 5.1 (1979), 16;

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Historians of law enforcement have reached a similar conclusion by a different route. Their focus has been on the scale of participation in the administration of criminal law, especially at the beginning and end of the legal process: apprehension of suspects and trial by jury. Led by Cynthia Herrup, scholars in this field have emphasised the involvement of people who held no office in pursuing and capturing suspected offenders. Victims and bystanders were often the key (or even the only) participants in this core aspect of law enforcement.[12] As Sir Thomas Smith wrote in his account of the government of Elizabethan England, 'everie man is a seriant to take a theefe'.[13] At the same time, the involvement of juries at various stages of a prosecution – grand juries and trial juries for both Quarter Sessions and Assizes, as well as juries of matrons, manorial juries, and coroner's juries – allowed substantial numbers of people to take part in making decisions about innocence and guilt.[14]

Historians of both policing and officeholding have interpreted this widespread participation in law enforcement and local government as indicative of the nature of the early modern state. A highly participatory state was, in the language of social theory, an 'undifferentiated' state.[15] There was no clear distinction between state and society. The state relied on and was in many ways part of the wider social order. In the case of

Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), 267–8; James Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550–1760* (2nd edition, London, 1997), 109–10; Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic', 162; Henry French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England 1600–1750* (Oxford, 2007), 120.

[12] Cynthia B. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1987), 67–92; Cynthia B. Herrup, 'New Shoes and Mutton Pies: Investigative Responses to Theft in Seventeenth-Century East Sussex', *Historical Journal* 27.4 (1984). See also James Sharpe, 'Enforcing the Law in the Seventeenth-Century English Village' in V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman, and Geoffrey Parker (eds.), *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); Sharon Howard, 'Investigating Responses to Theft in Early Modern Wales', *Continuity & Change* 19.3 (2004).

[13] Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum: The Maner of Governement or Policie of the Realme of England* (London, 1583), 71.

[14] Herrup, *Common Peace*, 93–164; Thomas A. Green, *Verdict According to Conscience: Perspectives on the English Criminal Trial Jury, 1200–1800* (Chicago, 1985); J. S. Cockburn and Thomas A. Green (eds.), *Twelve Good Men and True: The Criminal Trial Jury in England, 1200–1800* (Princeton, 1988), Chapters 5–10; Brodie Waddell, 'Governing England through the Manor Courts, 1550–1850', *Historical Journal* 55.2 (2012); Matthew Lockwood, *The Conquest of Death: Violence and the Birth of the Modern English State* (New Haven, 2017), 146–96; Jane Bitomsky, 'The Jury of Matrons: Their Role in the Early Modern English Courtroom', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* 25.4 (2019).

[15] Gianfranco Poggi, *The State: Its Nature, Development and Prospects* (Stanford, 1990), 20–1. See also Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power I: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge, 1986), 1–18; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power II: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge, 1993), 44–91.

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officeholding, this is presented as the result of a period of dramatic social change. Local officers were simultaneously servants of the crown and of the local community. Sometimes, their loyalties were torn between these two, especially when it came to enforcing laws which did not align with the priorities of their neighbours. Officers found themselves caught between 'two concepts of order', between their duty to uphold the letter of the law and the pressure exerted by the people they lived among.[16] An influential school of social history, led by Keith Wrightson, has argued that the balance of officers' loyalties tilted away from their communities towards the crown over the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This was part of a broader process in which the 'middling sort of people' got richer and increasingly aligned themselves with the interests of their social superiors and the central government, rather than those of their poorer neighbours.[17] The social status of the middling sort both justified and derived from their participation in law enforcement and other areas of state activity. As Steve Hindle has argued, state power rested on and reinforced social hierarchy.[18]

The intermingling of state power and social power meant that offices were as much social roles as political or legal positions.[19] The authority of an officer was a product of both their personal identity – as a gentleman, yeoman farmer, or master artisan – and their official status. The two were inextricable from each other. To be a justice of the peace was to be a gentleman, and vice versa. To be a constable or churchwarden or overseer of the poor was to belong to the middling sort, and vice versa. It has become commonplace among historians of the early modern period to say that there were no clear distinctions between the official and the personal.[20]

[16] Keith Wrightson, 'Two Concepts of Order: Justices, Constables and Jurymen in Seventeenth-Century England' in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1980); Ethan Shagan, 'The Two Republics: Conflicting Views of Participatory Local Government in Early Tudor England' in John F. McDiarmid (ed.), *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson* (Aldershot, 2007).

[17] Keith Wrightson, 'Aspects of Social Differentiation in Rural England, c. 1580–1660', *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 5.1 (1977); Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London, 1982), 222–8; Steve Hindle, 'The Political Culture of the Middling Sort in English Rural Communities, c.1550–1700' in Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded*; French, *The Middle Sort*; Andy Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity: English Neighbourhoods, 1500–1640* (Cambridge, 2020). For a critique of this argument, see Richard Hoyle, '"Wrightsonian Incorporation" and the Public Rhetoric of Mid-Tudor England', *History* 101.344 (2016).

[18] Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change, 1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2000).

[19] Braddick, *State Formation*, 27–37, 77, 82–4. See also Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge, 2006).

[20] Recent examples include: Fiona Williamson, '"A Fured Mutton Wolde Contayne As Much Good Doctrine": Social Politics in the Seventeenth Century Parish' in Fiona Williams (ed.), *Locating Agency: Space, Power and Popular Politics* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2010), 78; Malcolm Gaskill,

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Such distinctions are said to be characteristic of a 'modernity' which had not yet arrived, or which was only just beginning to take shape. Anglophone historians tend to be less explicit than others about the theoretical underpinnings of this idea, but there is a clear debt to the sociology of Max Weber.[21] Weber argued that unlike modern 'bureaucratic' officeholding, pre-modern 'patrimonial' officeholding did not distinguish between the office and the person who held it: 'The patrimonial office lacks above all the bureaucratic separation of the "private" and the "official" sphere'.[22] Only modern officeholding regimes, Weber thought, drew distinctions between the official and the personal.

Historians of officeholding and law enforcement are more or less in agreement that most aspects of early modern government were closer to the patrimonial than the bureaucratic. They differ, however, in their account of how, when, and where 'differentiation' – the separation of the official from the personal or social – began to take place. Historians of policing tend to locate the early stages of differentiation in the decades either side of 1700, specifically in London. Here, as John Beattie showed, the old system of law enforcement by constables and night watchmen who were unpaid amateurs, doing their duty for a short time before passing the burden to a neighbour, began to break down. A range of factors conspired to introduce increasingly long-term, specialised, and paid forms of officeholding into the capital's structures of law enforcement. Constables and watchmen began to serve for longer periods, received payment for their work, and were increasingly seen as specialists with a more important role in catching suspected offenders than anyone else.[23]

'Little Commonwealths II: Communities' in Keith Wrightson (ed.), *A Social History of England 1500–1750* (Cambridge, 2017), 92; Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, 212, 218, 223.

[21] Robert Frost, 'Early Modern State-Building, The Scandinavian *Machstaat*, and the Shortcomings of Anglo-Saxon Scholarship', *Journal of Early Modern History* 7.1 (2003). For direct applications of Weber's models to early modern continental Europe, see Roland Axtmann, 'The Formation of the Modern State: A Reconstruction of Max Weber's Arguments', *History of Political Thought* 11.2 (1990); Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 2005); Manon van der Heijden, *Civic Duty: Public Services in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2012). Anglophone medievalists have engaged with Weber more directly than their early modernist colleagues, especially David D'Avray, *Rationalities in History: A Weberian Essay in Comparison* (Cambridge, 2010).

[22] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, 1978), 1028. Weber saw bureaucratic and patrimonial forms of office as ideal types rather than historical realities, but he explicitly linked bureaucracy with modernity, writing that 'The bureaucratic structure is everywhere a late product of historical development. The further back we trace our steps, the more typical is the absence of bureaucracy and of officialdom in general': *Economy and Society*, 1002.

[23] J. M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660–1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (Oxford, 2001), 114–256; Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688–1800',

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Historians of officeholding, by contrast, have presented the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as a period of consolidation rather than change. The middling sort continued to dominate local offices across rural England (towns and cities rarely feature in these accounts) so state power and social authority continued to go hand in hand.[24] Such change as there was had taken place earlier in the seventeenth century. According to Michael Braddick, who has engaged directly with Weber's analytical framework, English government was 'still predominantly patrimonial' in 1700, but the civil wars of the 1640s and the fiscal demands of continental warfare in the 1690s had prompted the creation of new kinds of officers to collect new kinds of taxation. Officers of the new excise tax, in particular, bore a closer resemblance to Weberian bureaucrats than any of their predecessors had done. Excisemen were trained, salaried, full-time, and wielded a form of authority which 'depended on knowledge, precision and the application of impersonal norms, rather than on a broadly conceived "natural" and personal authority'.[25] In a recent study of corruption in the higher offices of politics and administration, Mark Knights also found a key turning point in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1600, he writes, 'the distinction between public and private roles was blurred'. This began to change in the 1640s with 'a conceptual and discursive shift' in which the notion of 'fiduciary "trust" became routinely applied to office, starting with the monarch and rapidly becoming applicable more broadly'. Officers defined as trustees, whether they were monarchs or ministers or members of parliament, drew their authority from whoever or whatever entrusted them with power, not from their own personal status. Describing officers as trustees placed them

Journal of British Studies 46.2 (2007); Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690–1800* (Cambridge, 2015), 29, 34–42, 56–60, 107–21. David Lemmings argues that this development was symptomatic of a broader decline of participation in legal processes: *Law and Government in England during the Long Eighteenth Century: From Consent to Command* (Basingstoke, 2011).

[24] Joan Kent, 'The Centre and the Localities: State Formation and Parish Government in England, circa 1640–1740', *The Historical Journal* 38.2 (1995); Steve Hindle, 'Power, Poor Relief, and Social Relations in Holland Fen, c.1600–1800', *The Historical Journal* 41.1 (1998); Joan Kent, 'The Rural "Middling Sort" in Early Modern England, circa 1640–1740: Some Economic, Political and Socio-Cultural Characteristics', *Rural History* 10.1 (1999); Steve Hindle, 'The Growth of Social Stability in Restoration England', *The European Legacy* 5.4 (2000); Naomi Tadmor, 'The Settlement of the Poor and the Rise of the Form in England, c.1662–1780', *Past & Present* 236.1 (2017).

[25] Michael J. Braddick, 'The Early Modern English State and the Question of Differentiation, from 1550–1700', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38.1 (1996), 109; Braddick, *State Formation*, 261. The significance of the Excise is laid out in greater detail in John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York, 1989) and in Michael J. Braddick, *Parliamentary Taxation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 1994), 168–230.

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in a 'principal-agent relationship'. Officers became agents who acted on behalf of principals like the crown, the people, or the state. It was these principals which provided the source of their authority.[26]

This book bridges the gap between histories of officeholding and law enforcement on this point. It argues that the changes in London's policing in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were facilitated by changes which took place earlier in the seventeenth century, which had much in common with the developments described by Braddick and Knights. The history presented here, however, differs from their work in its chronology, its cast of characters, and its conceptual framing. It unfolds at an uneven pace, beginning in the early 1600s, accelerating with the civil wars, and reaching a climax in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It is less concerned with monarchs and politicians than with constables and other low-level officeholders. It focuses on changes in law and legal practice more than high politics or administration, though both of these do feature. Above all, this book argues that changes in officeholding, law enforcement, and the early modern state were all deeply entwined with gender. Only by paying attention to gender can we properly understand how new practices of policing emerged from the old officeholding system and what it was that made them so distinctive. The process traced by this book forms a crucial chapter in the much longer history of gendered state power.

Arguments

Part I sets out the relationship between local officeholding and the central institution of gendered power in early modern society: the household. Most officeholders were also householders. This was the norm throughout the early modern period, though as subsequent parts of the book show, it was a norm from which particular groups of officers increasingly diverged. The domination of local offices by heads of household was a result of the lack of distinction between official and personal or social identity. According to much contemporary political thought, the only people qualified to wield official power were those who already governed others, or at least were not themselves governed by anybody else. 'Independence' was the key quality required of an officer. A person who depended on someone else for their position, livelihood, or general well-being could not make decisions

[26] Mark Knights, *Trust and Distrust: Corruption in Office in Britain and Its Empire, 1600–1850* (Oxford, 2021), 416, 108–9.

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