

Faith, Hope and Charity

Faith, Hope and Charity explores the interaction between social ideals and everyday experiences in Tudor and early Stuart neighbourhoods, drawing on a remarkably rich variety of hitherto largely unstudied sources. Focusing on local sites, where ordinary people lived their lives, Andy Wood deals with popular religion, gender relations, senses of locality and belonging, festivity, work, play, witchcraft, gossip, and reactions to dearth and disease. He thus brings a new clarity to understandings of the texture of communal relations in the historical past and highlights the particular characteristics of structural processes of inclusion and exclusion in the construction and experience of communities in early modern England. This engaging social history vividly captures what life would have been like in these communities, arguing that, even while early modern people were sure that the values of neighbourhood were dying, they continued to evoke and reassert those values.

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English Neighbourhoods, 1500–1640

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University of Durham



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For my mother and in memory of my father

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

1 Corinthians 13: 1–13

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book develops the social history of an *idea*: that of neighbourhood. It assesses the ways in which that idea was conceptualized and shows how neighbourhood fed, constantly, into social practice. The book is focused not just on those social groups whom the Levellers called the ‘lower and middle sort of people’ but also upon the gentry, who are an important part of our tale. Fundamentally, this is a story about the ways in which early modern people – rich, middling and poor – did their best – often in the face of terrible pressures – to make their communities *operate*. The book’s title foregrounds the Scriptures as massively powerful yet constantly contested texts with the potential to legitimate or to subvert social order. The title, drawn from 1 Corinthians 13: 1–13, does the following interpretive work:

- (a) Faith. Obviously, this alludes to the power of Christian faith within everyday life in Tudor and early Stuart England. Throughout, we return to the significance of readings of the Scriptures for the ways in which ordinary people made sense of their world. Less obviously, it alludes to the capacity of local solidarities – faith amongst one another, amongst neighbours and friends – to weather the storms that threatened otherwise to overwhelm villages and towns.
- (b) Hope. In an economy characterized – especially for poorer people – by constant insecurity, what hope was there for the future? Hope is here used as a category against which to situate profound material inequality and political disempowerment and alongside which to locate lower-class agency.
- (c) Charity. This critically important concept refers not only to poor relief but also to the *meaning* of charity. Partially, charity was functional: it reinforced practical patterns of paternalism, subordination and deference. Poor folk were expected to beg for support on their knees, with their caps in their hands. Where they did so, their deference legitimated elementary social norms. But charity was also *relational*: poor folk had expectations of their richer neighbours – when

demands for charity were frustrated, those expectations could quickly mutate into something far more assertive.

These three concepts – faith, hope and charity – lead us into the unpredictability of early modern people's lives. Most importantly, they lead us to neighbourhood: to the forces that (for all that they were sometimes observed more in the breach than in practice) helped to shape social relations, drawing richer and poorer folk together through a shared investment in community. The book opens with a consideration of one of the dominant beliefs about neighbourhood: the sense that it was in decline or even dead. Charity, contemporaries believed, had 'grown cold'; the rich no longer regarded the poor; litigation and malicious gossip set neighbour against neighbour; the gentry no longer practised good lordship or hospitality but instead oppressed their tenants and ignored the poor. In particular, Tudor and early Stuart people felt that they were trapped within a cash nexus in which the growing commercialization of the economy separated rich from poor. A powerful sign of these divisions was to be seen in the enclosure of the land and the denial of common rights to the poor, generating a set of social practices that were inimical to neighbourly ideals and that were written into the enclosed landscape. In this respect, enclosure was something that was *felt, seen and read*: it was as much as anything a metaphor, a way of capturing the social conflicts that people felt around them. In the background was a nagging sense of melancholy, nostalgia and loss and a yearning for a golden age of social cohesion. It is important to note that this melancholy was present in 1500 just as it was in 1640; but also that it gained greater voice over the course of our period. There was an important change here. As a discourse, the idea of neighbourhood enjoyed a relative autonomy that lifted it above relations of both production and exploitation. There was a never-to-be-resolved contradiction at work: the more that people complained about the collapse of neighbourhood, the more they reasserted those values. Neighbourliness, it will here be argued, was not so much in decline as it was constantly *contested*. Importantly, economic individualism was constantly *in friction* with corporate ideals that dominated early modern ideas about social structure and social relations, and this contradiction was certainly not resolved by 1640.

We move on from this to consider the characteristics of neighbourhood as an ideal. Collective values, hostility to division and a profound belief in the virtues of social unity coexisted alongside growing economic individualism and increasing polarization. The language of neighbourhood was regularly mobilized in criticism of such forces, which were felt to bring with them atomization. Increased litigation was another force that was felt to be driving society apart; it is therefore important that neighbourly

values were regularly linked to informal processes of dispute resolution, which both strengthened communal bonds and reaffirmed social hierarchies. Similarly, while usury was deplored, the practice of providing interest-free loans to the poor was upheld as neighbourly; and, once again, it reinforced the social order. Neighbourhood was a living social virtue, linked to cognate concepts that included love, friendship, charity and equity. Trust and reputation were central to the relationships that neighbourhood generated, and they came with a certain watchfulness: men and women who stood apart from their neighbours, who sought privacy from the public world of the street, village and neighbourhood, were regarded with suspicion. Communal life generated a set of intimate emotional proximities that were to be found within towns and cities just as much as in villages. The notion that urban society was characterized by a placeless anomie is not supported by the evidence: the locus of much of city life was centred on the immediate neighbourhood, street, courtyard or small city parish, and, here, neighbours looked out for one another just like in rural communities.

There were many enemies of neighbourhood: early modern people were sure of that. Litigious lawyers, greedy merchants, oppressive landlords and selfish gentry were joined by those who spread negative gossip about their neighbours. The historical record of litigation concerning tale-bearing and reputation speaks not just to the increased use of the courts but also (contradictorily) to the reassertion of neighbourhood values. Church court litigation, in particular, was as much about sealing social division as it was about getting one over on a local opponent. Importantly, the language of neighbourhood offered a discourse that could be deployed in criticism of the actions of elites, whether gentry, civic governors or middling-sort Puritans. But the most potent enemy of neighbourhood was the witch, who brought dark, malicious, satanic forces into the community. Witches did more than set neighbours against one another; witches personified the reverse of the Christian ideals of charity and moral conduct on which neighbourhood was founded.

Another widely hated figure who stood for anti-neighbourly values was the Puritan, and his or her evangelical predecessors. The early Protestant Reformation was associated for many people with what they called ‘new-fangledness’. This was a culture in which innovation might easily be deplored, especially in matters of belief, as the old ways of ancestors were preferred over the divisions that Reformation preachers brought to communities. In the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Puritans attempted to inflict on working people what one historian has called a ‘disciplinary revolution’: shutting down alehouses, abolishing communal celebrations, banning festivity, play and good cheer. But

Puritans were largely unsuccessful in imposing their own standards on the ‘common sort’ of people, who saw in the Calvinist disciplinary revolution an attack on neighbourhood and on the relatively tolerant, easy-going version of Christian religion that ordinary people preferred. In their defence of festive culture, it is significant that religious conservatives and recusant Catholics presented themselves as the friends of neighbourhood. Here, there was an *achievement*. Importantly, when war came in 1642, the embedded hostility towards the godly laid the basis for popular royalism. I will write about this more fully in the future.

According to conventional religious doctrines, all Christians were neighbours. But most early modern people tended to associate neighbourhood with locality – and propinquity. Tudor and early Stuart people did have a sense of national identity, and that could sometimes be mobilized against the Scots, Irish, Walloons, Spanish, French and Dutch. But that sense of patriotism existed alongside an enduring sense of place that was vested in social memory, custom, tradition and the landscape. This was as true in cities and towns as it was in the countryside. One of the things that neighbourhood did was to *localize* social relations. People certainly had a wider sense of a social order, comprising gentry, middling sort, smallholders and the poor: they had a language of social classification that enabled them to think about broader social structures. But those social structures were experienced, understood and articulated on the level of the locality; again, this both helped to reproduce the micro-politics of domination and subordination while – contradictorily – generating horizontal senses of solidarity amongst poorer people that could, in the right circumstances, provide a political resource.

The parish church was one key site within which neighbourhood happened. Another – especially for poorer people – was the alehouse. Then there were what contemporaries called ‘merry meetings of the neighbours’: parish feasts, gatherings around maypoles or bonfires, events such as Rogationtide and Christmas when neighbourly values were strengthened in ritual drinking. Alcohol was central to such merry meetings: most early modern people liked a drink, and downing ale together could be a way in which friendships were reinforced and hostilities drowned. Customs such as wassailing, wakes and bid-ales drew people together – again, through the ritual consumption of alcohol. For lads, football – what was known as ‘camping’ – was another way in which parish solidarities could be expressed, as teams from one parish confronted those of a neighbouring settlement. Yet again, alcohol was part of these events, which invariably led to broken heads, blackened eyes and – occasionally – deaths. In this way, a sense of youthful masculinity could be celebrated and linked to a sense of local identity.

Neighbourhood was partly constructed around the bonds that held women together – for instance through working patterns, rituals around childbirth, and gossip networks. Although the harvest saw men and women working alongside one another, for much of the rest of the year – especially in arable and mixed-farming regions – women and adult men seem mostly to have worked apart (the subject requires fuller research). In arable and mixed-farming zones, adult men and older lads worked out in the fields, ploughing and seeding. Women and younger children pastured animals on the commons, did the milking, made cheese, collected honey, cleaned, gleaned, cooked, carried and looked to the very youngest (as a child in the mid-1940s, my father worked on a mixed farm, mostly milking by hand – but by his later-teens in the mid-1950s, his father changed my dad’s role and sent him to plough with the great Cheshire shire horses whom they called Captain and Duke and whose presence dominated the farm. This was not so long ago). The result was to generate local solidarities and friendships that were built around gender. Where men assaulted their wives, then, they might confront the collective face of women’s disapproval. Violent patriarchs could easily be represented as disturbers of neighbourly values, bringing viciousness and cruelty into a local community. Men had that violent force; but their neighbours knew its deployment to be wrong. Other males despised such men; and, in particular, the evidence speaks of a female solidarity that could be stoked in response to the sight of a woman with bruises and cuts about her face. Yet female solidarity had its limits: there are hard stories to be told in which poor, single women who found themselves pregnant were frozen out by the established women of a community.

Such isolated young women were denied *place*. Having a place allowed poorer folk to access resources through charity, formal relief, employment and clientage. Once again, relations of domination and subordination were reasserted; but the poor got something from that exchange. And so did the rich: they gained the prayers of God’s poor. Such prayers eased the gates of heaven. But there were many poor folk who had no such place. The book therefore concludes by considering the other side of the coin: those who were locked out of neighbourhood. These included the transient poor: men, women and children who were to be found frozen to death or perished from starvation, on the road or in fields and barns. But in times of high food prices, even the settled poor might be left to die: times such as the 1550s, the 1580s, the 1590s and the 1620s saw charity grow cold. We finish, then, by considering the ways in which dearth and disease represented challenges to the broad, tolerant, socially inclusive values of neighbourhood that much of this book describes and analyses.

This book is a departure from a large chunk of my earlier work, which has been partly focused on social conflict. One of the criticisms of my earlier work has been that, because I have written about the *agency* of working people in the past, I have somehow *valorized* their efforts to shape the world around them. It has always seemed to me that I have not so much valorized that agency as I have described and analysed it: it is there to be found in the evidence of the archival record. We just need the eyes to see. Historical empiricism – seeking voices in the archive – and historical materialism – an awareness of the social structures within which those voices were heard and recorded – need not be opposed. Historians should be able to write a social history that is rooted in an awareness of the power relations that produced our documents yet also speaks to the stories that those documents tell. As regards this book, although class is always there in the background, it is really about community. I realize, then, that this book represents not so much a *valorization* as a *celebration*. It describes the many ways in which poorer and middling people tried to hold their communities together in the face of often terrible, difficult and profound pressures that, in a post-industrial society, the reader is not always equipped to grasp.

This book will be succeeded by another monograph in which I return to struggles over power, space and resources. My intention is to publish that book in perhaps seven or eight years. I am thinking of calling it something like *Letters of Blood and Fire: Social Relations in England, 1500–1640*. That book, like this one, will deal with the period before the English Revolution. This is not because, like too many social historians of early modern England, I want to avoid the revolutionary decades. Rather, I think that things changed profoundly in the 1640s. The civil wars therefore make a meaningful terminus for both books. In the long run, I want to write a social history of the English civil wars, focusing on their material and human impact; but all of that lies in the future. The year 1640, then, represents a breaking-point.

Every book is a collective endeavour: there is no such thing as the isolated, individual author, labouring away in her or his study. One of the great things in my life has been the endlessly enjoyable experience of being part of a community of historians, along with some stray sociologists, literary critics and anthropologists. Many friendships go back by more than three decades. I am grateful to a great many friends for their encouragement, enthusiasm and criticism. They include John Arnold, Alex Barber, Dom Birch, Andy Burn, Sarah Covington, Barbara Crosbie, Andy Davies, Chris Fitter, Henry French, Adam Fox, Jo Fox, Malcolm Gaskill, Laura Gowing, Adrian Green, Paul Griffiths, Mark Hailwood, Tim Harris, Steve Hindle, Andy Hopper, the late Alun Howkins, Ronald

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Methodologically, this book is an exercise in what might (pretentiously) be called a sort of theorized serendipity. Partly, it involves stumbling on material. That great empiricist Sherlock Holmes would have called it the scientific use of the imagination. More simply, this might mean following one's nose through an archive, albeit with recurrent (yet

ever-changing) questions, combined with some sense of those things for which one might be looking. It is also necessary for some such mission to have a rough-and-ready reading of the interdisciplinary, comparative and theoretical literature around one's subject and here, as always, this involved a conversation with social anthropology. The important thing is to allow the archive to surprise you, to let it make you think differently and to listen to the voices in the records that tell you about worlds that are dissimilar from our own.

Historical research does that – or, at least, it should. Here, there is a contest that is methodological, epistemological and political. For historians working in British universities in the early twenty-first century, the bureaucratic demands made for 'rigour', 'targets' and 'outcomes' need always to be muted by the unexpected voices from the past. Times were a'changin' in the years during which I wrote this book, and the deadening strictures of neo-liberalism have become less dominant. The past might provide a few lessons: in the early modern period, neighbourhood was simultaneously an abstract ideal, a local site, a source of mutualities and interdependencies, and a mode of social interaction. The people of Tudor and early Stuart England may have something important to tell us. As social ideals go, neighbourhood is not such a bad place to start.

While I have been writing this book, it has been a wonder to watch my children, Max and Rosa Simpson, grow into adults. Lucy Simpson has been my rock. When I was ill with cellulitis, Sally Simpson was a source of considerable support. Pete Herdan carted my books up and down the A1 and did his level best to keep me sane. Along with Barbara Crosbie, Neil Marley, Natalie Mears and Keith Wrightson, Pete and Lucy have been there when I needed them most of all. And Laura Gowing offered kind, thoughtful words at the worst of times. This book was written in two of England's great medieval cities: Durham and Norwich. In 1986, Norfolk set a splinter in my heart. Yet it is good to be back at home in the North, with its rain and egalitarianism. My father, Jim Wood, loved the North. As I was completing the first draft of this book, he passed away. My dad was a marvellous man who meant the world to me. He was clever, funny, erudite and almost wholly self-taught. My dad was intrigued by history and he loved my wonderful mother. We shared both of those things. It is to my father and to my dearest mother that I dedicate this book.

All Biblical quotations are taken from the 1611 King James edition.
 Dates have been modernized.

Abbreviations

BIA	Borthwick Institute for Archives
BL	British Library
CRO	Cheshire Record Office
DUL	Durham University Library
<i>ECHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
EETS	Early English Texts Society
FSL	Folger Shakespeare Library
HALS	Hampshire Archives and Local Studies
HCCO	High Court of Chivalry Online: www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/court-of-chivalry/intro-project
HEHL	Henry E. Huntington Library
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>TC&WA&AS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society</i>
<i>TED</i>	R. H. Tawney and E. Power (eds.), <i>Tudor Economic Documents: Being Select Documents Illustrating the Economic and Social History of Tudor England</i> (London, 1924).
TNA	The National Archives
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
YASRS	Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series