# Medieval Londoners: essays to mark the eightieth birthday of Caroline M. Barron

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The *Festschrift*, usually a gathering of articles composed to honour a scholar on his or her retirement, or to mark a significant anniversary, originated around the beginning of the 20th century, and has become an acknowledged feature of the academic landscape, albeit one rather irregular in its occurrence. Continental *Festschriften* have sometimes run to several volumes. In Britain they are compiled on a less grandiose scale, but on the other hand particularly highly-regarded scholars may receive more than one, a possibility of which the present volume provides a happy illustration. In 2004 the retirement of Professor Caroline Barron (hereafter CMB) from Royal Holloway was marked by a Harlaxton Medieval Symposium in her honour, and four years later its proceedings were published under the title *London and the Kingdom*, constituting a *Festschrift* made up of 26 essays acknowledging and applauding her substantial contribution to the history of London in the later middle ages. The year 2017 saw the publication of a sizeable volume entitled *Medieval London: Collected Papers of Caroline M. Barron*, containing 16 articles which CMB had published between 1968 and 2009. Arranged under four headings, it illustrates the many different themes which CMB has pursued in her engagement with the history of England's capital, and the same can be said of the present volume—*Medieval Londoners* [2]—a second *Festschrift* published to mark her 80th birthday. This new collection appears in print and also as a free Open Access publication, with chapter-by-chapter downloads (to which this review links) available via the University of London's Open Access platform [3] and JSTOR OA Books [2].

Within the context of her whole *oeuvre* ('whole' in December 2019, at least), CMB's most notable single achievement is undoubtedly her work of synthesis, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (2004). Its terms of reference are such, however, that it inevitably gives more space to the government than to the people, to the institutions which ran the city than to the people who operated them. This is not because CMB has ever regarded people as unimportant, far from it—in her introduction to *Medieval Londoners* [4], Elizabeth New stresses CMB's 'interest in and enthusiasm for the men and women who lived and worked in, or were visitors to, the capital …'. New emphasizes how this interest has extended beyond the great and good (like Sir Richard Whittington, the subject of a fine study by CMB, republished in her *Collected Papers*) to the lesser folk, often outsiders by birth, who also made, or scraped, their livings in

London, to the city clergy—like the bells of their churches, they were always there—and to women and children. It is therefore appropriate, in keeping with its title, and indeed with the illustration reproduced on its cover, that this second *Festschrift* should be particularly concerned with the people who lived in the medieval city, with what they did for a living and how they spent their time when they were not at work, with what they thought of one another and how they wanted others to think of them, with how they hoped to be remembered after their deaths. *Medieval Londoners* is a shorter book than *London and the Kingdom*, and contains fewer chapters—15 compared with 26. But the chapters in this latest *Festschrift* are for the most part noticeably longer than their equivalents in the earlier one, and the extra space has been used well, to ensure that there is a sufficient provision of context for the activities described and discussed in the individual articles, and so providing them with a background without which those activities might otherwise appear to lack definition or even meaning.

*Medieval Londoners* is divided into three sections. The first, headed 'Londoners in the city', leads off with Vanessa Harding's essay on 'Families in later medieval London' [5], a wide-ranging survey given additional value by its author's ability to make comparisons between the conditions of family life around 1500 with those prevailing in the late 17th century—generally to the advantage of the former. The early Tudor city was one to which trade brought prosperity, and where wages could be high, helping to make it a magnet for outsiders. Not all of them flourished, for the other side of the coin shows that there was also much poverty, while even the most promising career could be cut short by epidemic disease, something which endangered marriages as well. The result was a hard-won stability that was maintained by communities which appreciated the value of the family as one of its essential building-blocks, and maintained institutions which endeavoured to support it. Proceedings in church courts show how fornication and adultery were frowned upon as threats to the integrity of households as well as mortal sins, and how both men and women maintained their standing in defamation actions against those who impugned what must often have been precarious reputations. Children—the next generation—were valued and looked after, both in family units whose continuity was assured by the frequency with which widowed parents remarried, and by the city's Court of Orphans.

Professor Harding concludes what might otherwise appear a rather idealised picture of the circumstances of family life in early modern London with contemporary quotations drawing attention to its potential precariousness. Her Londoners are on the whole serious people, with little time for fun. Enjoyment, by contrast, underlies much of Justin Colson's contribution, 'A portrait of a late medieval London pub: The Star Inn, Bridge Street' [6]. An investigation of the lives of the 'small people' of the late medieval city (also the subject of a 2008 article by CMB), Dr Colson presents 'The Star' as a venue providing both hospitality and opportunities for sociability, and as such a cut above the less reputable alehouse. A very well documented establishment, thanks to the survival of both property deeds and two 17th-century plans, *The Star* served many functions: as a meeting place for fraternities and guilds, notably the Fishmongers' Company—for which it appears to have acted as their hall before they had one of their own—and as a place where business deals could be struck and marriage contracts concluded. *The Star* appears to have acquired many of the characteristics of a community centre, and as such to have been another of the institutions which, at a local level, helped to hold civic society together.

With Julia Boffey's contribution, 'Household reading for Londoners? Huntington Library MS HM 140' [7], we move back into private houses, and to the question (also of interest to CMB), of what citizens read. A collection of several writings, Huntington MS HM 140 is essentially serious in tone, containing texts predominantly either practical and polemical, as with the *Libelle of English Policy* and a treatise of 'Advice to Apprentices'; or religious, among them an account of St Ursula and her 11,000 virgins, together with a gathering of short prose items with titles like 'The benefits of reading the psalter'. A number of names are noted in the manuscript, enabling Professor Boffey to recreate the *milieu* in which these texts circulated, one of men with links to the king's court, and particularly to the royal wardrobe. Service to and relations with the crown, we are reminded (and as CMB has demonstrated), were defining factors in late medieval London's identity. Professor Boffey shows us the uses of literacy, but Martha Carlin's fascinating study, 'Palaeography and forgery: Thomas D's *Book of the Hartshorn in Southwark*' [8], shows both how it might

be abused, and how such abuse might be countered. Starting in 1474, the abbot of Lesnes in Kent challenged Bishop Waynflete of Winchester's title to property in Southwark with the aid of forged charters and non-existent account rolls, but was defeated by the expertise of the bishop's adviser, convincingly identified as Thomas Danvers of Waterstock, who on five different counts demonstrated that Lesnes's claim was spurious. Professor Carlin's article sheds unusual light on professional skills, and the way they might be employed, in late medieval London. It also shows that Danvers possessed an awareness of historical and technical issues as relevant to medieval studies in the 21st century as it was to this 15th-century lawsuit.

A medium-sized Augustinian house, Lesnes seems to have enjoyed no great reputation, and was suppressed by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525. Reputation, at an altogether lower social level, is the theme of Charlotte Berry's article, '"Go to hyr neybors wher she dwelte before": Reputation and mobility at the London Consistory Court in the early sixteenth century' [9]. Even more than earlier essays, this is concerned with the world of 'small people', of the very poor, for whom, in watchful and suspicious neighbourhoods, reputation commonly had to serve instead of money or birth for the maintenance of personal standing. It is also—fittingly given the interests of this book's dedicatee—principally concerned with a woman, for at its heart is the action for defamation brought in 1521 by one Agnes Cockerel, complaining that she had been driven from her home, in the suburban parish of St Sepulchre outside Newgate, as a result of her having been slandered as a prostitute—she claimed to be a midwife. The proceedings which followed, rich in vivid detail about life and speech, are as revealing about communities, and the people who formed them, as they are about Agnes's predicament, when she found that her ill-repute had come to the ears of her new landlady. Living precariously in an urban society, which needed continual refreshment with new blood, yet at the same time valued stability to the extent of regarding mobility as inherently suspicious, her action in a formal law court illustrates the perils faced by those convicted, whether justly or not, of failing to live up to the standards demanded by what Dr Berry calls 'the court of neighbourhood suspicion'.

The second section in *Medieval Londoners*, entitled 'The Lure of London', is principally concerned with men and women who came to London from elsewhere; either from other parts of England or from continental Europe. Matthew Davies's contribution, 'Aliens, crafts and guilds in late medieval London' [10], illustrates the advantages that come from providing space for contextual analysis, for it begins with a meticulous scrutiny of the historiography of immigration—and of the sources underlying it—accompanied by tables and maps which provide quantitative data for the numbers and visual evidence for the patterns of alien settlement in the 15th-century capital. Alien, in this context, usually meant someone born outside the English kingdom, distinguished as such from a 'stranger', a man or woman originating elsewhere in that realm, though the difference was often blurred. As in the previous section, we encounter attempts to separate insiders from outsiders, but now within a commercial rather than social context, and using different kinds of evidence—the records of guilds and of taxation, rather than those of courts of law. Concentrating on the Tailors' and Goldsmiths' guilds, Professor Davies shows how the pragmatism and flexibility of the men who governed them could temper the restrictions nominally placed on the involvement of aliens in their trades which, indeed, could hardly have been carried on without them. A few were even permitted to pay large sums for the freedom of the city. Native interests were safeguarded by regulations and penalties, but although restrictions upon aliens became more severe in the late 15th century, their skills enabled them to make an indispensable, and often overlooked, contribution to the civic economy.

Professor Jim Bolton's contribution, a study of 'William Styfford (*fl.* 1437-66): citizen and scrivener of London and notary imperial' [11], examines the mechanics of particular forms of commercial and financial exchange as they were operated by—and for—Italian merchants who had become increasingly closely involved with London's economic life. Essential to that involvement were notarially-authenticated documents, especially bills of exchange enabling transfers of money between London and commercial centres elsewhere, and men like Styfford made what was evidently a good living by providing them. Written documents of all kinds circulated freely in 15th-century London. Bills and contracts prepared according to prescribed formulas by a notary imperial (who needed specialized training to enable him to carry out the work) have hitherto received little scholarly attention—at any rate in England—and yet, as Professor Bolton shows (in a study notable for the clarity with which complex transactions are presented), their development

and use were fundamental to the process whereby London's, and with it England's, commercial and financial life became bound up with that of the Continent. One aspect of those links is illustrated by Matthew Payne's essay on 'Bankers and booksellers: Evidence of the late fifteenth-century English book trade in the ledgers of the Bardi bank' [12]. Here we are shown how, in the 1490s, letters of credit and bills of exchange, as recorded in two ledgers of the Bardi Company of Florence (now back in England after their disastrous involvement with Edward III), were regularly used to enable the import of printed books from Paris to London, and sometimes beyond. Literary scholars will find much of interest in Matthew Payne's chapter (for instance that books might be printed in France for sale in England), but it has a particular value—supplemented by a ten-page appendix giving details of all the relevant transactions—for the light it sheds on the mechanics of trade, on the sophisticated ways in which the movement of money was organized to facilitate the movement of goods, and also on the people involved in this. The import of liturgical books, it seems, was largely in the hands of grocers.

Anne Sutton's chapter, 'Nicholas Alwyn, mayor of London: A man of two loyalties, London and Spalding' [13], discusses (as its heading shows) a man who also had interests outside the capital, but in his home town in the East Midlands rather than across the Channel. After an extended apprenticeship in London, during which he travelled overseas and learnt foreign languages, Alwyn was admitted to the Mercers' Company in 1463, rising to become master in 1495-6. As well as prospering in the wool trade, and accumulating property in the capital, he also became increasingly involved in the government of the city, serving as MP, sheriff, and alderman, and finally being elected mayor in 1499, at the age of 64. Twice married, he was predeceased by all but one of his recorded children, a son who rapidly dissipated a substantial inheritance. Nicholas Alwyn might easily appear a typical success story, that of a provincial lad for whom London's streets had golden paving. The interest of his life, as Dr Sutton records in fascinating detail, lies equally in the way Alwyn looked back upon his own achievement. Following his death in 1506, he was buried in St Mary le Bow, his parish church in London, and made lavish provision for his exequies and subsequent commemoration there. But his extended testament shows that he also remained faithful to his place of origin, where he had bought a substantial house and contributed to good causes like bridges and roads, and where he arranged for his month's mind to be celebrated on a very grand scale, with no fewer than 3,000 poor people receiving 12*d.* apiece. That could have been a *pro forma* munificence—the wealthy were expected to show concern for the poor when they contemplated their own mortality. But Alwyn also illuminated his own personality, as a man good-natured, sociable, and open-handed, by making generous bequests, mostly in the form of money, jewellery, and clothing, to friends, craft employees, and domestic servants, in London and Spalding alike.

The book's third and final section is headed 'Londoners remembered', and begins with an essay by John McEwan on 'Charity and the city: London Bridge, *c.* 1176-1275' [14]—in chronological terms the earliest contribution to this volume. It pursues a double theme: the fortunes of the bridge from its beginnings in the last quarter of the 12th century until its transfer to the City government by Edward I, and the men responsible for its maintenance—an appendix lists their names. Dr McEwan shows how the bridge was at first run by an independent trust in the form of a brotherhood which, from charitable donations, built up and administered a landed endowment; this was the source of rents which paid for the upkeep of the bridge. But, although the brotherhood was initially composed of clergy, from early in Henry III's reign the brethren were reinforced by laymen. These were men who were also prominent in civic government, with the result that when King Henry quarrelled with the city in the 1260s, his anger fell upon the bridge as well, until in 1265 he transferred custody of it to Queen Eleanor, thereby initiating a decade of neglect. In 1275 Edward I was persuaded to transfer the bridge to the city (not back to trustees), which thereafter elected wardens to administer it and oversee its finances. But, although London Bridge had come to be seen as too big and important to be safely handled either by any one individual or by a charitable foundation, citizens still saw it as a public benefit and, as such, an appropriate beneficiary from their wills.

With 'John Reynewell and St Botolph Billingsgate' [15], Stephen Freeth and John Schofield cooperate in returning us to the 15th century, and to a single life, albeit one seen in the round, combining the insights of archaeology with those of documentary history, and supplementing the findings of both with excellent

illustrations. John Reynewell, who was elected mayor in 1426, served several times as MP, and died in 1445 after a highly successful career trading in wool and victuals, is here presented alongside his fellow parishioners of the church of St Botolph, and with reference to the physical remains not only of that church (destroyed in 1666) but also of Reynewell himself, his skeleton having been plausibly, if not quite conclusively, identified among those disinterred there. The parish was wealthy, as we learn from details of wills—yet again showing their evidential value, as they have done in so much of CMB's work—which record bequests of money, vestments, and fittings, to a church which also possessed a mechanical image of St George and the Dragon, with figures operated by spindles and cranks. Reynewell's own will, drawn up two years before his death, was never proved, so that legally he died intestate. But both his wealth and his intentions were recorded in two trust deeds whose subsequent implementation made him posthumously a major benefactor to St Botolph's, conveying to it a stone house which was incorporated as a vestry into a new aisle built on the church's south side. Reynewell's benefactions also extended to the city as a whole, in the form of a substantial portfolio of city property, and the direction that its rents should be chiefly employed to offset taxes and tolls. Unsurprisingly, people were still invoking Reynewell's legacy nearly a century after his death, while his generosity was recorded in a lengthy verse epitaph preserved by John Stow.

John Reynewell's life and good works are elucidated from an unusually wide range of sources. By contrast Julian Luxford's article, 'The testament of Joan FitzLewes: a source for the history of the abbey of Franciscan nuns without Aldgate' [16], is based upon a single document, the testament which is referred to in the title, reproduced on the page (as is her signature), and presented in full transcript as an appendix. In it we meet a devout widow preparing in 1511 to become a nun, at the age of about 60, and carefully setting her affairs in order in the world she was leaving behind; for instance by making provision for the payment of her debts, while also making arrangements for her commemoration in the world she was about to enter. She provided money for the rebuilding of the cloister, but also for two monuments in the church; one in the nuns' choir and the other in the nave. All have long disappeared. There may be compensation, however, in the stimulus to the imagination which, as Professor Luxford observes, a document like Joan's testament can provide, and certainly her personality seems to come strongly across the parchment, as a practical woman whose evident business sense might well prove useful in her new community, and with a good sense of her own worth. Since she was able to name Sir Thomas Lovell, one of the most powerful men in the kingdom, as the supervisor of her will, it may be assumed that she moved in distinguished circles in her lifetime, and she clearly intended to stay in them after her death, demanding burial near the high altar at the feet of the duchess of Norfolk.

Aristocratic connections, even by association, find little place in Christian Steer's essay, 'Souls of benefactors at Grey Friars church, London' [17], an investigation of the involvement of friars in the commemoration of London's dead. Wills are again the principal source, in an article which is as much an examination of citizens' relations with the Franciscans as it is of their spiritual aspirations. A concise survey of the Greyfriars' early history shows how the house was popular from its foundation, and remained so until its dissolution. Nowadays, this it less surprising than earlier generations of historians might have found it. Dr Steer shows clearly the extent of that appeal: first, as manifested in burials (682 recorded monuments) and the funding of at least 25 glass windows; secondly, in bequests, often to individual friars who had been a testator's confessor; and thirdly, in the endowment of anniversaries and of chantries both temporary and permanent. But he also goes on to help explain the Greyfriars' popularity. He does so in particular by reference to the indenture of 1460, which founded a permanent chantry on behalf of Thomas Gloucester (it is printed in translation in another welcome appendix). For one thing it was witnessed by 30 friars, underlining both the size of the house—one that had the manpower needed to meet the demands made upon it—and also the economic advantage which, partly as a result, the mendicant Franciscans enjoyed over the parish clergy and the other regular orders. But, more importantly, the indenture was precise in what was being given and in what was expected in return. This included prayers in perpetuity for the souls of Gloucester and named others, at specified places and times, with the indenture being read out in chapter once a year as a reminder to the convent of its obligations. Business-like themselves, Londoners clearly trusted the Franciscans to be business-like too, and paid for prayers and commemoration, confident that these would be forthcoming,

thereby ensuring the salvation of their souls.

The *Festschrift* ends with a warm tribute by Clive Burgess to ['Caroline Barron as teacher and colleague'](#) [18], praising her achievement not only as a historian but also as an enabler and an encourager of achievement in others, as demonstrated both in the list of 33 PhDs awarded under her supervision (pp. 329-30), and in the record of her involvement in scholarly enterprises like the annual Harlaxton Medieval Symposium (where a photograph of CMB provided this book with its frontispiece); the IHR's Medieval and Tudor London seminar; the London Record Society; and many other undertakings, not all of them concerning London. Burgess applauds CMB's scholarly range, and it is against this that her second *Festschrift* needs to be judged, since such a volume is, or should be, a reflection of the qualities of its dedicatee as well as of the scholarship of its contributors. One may reasonably wonder what the history of London in the period 1200-1500 might now look like without CMB's contribution, given that, until the publication of *London in the Later Middle Ages*, there had been no authoritative study of the lives of even a section of city society since Sylvia Thrupp (1948). As it is, CMB has done for late medieval London what K.B. McFarlane did for late medieval England as a whole: that is, she has given it a form, a shape which is not a straitjacket but rather a kind of chassis to which additional parts can be attached, by herself as well as by others. To the advance she has made possible the essays in this book stand witness, for all are fine pieces of scholarship, based on original research, which in many cases pick up and carry forward themes with which CMB has herself engaged, such as the treatment of women; the progress of literacy; and the importance of religion, while others—particularly those in the second section—venture down relatively new and undeveloped paths. Handsomely produced (though a printing error at the top of page 36 has led to the omission of the word 'years'), with well-chosen illustrations (it is a pleasure not to have to complain in a review about the inadequacy, or even absence, of decent maps), *Medieval Londoners* advances the study of the medieval capital at the same time as it acclaims the historian who has done most to bring it to life.

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