Kett's Rebellion in Norwich[1]

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'The...rable of Norffolke rebelles, ye pretend a common-wealth. How amend ye it? By killing of gentlemen, by spoiling of gentlemen, by imprisoning of gentlemen? A marvellous tanned common-wealth. Why should you thus hate them? For their riches or for their rule?...is this your true duetie...to disobeie your betters, and to obeie your tanners, to change your obedience from the king to a Ket?...In countries some must rule, some must obeie, everie man maie not beare like stroke: for everie man is not like wise.'
Sir John Cheke, *The hurt of sedition* (1549).
(Holinshed, Chronicles, III, 989.)

'He saied that he did well in keping in ketts campe and so he wolde saye', asked 'what he did think by kette...he sayed nothing but well that he knewe...he trusted to se a newe day for suche men as I was.'
Speech of 'one Claxton', 23 November 1549.
(NRO, NCR 12A/1(a), City Quarter Sessions, interrogatories, depositions, etc., 1549-53, fo. 31r.)

'Suche as were slayn & dyd uppon mushold in the comoycon tyme wer honest men'; being admonished, he retorted 'That Robert kette was an honest man'.
The alleged speech of James Stotter of Randworth, 18 May 1551.
NRO, NCR 12A/1(a), City Quarter Sessions, interrogatories, depositions, etc., 1549-53, fo. 31r.

Patrons of the gentlemen's lavatories at the Castle Mall shopping centre in Norwich are confronted, as they exit, with a perplexing image of popular disorder. When the Mall was completed in the early 1990s, the walls of its cafeteria were decorated with a mural depicting the history of the city. On Saturday lunchtimes, harassed parents now struggle with their hungry toddlers before a tableau of Norwich's turbulent past. It so happened

[1] I am grateful to John Arnold for reading an early draft of this chapter, and to Paul Griffiths, Andy Hopper

that the section of the murals depicting the major popular insurrection in the city - Kett's rebellion of 1549 - was located opposite the entrance to the gentlemen's toilets. This shows a portly Robert Kett seated beneath his fabled Oak of Reformation. Sitting below Robert is the clerk of the court of popular justice that met under the Oak; around him stand his grave, elderly advisers; in front of Kett stands a representative of Protector Somerset's Council, a royal herald entitled the King of Arms; and behind the herald is a posturing boy, lifting his tunic to reveal his bared buttocks. Between Kett and the King of Arms the artist depicted two adult rebels. One raises a hammer above his head, while the other lifts a sickle, the two implements forming a cross. Unfortunately (perhaps as an ironic comment upon the eclipse of organised socialism after 1989?) this element of the mural has been obscured by the control panel for the Mall's sprinkler system. None the less, its symbolism should be obvious: the crossed tools, alluding to the unity of town and country labourers, originated with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and remain a potent symbol of the international socialist movement. Whereas the significance of the mooning boy is less than immediately obvious, the crossed hammer-and-sickle, despite its occlusion, highlights both the historical role played by the labouring people of Norwich in what is often described as an 'agrarian revolt', and the modern appropriation of Robert Kett's rebellion by Norfolk radicals and socialists.

For the first 300 years following the defeat of his insurrection, Robert Kett's name stood as an official byword for the chaos that flowed from popular politics. Like the medieval rebels Wat Tyler and Jack Cade, Kett was invoked by conservative writers in order to damn mob politics. It was not until the early nineteenth century that he was rehabilitated. Norfolk Chartists, radicals and (later) trade unionists and socialists,

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and Carole Rawcliffe for many conversations about sixteenth century Norwich.

confronting many of the same issues that they felt had led to rebellion in 1549 - rural poverty, low wages, legal prohibitions on popular organisation - saw in Kett's rebellion a precursor of their own struggles. Robert Kett's current good name originates from this ideological reorientation of mid-Tudor history. Labour-voting, twentieth-century Norwich embraced the yeoman rebel from Wymondham as one of its own: the ridge upon which Kett's command post stood is now known as Kett's Hill; the remains of that building (originally Surrey Place, the palace of the earl of Surrey) has become Kett's Castle; below Kett's Hill stand a pub and a garage named after the local hero; the great brass doors of Norwich's interwar City Hall depict Robert Kett's horrible death in December 1549, hanging in chains from the walls of Norwich Castle. Glowering across the marketplace from City Hall stands the Castle itself, in 1549 the symbol of royal authority within the city. But here too the modern rehabilitation of Robert has left its mark. A plaque unveiled in 1949 commemorates (and in part apologises for) Robert Kett's execution in the following terms:

> In 1549 A.D., Robert Kett, yeoman farmer of Wymondham, was executed by hanging in this Castle, after the defeat of the Norfolk Rebellion, of which he was the leader. In 1949 A.D. - four hundred years later - this Memorial was placed here by the citizens of Norwich in reparation and honour to the memory of a notable leader in the long struggle of the common people of England to escape from a servile life into the freedom of just conditions.

Academic historians often condescend to such public representations of the past.[2] But the contrasting styles of the plaque on the Castle and the shopping centre mural hint at a historical contradiction within the ideology of Kett's rebellion. Somewhere between the jokiness of the Castle Mall mural, with its mysteriously mooning boy, and the sombre

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[2] For the shifting representation of Kett's rebellion, see my *Insurrection, social change and political culture: the 1549 rebellions and the Tudor polity* (Cambridge, forthcoming), chapter 9. For the history of the plaque on Norwich Castle, see NRO, MS 4265, MC4/HEN43/26, 40; NRO, MS 21525, MC4/HEN8.

plaque on Norwich Castle, lies a genuine conflict at the heart of sixteenth-century popular politics. Whereas the plaque of 1949 identifies only one source of rebel politics in 1549 - that of the disciplined struggle of ‘the common people’ - the humorous late twentieth-century mural illuminates a fundamental contradiction within rebel ideology: that between order, represented by Kett under his Oak of Reformation, and the festive disorder personified by the rude boy.

In order to appreciate the significance of this dichotomy, we must return to the events of 1549 themselves. This chapter will therefore begin with a brief account of the 1549 rebellions within Norfolk. It will then use the incident depicted in the Castle Mall mural as a starting point for an assessment of rebel ideology, looking in particular at the insurgents’ religious attitudes; at the significance of rebel divisions; and at the theme of social conflict. Thereafter, it will briefly describe the pattern of disorder elsewhere in the country in 1549, before illuminating the peculiar intensity and violence that characterised Kett’s rebellion in Norfolk. Finally, comes an examination of the role played by the inhabitants of Norwich in the rebellion, focusing on the ambivalent behaviour of the City’s elite towards the rebels; the underlying social tensions within the mid-Tudor City; and the strong support shown by many labouring Norwich people towards the rebel cause.

The Castle Mall mural depicts an event that occurred on 24 August 1549. For the preceding six weeks, Norwich had been surrounded, and periodically occupied, by a large

rebel force led by Robert Kett.[3] Yet the insurrection began without Kett; and although history has given his name to it, the Norfolk rising was best known until the 1580s as the 'commotion time'. According to Holinshed's *Chronicle*, trouble started in Norfolk in early June 1549, when the inhabitants of Attleborough broke enclosing fences on their commons. On 6 July, the Attleborough rioters led a general attack on enclosures, including those recently erected by Robert Kett, a wealthy yeoman tanner from Wymondham. The assault on Kett's enclosures took place on 9 July, and ended in Kett offering to lead the rebels himself in an attempt 'to subdue the power of Great men'.[4] The rebels moved swiftly, gathering support as they marched. On the evening of 10 July, they met with Norwich sympathisers at Eaton Wood, and were subsequently joined by the mayor, Thomas Codd, and a delegation of aldermen, who came to hear their complaints. Kett asked Codd's permission to move his host through Norwich on his way to Mousehold Heath, a large area of common land bordering the eastern side of the city, where they intended to establish a camp. Denied such permission, Kett's host skirted Norwich, arriving at the Heath on 12 July. According to later exaggerated estimates, some 20,000 commoners converged upon Mousehold Heath. Captured gentlemen were imprisoned in Surrey Place, in the city's gaol, and in Norwich Castle. With its commanding views over Norwich, Surrey Place became Kett's military headquarters; he

[3] Until very recently, accounts of Kett's rebellion have treated the Norfolk rising in isolation from the other insurrections of 1549. For descriptions of the Norfolk rebellion, see S.K. Land, *Kett's Rebellion: the Norfolk Rising of 1549* (London, 1977); F.W. Russell, *Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk* (London, 1859); S. T. Bindoff, *Kett's Rebellion, 1549* (London, 1949); J. Cornwall, *Revolt of the Peasantry, 1549* (London, 1977), chapters seven, nine, twelve; B.L. Beer, *Rebellion and Riot: Popular Disorder in England During the Reign of Edward VI* (Kent, Ohio, 1982), chapters four-five. The best of these accounts remains Russell's 1859 work. For introductory discussions of the 1549 rebellions, see A. Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 54-71, and A. Fletcher and D. MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions* (1968; 4th edn., Harlow, 1997), pp. 50-80.

[4] Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (6 vols, 1577; 2nd edn 1580, vi, reprinted London, 1808), iii, p. 963; R. Woods, *Norfolke Furies, and their Foyle, under Kett, their Accursed Captaine* (London, 1615; 2nd edn, 1623), sigs. B3r-v.

administered justice in Thorpe Wood, adjoining the southern edge of the Heath, under his Oak of Reformation. Here, Kett and his councillors maintained order over the 'commotioners'. Lists of rebel complaints were drawn up for the attention of Protector Somerset's Council, and handed to royal representatives on their periodic visits to the camp.[5]

Over the succeeding weeks, these negotiations became increasingly fraught, especially after the rebels seized the city on 22 July. Receiving news of the fall of Norwich, the Council sent an army of 1,500 men, under the command of the marquis of Northampton, to confront Kett's rebels. This force arrived on 31 July. One day later, during running street battles within the city, the rebels defeated Northampton's small army. Following the rebel victory, Norwich entered a period of dual control: the city authorities continued to function, but real power lay with the rebels. By late August, the situation was transformed by the arrival of a new royal army. This large force was led by the earl of Warwick, and numbered somewhere between 8,000 and 12,000 men. The hard core of Warwick's host comprised a body of foreign mercenaries and mounted gentry, including many Norfolk gentlemen keen to punish their tenants for their impudence. The King of Arms' presence at the Oak of Reformation on 24 August 1549 therefore had a dual purpose: preceding Warwick's arrival, the herald came to offer pardon and instruct the rebels to depart; but he also came to negotiate, acting as a kind of go-between. For all its jokey qualities, the incident depicted on the shopping centre mural therefore represents a moment of profound tension in the history of Norwich. We shall now look more closely at the encounter between the King of Arms and the rebels, before proceeding to an

[5] For these negotiations, see E. Shagan, 'Protector Somerset and the 1549 rebellions: new sources and new perspectives', *English Historical Review*, cxiv, cccclv (1999), pp. 34-63.

examination of its significance.

According to Alexander Neville's 1575 history of the rebellion, the earl of Warwick dispatched the King of Arms on the assumption that he would be able to persuade the rebels to disarm 'by the hope of pardon and impunity', and so save the lives of the hostage gentry in Surrey Place.[6] He was doomed to disappointment. Although the captives remained safe, Neville claims that unruly elements within the Mousehold camp demanded their death. Significantly, unlike rebels in many other parts of the country, the Norfolk 'commotioners' consistently refused pardons, and their negotiations with royal representatives were conducted in a spirit of truculent defiance.

The King of Arms was met by forty mounted rebels, who led him out of the city and onto Mousehold Heath. Here he encountered 'rankes of the Rebels ... every one uncovering their heads, as it were with one mouth and consent all at once (for the most part) cried, God save King Edward, God save King Edward'. While he awaited the arrival of Robert Kett, the herald spent his time denouncing the rebels as 'the scumme of the people', and warning them that, although he brought another pardon, this would be their last opportunity to save themselves, because 'Warwick hath most solemnely sworne, [that they] shall never hereafter be offered [pardon] ... againe: but ... he would pursue [the rebels] with fire and sword'. The assembled rebels remained unconvinced by the Herald's

[6] The Neville/Woods narrative has provided the main basis for all subsequent histories of Kett's rebellion. See A. Neville, *De Furoribus Norfolciensium Ketto Duce* (London, 1575), translated in 1615 as Woods, *Norfolke Furies*. Holinshed's Chronicles, although derivative of Neville, also provide some new information: *Chronicles*, III, pp. 963-984. At least two eyewitness accounts of Kett's rebellion were written, neither of which saw contemporary publication. That by Nicholas Sotherton survives as BL, Harl Ms 1576, fols 251r-59r, and has been edited: see B.L. Beer, ed., '"The Commoyson in Norfolk, 1549": A Narrative of Popular Rebellion in Sixteenth-Century England', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vi (1976), pp. 73-99. The other eyewitness account, known as the Norwich Roll, had been lost by 1859: see Russell, *Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk*,p. 38. But hints of its contents are apparent from its use in earlier works, in particular Anon., *The History of Kett's Rebellion in the Reign of Edward the Sixth* (Norwich, *c*.1843) and F. Blomefield, *Norfolk*, iii, pp. 223-260.

peroration:

> When he had made an end, although many ... trembled ... for the guilt of Conscience ... yet neverthelesse all of them ... being grievously offended with his speech ... reviled the Herald ... with shouts & cursings: some calling him Traytor, not sent from the King: but had received his lesson from the Gentlemen ... to bring them a sleepe with flattering words & faire promises to deceive them in the end ... Others said, that pardon in appearance seemed good & liberall, but in truth would prove in the ende lamentable & deadly, as that which would be nothing else; but Barrels filled with Ropes and Halters. And that painted coate distinct, and beautified with gold; not to be ensignes of an Herald: but some peeces of Popish Coapes sewed together.

Unmoved by this display of plebeian fury, the herald moved up the hill, and began to repeat his speech. This time, his oration was interrupted by an obscene display of rebel contempt:

> It happened before he had made an end of his speech, that an ungracious boy, putting down his breeches, shewed his bare buttockes, & did a filthy act: adding therunto more filthy words.

It is this incident that provides the basis for the humorous scene depicted in the Castle Mall mural.

From a late twentieth-century perspective, influenced by the burlesque humour of *Monty Python* and *Blackadder*, the excremental incident may seem amusing; but, at the time, both its immediate context and effects were gravely serious. The ‘ungracious boy’ was (in an ugly, but deliberately political display) demonstrating his ostentatious contempt both for the negotiations, and for the King of Arms’ office. The response of the royal forces to this insult was correspondingly brutal:

> At the indignity whereof, a certaine man being moved (for some of our men were on the river, which came to behold) with a bullet from a Pistoll, gave the boy such a blow upon the loines, that sodainely strooke him dead.

The soldier’s reaction was taken by the rebels as confirmation of the now deceased ‘ungracious’ boy’s point: that the negotiations were false, and that the gentry could not be

trusted. Rebel horsemen came flying from the scene, crying

> O my companions, we are betrayed. Doe you not see our fellow Souldiers cruelly slaine before our eyes, & shot thorow? ... For surely this Herald intendeth nothing else, but we ... may most cruelly be slaine of the Gentlemen.

At this point, Robert Kett arrived, and 'joyned himselfe with the Herald & minded to have spoken with Warwicke', but was pursued by 'a mighty rout of Rebels' who cried after him 'whither he went', promising that they should remain 'his companions and partners, both in life and death'. Observing the apparent collapse of Kett's authority, the King of Arms 'willed Kett to goe backe againe, and stay his concourse and tumult'.[7]

This incident sealed Kett's fate. Upon the return of the humiliated King of Arms, the earl of Warwick ordered a bombardment of the city. This opened three days and nights of claustrophobic street-fighting. For a while, the outcome hung in the balance: on 25 August, after the rebels had burned part of the southern parishes, Warwick received a delegation of city oligarchs, who pleaded with him to withdraw. After refusing, Warwick considered breaking the bridges that linked the poorer northern parts of the city to its prosperous centre, leaving the northern wards in rebel hands. Relief for the royal forces came on 26 August, with the arrival of a thousand fresh mercenaries. With his expanded forces, Warwick cut the rebels' supply lines into the countryside. Moved by a prophecy which told of success at Dussindale (a low, flat valley between the southern edge of Mousehold and the river Yare), on 27 August the exhausted rebels moved to Dussindale, where they pitched stakes and awaited Warwick's onslaught. Battered by successive

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[7] Woods, *Norfolke Furies*, sigs. H4r-I1v. The King of Arms had been subject to similar abuse from Kentish rebels in July 1549. See BL, Microfilm M485/39, Salisbury MS, 150, fo 117r-v. Royal heralds were accustomed to greater respect: discussing the suppression of the Lincolnshire rising in 1536, Henry VIII assumed that 'the presence of o[u]r coat [of arms] was a greate means to abashe' the rebels; PRO, SP1/108, fo 67r.

artillery bombardments and cavalry attacks, they finally collapsed. Kett fled the site, only to be captured the following day. Many rebels had already been executed during the fighting within Norwich; after this crushing defeat further mass executions followed in the city. Meanwhile, Robert Kett was being interrogated at Norwich Castle. In November, he and his brother William were convicted of high treason in London, and returned to Norfolk. William was hanged from the tower of Wymondham Abbey, while Robert was suspended in chains from the walls of Norwich Castle on 7 December 1549.

The preceding account of Kett's rebellion dwelt upon the confrontation between the King of Arms and the rebel crowd on Mousehold Heath on 24 August 1549 for four reasons. Firstly, it enables us to make sense of the mooning boy in the shopping centre mural, while also suggesting how this apparently humorous gesture was really full of deadly violence. Secondly, the encounter between the rebel crowd and the King of Arms reveals some important contradictions within rebel ideology. According to the account, we see the herald arriving at the Mousehold camp, anticipating negotiations with the leadership. But such negotiations were frustrated by the mocking behaviour of the rebel rank-and-file. The conclusion of the incident, in which the herald advised Kett to return to his tumultuous followers, raises the question of who was leading who on Mousehold Heath.[8] Thirdly, the collective speech attributed to the rebels suggests something of their attitudes to religious politics - and so hints again at internal conflicts within their camp.

Historians of Tudor rebellions conventionally distinguish between the Norfolk rebellion, caused by 'economic' grievances, and the Western Rebellion underway at the

same time in Devon and Cornwall, which is traditionally presented as 'religious' in its concerns.[9] In contrast to the devout catholicism of the Western rebels, historians of the subject often present the Norfolk rebels as uniformly protestant in their religious inclinations. Such assessments of the religious politics of Kett's rebellion tend to be based upon an analysis of a single document, the list of complaints submitted by the leadership of the Mousehold camp to Protector Somerset in July 1549.[10] These articles include denunciations of vicars'dealings in the land market, and demand the provision of educated preachers capable of teaching 'pore mens chyldren' to read the catechism and primer. Such demands have been seen as an endorsement of Somerset's radical programme of evangelical religious reform. On the other hand, the rebel speech reported by Neville - in particular, the sarcastic assessment of the King of Arms' gorgeous surcoat, bearing the royal insignia, as 'some peeces of Popish Coapes sewed together' - suggests a rather different assessment of the Edwardian Reformation. The reported speech contains a hint of how the recent sequestration of church goods may have been regarded by many Norfolk rebels. Although historians of the Reformation often present the population of East Anglia as more receptive to protestant ideas than many other parts of the realm, both the suppression of the monasteries and the steady removal of the traditional furnishings of the parish churches during the Henrician and the Edwardian reformations stirred significant hostility within Norfolk. Would-be rebels in Walsingham in early 1537, for instance, recognised a connection between the dissolution of 'all the abbeys in the c[o]untrey' and the oppressions committed by the gentry: 'for the gentle men buye upp

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[8] For a fuller account of rebel division, see Wood, *Insurrection*, chapters six and seven.
[9] For a recent critiques of this dichotomy, see E. Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 129-132; Wood, *Riot*, pp. 54-60.
[10] BL, Harl. Ms 304, fol 75r-7v, reproduced in Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor rebellions*, pp. 144-6.

all the grayn, ke[e]pe all the catal in their handes and hold all the fermes that poor men cann have no living'. Throughout the later 1530s, and again during the reign of Edward VI, grumbling against the removal of church goods was reported from both Norfolk and Norwich. Notably, one such plebeian complainant, Robert Burnam, had been an ardent rebel during Kett's rising.[11] Such evidence jars with the implicit statements of support for policies presented Somerset's religious reforms in the Mousehold articles.

Lastly, Neville's account of the confrontation between the King of Arms and the rebel crowd illuminates the outstanding aspect of the Norfolk rebellion: the peculiarly violent conflict between the county's gentry and the 'pore commons' assembled on Mousehold Heath, made apparent in the rebels suspicion that the gentry would not honour any pardon offered by Somerset. The Norfolk insurgents' rejection of the pardon contrasts with the willingness of 'commotioners' in many other counties to negotiate with, and to submit to, the established authorities. It will be argued here that the violent ferocity that characterised the closing stages of the 'commotion time' in Norfolk resulted from the rebels' rejection of successive offers of pardon; the next part of this chapter will explore the deep, structural conflicts within urban and rural society that underlay the Mousehold rebels' suspicion of the offers of pardon made to them. In order to appreciate the significance of local patterns of social conflict to the unusually violent resolution of the Norfolk rebellion, we must first locate Kett's rebellion within the wider history of the 'commotion time' of 1549.

[11] PRO, SP1/119, fo 38r; NRO, NCR 12A/1(a), fol 8r-9r; 16A/4, fo 65r; 16A/6, pp. 1-2; Blomefield, *Norfolk*, iii, p. 263.

Ironically, although it remains the best-known rebellion of that year, the Norfolk insurrection came late in the 'commotion time'. By the outbreak of the Attleborough rising in early July, the commons of many other counties south of Trent had already risen in armed rebellion; and some had been subdued, either through negotiation or repression.[12] Although the rebellions expressed deep conflicts within Tudor society, the immediate cause of the 'commotion time' lay in Somerset's social and religious policies. His decrees enforcing the Edwardian Reformation were often bitterly resented, and in April 1548 led to a rising within Cornwall. In contrast, his opposition to the enclosure of common land met with widespread popular support. Following anti-enclosure proclamations of June 1548 and April 1549, royal commissioners were instructed to collect information concerning the illicit enclosure of land. This policy inspired the large-scale popular destruction of enclosures and demonstrations concerning other agrarian and urban grievances. Although in some areas, such as Wiltshire, Sir William Herbert immediately repressed these gatherings without waiting for royal authority, elsewhere, as in Kent and Sussex, the local gentry and nobility acted with greater moderation as intermediaries between the Council and the 'commotioners': as Edward VI noted, the spring rebellions were appeased 'by fair p[er]swasions, partly of honestmen among them selfes and partly by gentlemen'.[13] The 'commotion time' therefore had its origins, in the spring of 1549, in armed demonstrations in support of Somerset's enclosure policies, albeit sometimes tinged with hostility to the ongoing Reformation. May day saw the spread of insurrection across many southern counties. In June 1549, the commons of

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[12] Amanda Jones' forthcoming Warwick University doctoral dissertation, '"Commotion time": the English risings of 1549' provides a detailed narrative of the rebellions outside Norfolk, Devon and Cornwall. The essential discussion of the wider geographical context of Kett's rebellion is D. MacCulloch, 'Kett's

Cornwall and Devon rose in rebellion against Somerset's religious policies. By Midsummer, the relative quiet of the commons of East Anglia seemed peculiar.

Somerset's announcement of a new Enclosure Commission on 9 July, coupled with the absence of many leading gentlemen at Windsor, answering a summons from the Council to organise military action, drew the commons of East Anglia into the 'commotion time'. Diarmaid MacCulloch has shown how large-scale rebellion revealed itself in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire at almost exactly the same time: that is between 9 and 11 July.[14] Kett's rebellion therefore seems to have been but a late example of a more widespread phenomenon: across southern England during the spring and summer of 1549, prosperous men such as Robert Kett placed themselves at the head of rebel camps. By July, the leadership of such camps encountered Somerset's representatives, who encouraged them to submit written complaints to the Council, and to disarm. Like other aspects of rebel behaviour, violence was controlled and ritualised. Notoriously oppressive gentry who fell into rebel hands were roughed up and humiliated, but (with one notable exception, in Yorkshire) were not killed.

In one significant respect, though, the Norfolk rebels deviated from the general pattern of the 'commotion time'. The 'commotioners' of Norfolk not only refused to disarm, but actively frustrated the royal representatives' attempts at negotiation. This was not the only area where the demonstrations of the 'commotioners' led to armed violence. In Wiltshire and Cambridge the local authorities immediately repressed insurrection, with some loss of life. In Devon and Cornwall, where conservative religion defined rebel

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rebellion in context', *Past and Present*, vxxxiv (1979), pp. ??. For Cornwall and Devon risings, see F. Rose-Troup, *The Western Rebellion of 1549* (London, 1913).

[13] J.G. Nichols, ed., *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth* (2 vols, London, 1857), ii, pp. 226-7.

[14] MacCulloch, 'Kett's rebellion in context', pp. 39-40.

grievances, and in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, where hostility to the Reformation coloured complaints, the 'commotion time' also ended in substantial violence. But in Norfolk, as we have seen, the leadership of the Mousehold camp was careful to downplay rebel hostility to the Edwardian Reformation. We return, therefore, to our defining question: why did Kett's rebellion lead to such massive bloodshed?

Diarmaid MacCulloch has recently placed the blame for the violent end of Kett's rebellion upon Sir William Parr, the marquis of Northampton. It was he who led the first, small army to Norwich on 31 July, only to be forced into ignominious retreat on the following day. MacCulloch charges him with incompetence, stating that his defeat left the duke of Somerset with no alternative but to crush the Norfolk rebellion:

> The Protector might indeed have got away with the whole great gamble [that is, his appeasment of the rebels] if the Marquis of Northampton had not blundered when he led his expeditionary force from London into Norfolk, combining lack of local knowledge with political ineptitude: his mishandling transformed the Norwich encounter from negotiation to bloody battle. Once Norfolk exploded into really murderous violence, Somerset's strategy came crashing down, and the Privy Councillors could vent their feelings on him and on the commons of England.[15]

In MacCulloch's analysis, Northampton's blunders had far-reaching consequences, forcing Somerset to abandon his appeasement of the rebels, and to resort to repression. The failure of Somerset's policy towards the 'commotioners' undermined his political position, as it justified the gathering critique within ruling circles of the 'Good Duke's' leniency towards the rebellious commons.[16] This critique acquired armed force in the military coup of October 1549, in which Somerset was displaced by the earl of Warwick, fresh from his victory over the rebels in Norwich. MacCulloch's assertion of the centrality of the events of 31 July and 1 August is of fundamental importance in

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[15] D. MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London, 1999), p. 49.

determining how we understand the outcome of Kett's rebellion. Playing with counterfactuals, we might imagine (as MacCulloch invites us to) a different outcome to Northampton's arrival on 31 July, in which the Mousehold rebels followed their counterparts in Suffolk, Sussex and Kent and accepted Somerset's pardon in return for the consideration of their complaints. In the context of elite politics, MacCulloch implies, Somerset's position would have been secured and his social reforms would have continued. Within Norwich, as elsewhere, the memory of the Mousehold rebels would most likely have faded away; there would have been no 'Kett's rebellion', distinct from the 'commotion time', to remember.

Although MacCulloch accuses Northampton of having 'blundered', it is unclear how the marquis might have redeemed the impossible situation that faced him on 1 August. His small army was intended to intimidate the rebels into negotiations, rather than to confront and defeat them. His conduct during the battles of 31 July and 1 August might be compared with that of Lord Grey who, possessed of an army of similar size, had put the rebels of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to flight after battle in mid-July.[17] But unlike Lord Grey's opponents, Kett's rebels remained concentrated as a single body, dominating both Mousehold Heath and Norwich. Although Northampton was apparently unfamiliar with the city, he was accompanied by a number of leading Norfolk gentlemen who knew it very well. Once again then, we should call into question MacCulloch's judgment: Northampton's conduct stemmed not from any 'lack of local knowledge'. It seems equally unreasonable to blame the failure of negotiations upon Northampton's 'political ineptitude': in part, because the rebels had opened hostilities a week before his

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[16] For the beginnings of this critique, see PRO, SP10/8/4, 33.

arrival, when they had seized Norwich; and also because they did not present him with any real opportunity to negotiate. Such negotiations often formed the closing drama within the unstructured rituals of early Tudor rebellion. Northampton's clear expectation that they would take place derived not from his peculiar naivete, so much as from the wider political culture of the period.[18] Only in retrospect is it possible to criticise Northampton for his failure to recognise the concealed military threat posed by the rebels. As events transpired, the rebels' pretence at negotiations proved deceitful, being little more than a strategem to seize the military initiative. On the morning of 1 August, Northampton received 'information that att Pockthorp gates was a iiii or v *c* [400 or 500] persons to submit themselves and receive the Kings pardon'. Accompanied by some of his forces, he therefore proceeded to Pockthorpe gates where he found only twenty rebels, led by John Flotman of Beccles, who engaged him in a disputation. Northampton and his herald stood upon the corner tower of the gates, from where the rebels were offered the King's pardon. In answer, Flotman said that 'hee defyde [Northampton] and seid hee was a traytour nor wulde of his pardon, nor had deservid pardon but that they were the kings true subjects'. At this point, word was brought to Northampton 'that the rebellis had entrid the cittye neere the hospitall'.[19] The negotiations were revealed as but a device, designed to distract Northampton from the main rebel onslaught near the Great Hospital at Bishopgate. Northampton's small, divided force was therefore left under the authority of his second-in-command, Lord Sheffield, to face the rebel attack. During a series of running engagements, Sheffield was knocked from his horse and hacked to

[17] A. Vere Woodman, 'The Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Rising of 1549', *Oxoniensia*, xxii (1957), pp. 78-84.
[18] M.E. James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 344-57.

death. Confused and leaderless, the royal troops fled Norwich.

If Northampton made a mistake, it lay in underestimating the military threat posed by the Mousehold rebels. The Norfolk rebels' consistent willingness to fight their opponents represented a breach of the rituals of Tudor rebellion: in earlier rebellions of 1525 and 1536, as in many places in 1549, rebels had assembled in arms, but subsequently disbanded upon the offer of a pardon and a promise that local elite would represent their grievances to the Crown. In defiance of these conventions, Kett's rebels deliberately rejected the intercession of urban oligarchs, country gentry and royal heralds on numerous occasions: on 10 July, the mayor of Norwich attempted to persuade the rebels to return home, but was rejected. The following day, Sir Roger Woodhouse brought carts of food and beer to the 'commotioners'. In contrast to events in Sussex, where the earl of Arundel's conspicuous display of such traditional hospitality had smoothed his successful negotiations with the rebels, Woodhouse was beaten up and taken prisoner.[20] On 21 July, York Herald confronted the rebel leadership on Mousehold Heath. Upon the rejection of his offer of pardon, he had denounced the Norfolk rebels as traitors. The following day, they seized Norwich. On 1 August, Northampton offered pardon to the rebels assembled at Pockthorpe Gate, but was mocked. On 24 August, as we have seen, the King of Arms was verbally abused while attempting to deliver yet another olive branch. Finally, surrounded by Warwick's victorious mercenary troops at the sanguinary conclusion of the battle of Dussindale, some insurgents still continued to refuse the royal pardon, exclaiming that

> they suppose[d] this mention of pardon, deceitfully offered by the Nobles; to

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[19] Beer, ed., '"The Commoyson"', pp. 90-1.
[20] L. Stone, 'Patriarchy and Paternalism in Tudor England: The Earl of Arundel and the Peasants' Revolt of 1549', *Journal of British Studies*, xiii, (1974), pp. 19-23.

> be nothing else, but whereby...they should all then, the last bee led to torture and death. And in truth, whatsoever they pretend, they know well...this pardon to bee nothing else, but vessels of Ropes and halters, and therefore have decreed to die.[21]

The extreme violence of the closing stages of the Norfolk 'commotion time' resulted not from the individual failings of the marquis of Northampton, but rather from the rebels' fundamental distrust of the pardons that were offered repeatedly to them. This distrust expressed a deeper conflict within both urban and rural society in Norfolk.

The vicious conflicts in early sixteenth-century rural Norfolk have become notorious. Landlords' attempts to enclose common fields, increase rents, extend deer parks and expand their sheep flocks created lasting social antagonisms within the countryside, and richer and poorer villagers, often at one another's throats over other issues, joined forces against a common enemy. The Reformation heightened such conflicts. The Dissolution of the Monasteries and the radical changes to church ornaments and services were often understood as attempts by the 'gentlemen' to destroy the cultural and spiritual basis of plebeian community, at the same time as their aggressive seigneurialism undercut its material basis. Social and economic historians have long understood these conflicts as providing the deep causal basis for Kett's rebellion.[22] Moreover, they also help to explain the refusal of the Norfolk commons to accept the validity of the pardons offered to them: by 1549, the commons had grown used to confronting what they saw as the gentry's 'treachery'.

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[21] Woods, *Norfolke Furies*, sig. K3r.

[22] R.J. Hammond, 'The Social and Economic Circumstances of Kett's Rebellion' (University of London, MA dissertation, 1933), remains useful.

Historians have tended to present Kett's rebellion as a rural uprising, in which urban conflicts played only a minor role.[23] In standard accounts of the rebellion, the city of Norwich provides merely the passive backdrop to the closing dramas of the insurrection; the inhabitants are portrayed as the helpless victims of the rebels. Yet the conflictual social relations within mid-Tudor Norwich heavily influenced the events of July and August 1549. Moreover, it will be argued here that an awareness of the depth of internal conflict on the part of the city's rulers undermined their confidence in dealing with the rebels, thereby generating a weak and contradictory policy towards the 'commotioners'. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with the urban basis of Kett's rebellion. Firstly, it will briefly elucidate some of the fundamental conflicts which divided the mid-sixteenth century city. Secondly, it will look at the response of the city's governors to the rebels. Lastly, it will examine the nature of rebel support within Norwich.

Fundamentally similar conflicts seethed in Tudor Norwich to those within the countryside. Just as rural commoners criticised the administration of government and justice by the gentry, so, as in other early modern towns, vicious disputes occasionally exploded in Norwich over issues such as popular participation in civic government, entitlements to common resources, local taxation and the crown's harsh fiscal demands. There seems to have been a particularly anxious quality to the assertion of urban authority in early modern England. The elaborate displays of this authority all too often contrasted with the deliberately confrontational language used by the poorer classes to

[23] Hence, for example, the title of Cornwall's book: *Revolt of the Peasantry, 1549*. Broad surveys of European rebellions also tend to present it as an 'agrarian' insurrection. See, for instance, P. Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers, 1500-1660: Volume I. Society, States and Early Modern Revolution: Agrarian and Urban Rebellions* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 208-14.

describe their social superiors: the Norwich capper who in 1513 called an aldermen a 'Shytebreke' might stand for many.[24] In flagrant contrast to its structural and economic diversity, the social order tended to be harshly bi-polar when viewed through contemporary eyes. Whereas richer inhabitants were sometimes inclined to see their poorer neighbours as a threatening, disease-ridden burden, so the labouring classes used the same social terminology as their rural counterparts when describing of the 'rich men', whom they condemned as 'traitors' and 'churles', and denounced for their corrupt monopolisation of local government.[25] Indeed, the artificial distinctions made by historians between 'urban' and 'rural' experiences dissolve at this point, for popular perceptions of economic change tended to present grasping merchants and sheepfarming gentlemen as locked in a joint conspiracy to destroy the poor.[26]

Plebeian senses of economics were articulated most clearly in the seditious speech recorded immediately before and after the 1549 rebellion, in which urban workers and rural labourers alike stood accused of having denounced the 'Gents & Richemen'. These were said to 'have all [the] catell & wolles ... in ther hands nowe a dayes & the pore pe[o]ple are now Famysshed'.[27] The fundamental conflicts within the City arose at the hotly contested junction of material resources and physical space: in lanes and courtyards, on common lands and in the marketplace. Attempts by richer inhabitants to extend or improve their properties were sometimes understood by their poorer neighbours

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[24] Quoting NRO, NCR, 16A/2, fos 15r, 16r. For early Tudor popular criticism of urban authority, see for instance PRO, STAC2/21/151; NRO, NCR, 16A/2, fo 16v; 16A/2, p.276; 12A/1(a), fo 76r. For criticism of lay subsidies, see 16A/2 fos 36r-v, 37r, pp.16-18; 16A/2, p.173; 16A/3, pp. 9-10.
[25] C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital* (Stroud, 1999), pp. 215-19. For two defining statements of popular perceptions of the governors of Tudor Norwich, see NRO, NCR, 12A/1 (c), fo 55r; *HMC, Salisbury*, XIII, pp. 168-9.
[26] See, for instance, NRO, NCR, 12A/1(a), fos 11v-12r.
[27] NRO, NCR, 16A/4, fo 61v.

as part of a plan to squeeze the 'pore comons' out of the City.[28] We should not lightly dismiss such anxieties. As John Pound has demonstrated, Tudor Norwich was delineated into richer and poorer parishes, with the poorer classes largely concentrated north of the river, and in the southern parishes.[29] Sharp, face-to-face conflict was also manifest upon the City's common lands, which came under pressure from poor urban dwellers and from commercial sheep-farmers. The same is also true of the extensive resources of fuel, building materials and grazing lands east of the city, on Mousehold Heath and in Thorpe Wood, where both urban poor and rural commoners claimed traditional rights, in opposition to rural lords.[30] Importantly, many of the conflicts within Norwich therefore both involved, and won the immediate sympathy of, the commons of rural Norfolk. It did not require a giant leap of imagination to see the extension of rich men's houses over the humble plots of the urban poor as the equivalent of rural enclosure. Indeed, disputes over the city's common fields and the urban poor's claims to pasture and timber rights in Mousehold Heath and Thorpe Wood connected directly with the conflicts in the countryside, pitting the urban poor against some of the rural commoners' leading opponents: wealthy families such as the Corbetts, Spencers and Pastons.

But it was the marketplace that formed the prime everyday arena for confrontations between popular opinion and urban authority. Here, increases in the price of food inspired verbal and physical anger against market traders and civic officials, sometimes culminating in riot.[31] Throughout the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, sudden increases in prices led the ruling elite to anticipate the possibility of serious

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[28] PRO, STAC2/2/225-7; NRO, NCR, 12A/1 (c), fos 18r-19v. See also above, p. ***.
[29] See chapter **.
[30] For disputes over the city's commons, and over Thorpe Wood and Mousehold Heath, see NRO, NCR 12A/1(a), fo 123r; 12A/1 (c), fo 23r; PRO, REQ2/18/106.

insurrection. In 1526, for instance, the 'greate skarsenes of corne ... abowte Christmas' persuaded some of 'the comons of the Cyttye to ... ryse upon the ryche men'.[32] In response, the corporation ensured that exemplary punishment of offenders (whipping minor rioters; branding, mutilating, flogging or otherwise humiliating those who articulated seditious speech; and even occasional hangings) was followed not only by close supervision of the movements and speech of the poor ('badging' paupers; listing those in receipt of alms; alerting the magisterial ear to the merest hint of sedition) but also by ostentatiously ameliorative action (lowering the price of food; seeing to the rigid regulation of the market; enforcing compulsory contributions to poor rates from substantial citizens in the interests of the 'comon weale').[33]

By the time of Kett's rebellion, the governors of Norwich had therefore grown used to balancing the interests of rich and poor. That balance was usually weighted in favour of the rich, but public clamour, especially when combined with paternalist impulses from central government, might tilt it in the other direction. In May 1549, at the height of the commotion time across southern England, and in the midst of Protector Somerset's social reforms, the city's governors established a compulsory levy for the poor, similar to that which they had instituted following the threat of insurrection in 1526.[34] It is difficult to see this action as anything other than a response to growing internal tensions. It will be

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[31] See for instance, NRO, NCR, 16A/2, p. 227; 16A/3, p. 23.

[32] NRO, NCR, C17A, MCB, fo18v. For other examples of serious trouble over food supply in the marketplace, see for instance Blomefield, *Norfolk*, iii, pp. 197-8; NRO, NCR,16A/2, pp. 268-9, 319-20.

[33] Quoting NRO, NCR, 16A/2, p. 204. See, for instance, the response to the economic troubles of the 1520s: NRO, NCR, 16A/2, pp.138, 160, 201-2, 204, 207, 208, 210, 243, 256, 258, 263, 265, and chapter **, below.

[34] P. Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (Harlow, 1988), p. 123.

argued here that the ambivalent response of the civic oligarchy to the arrival of Kett's rebels on the outskirts of Norwich on 10 July 1549 should be understood as a manifestation of their periodic willingness to compromise with dangerous forces within their own gates. Used to maintaining such a balancing act, mayor Codd underestimated the threat posed by Kett's rebels, treating them as though he were negotiating with an unruly urban crowd. This circumspection proved near-fatal, allowing the insurgents to exercise partial control over Norwich, until the denunciation of Kett by York Herald on 21 July forced Codd to acknowledge the Mousehold 'commotioners' as rebels and to close the city to them. The Herald thus denunciation precipitated the first bloodshed of Kett's rebellion, the rebels' attack on Bishopgate on the following day. Yet the significance of the Norwich oligarchy's flirtation with the rebels, and more broadly of the urban contribution to Kett's rebellion, have received little attention from historians.

This general understatement of the urban contribution to Kett's rebellion grows from twentieth-century historians' overdependence upon three well-known narrative accounts of the insurrection: that presented in Nicholas Sotherton's manuscript history of the rebellion; Alexander Neville's printed history of 1575; and the account offered in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*. In contrast to Sir John Cheke's condemnation of the city's governors, written in the immediate aftermath of the rebellions, these Elizabethan narratives presented the rebellion as an essentially rural affair and obscured the equivocal conduct of the Norwich elite during the 'commotion time'.[35] Yet, although these accounts did their best to draw clear distinctions between the citizens and the 'rude Countrymen' and 'Rude and rusticall people' whom they presented as the key constituents of the rebel host, the authors of the Elizabethan narratives were none the less forced to recognise, by

virtue of its significance, the depth of urban support for the 'commotion time'.[36] This bias flowed from the authors' social position: Sotherton was born into the civic oligarchy, while the opening paragraph of Neville's account provides an unambiguous statement of his loyalties. Neville wished that the rebellion 'had either never hapned, or (if it could be) the remembrance of [it] were utterly rooted out of the minds of all men'. But knowing that 'things past cannot be altered, or changed', he stated his intention to re-tell the story of the rebellion in order that 'this staine of treason, branded in the forehead of our Countrey ... can be utterly blotted out, or altogether taken away'. Once the authors of the widely-read Holinshed's *Chronicles* had plagiarised Neville's history, his sanitised version established the template for future treatments of the subject: the influential eighteenth-century Norfolk historian, Francis Blomefield, for instance, fulminated against Sir John Cheke's 'upbraiding' of the elite, insisting that 'the mayor, older men, and principal citizens, with the City clergy, behaved with the utmost allegiance to the King, and the greatest prudence, for the safeguard of their City and country'.[37] The reality, however, was more complicated.

The curious conduct of the governors of Norwich during the 'commotion time' is illuminated by three folios in a volume of the proceedings of the Mayor's Court.[38] These folios, which cover the events of 9 to 21 July 1549, provide some fascinating insights into the conduct of the ruling elite during the crucial period between the arrival of Kett's rebel host on the outskirts of the city, and their denunciation as traitors by York Herald. It is, for example, of interest that, the folios describe the rebels in strangely positive language.

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[35] Cheke's *Hurt of Sedition* is reproduced in Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, pp. 987-1011.
[36] Woods, *Norfolke Furies,* sigs. D3v-r; Beer, ed., '"The Commoyson"', p. 85.
[37] Woods, *Norfolke Furies*, sig. B1r; *Blomefield*, *Norfolk*, pp. 228-9. For Cheke's critique of the Norwich governors, see Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, pp. 997-8.

They also hint at collusion between the rebel leadership and the aldermanic bench. Taken together with the Elizabethan narrative accounts, they allow us to reconstruct the actions of the leading citizens during this crucial stage in the rebellion in some detail. The folios confirm Neville's claim that, on the evening of 10 July, Thomas Codd led the aldermen to the temporary rebel encampment at Eaton Wood. Hoping that the rebellion 'might be repressed in the beginning', he 'allured' the insurgents 'by money, and fairer promises'. Following his rejection, Codd returned to Norwich and convened the common council. Although some 'doubtfull opinions' were expressed at the meeting, others proposed an attack upon the rebels. Finally, the council refused the rebels' request to march through Norwich, and decided instead to 'fortifie the Citie'.[39] Despite this unequivocal response, the folios suggest that the city fathers adopted a rather less resolute attitude. Although the records of the common council for 10 July do not survive, a note describing a meeting of aldermen on the same day shows that the rebels were allowed to provision themselves from Norwich markets. Notably, although rebel representatives are described as being 'of the rebellyous campe', the word 'rebellyous' was clearly inserted into the manuscript at a later date. By Saturday 13 July, the clerk to the Mayor's Court was describing the Mousehold gathering as 'the pore comons campe', and recorded how the aldermen had allowed the rebels to imprison their gentry captives both within the city's gaol and, 'for asmuche as the said p[ri]son is Full of p[ri]son[er]s sent from the said campe', Norwich Castle itself. Here the clerk makes no attempt to conceal the fact that these decisions emerged from discussions 'betwyn Robt Kette of wy[mo]ndh[a]m & mr maior'. Two days later, the rebels demanded that their gentry captives be returned 'without any

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[38] NRO, NCR, 6A/4, MCB, date?, fos 66r-7r. Significantly, the Minute Books and Proceedings of the Municipal Assembly were not kept during the insurrection: NRO, NCR C16C/2; C16D/2.

condicon', so that they could stand trial. The corporation seemingly acquiesced to this demand. A characteristic mood of indecision prevailed at a meeting of aldermen on 17 July, at which it was recorded that 'muche matter was moved reason[e]d & debated ... conc[er]nyng the sayd campe but nothing ... concluded'. Finally, the folios tell us how the Norwich authorities were moved to action by the arrival of York Herald on 20 July, who on the following day denounced Kett as a traitor.

This important contemporary evidence suggests a striking lack of resolve to confront the rebel host. The material weakness of the city's defences, although extensive, fails to provide sufficient explanation for the continued association of the aldermen with the rebel leadership. Both before and after the insurgents stormed Norwich on 22 July, Thomas Codd and other leading oligarchs sat upon the rebel council. According to the Elizabethan narrative accounts, the rebels forced them to do so, while they in turn made virtue of necessity, hoping that they might moderate the rebels' behaviour. The authors of the narrative accounts did their best to praise those leading aldermen, such as Henry Bacon and Augustine Steward, who helped Northampton's and Warwick's forces; but the effect was only to highlight the failure of the mayor and most of the governing classes to take such a lead.[40] It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that when the earl of Warwick paused at Cambridge to gather further forces before marching to confront Kett, he was met by a group of aldermen and citizens from Norwich, 'upon their knees ... weeping' and protesting that they had had no part in the rebellion. Warwick's response highlights the suspicion that had fallen upon the Norwich elite: he first admonished their failure to deal effectively with the rebellion 'in the very beginning', and then ordered them to join

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[39] Woods, *Norfolk Furies*, sig. B4v-C1r.
[40] Beer, ed., '"The Commoyson"', pp. 82, 88; Woods, *Norfolke Furies*, sig. F2v.

his forces, wearing ‘Laces about their necks, to be discerned from the rest’, in order that any treachery on their part could be observed.[41] Warwick’s suspicion seems well-founded: at best, the rulers of Norwich had demonstrated a collective lack of judgment; at worst, they had become complicit with rebellion.

In contrast to the inconsistency of their rulers, many of the labouring people of Norwich were strong supporters of the rebel cause. When Augustine Steward surrendered the city’s authority to the marquis of Northampton on 31 July, he blamed the insurrection upon ‘a great rowt of the lewd citisens [who] were partakers with the rebelles’, but asked the marquis to note that ‘the substantiall & honest citizens would never consent to their wicked doings’.[42] The Elizabethan accounts of the rebellion developed Steward’s social analysis of political allegiance. In Holinshed’s *Chronicles* the urban rebels were described as ‘rascals & naughtie lewd persons’. To Neville, Kett’s Norwich supporters were ‘the scum of the City’, ‘pestilent persons’ and ‘beastly men ... of the common people of the City’. Like animals, the urban poor were full of ‘violent rage and fury’. For Sotherton, the urban rebels were but ‘vagrand persons’.[43]

Urban support for the rebellion was premeditated: preceding the outbreak of the Wymondham insurrection, there was a series of ‘secret meetings of men running hither and thither’. Clearly, the conspirators had run as far as Norwich; for on 9 July, the same day that Kett assumed leadership of the Wymondham rebels, new enclosures upon the

[41] Woods, *Norfolke Furies*, sig. H2r.
[42] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, p. 972.
[43] Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, p. 965; Woods, *Norfolke Furies*, sig. B3v, E3r-4v; Beer, ed., ‘"The Commoyson"’, p. 81.

commons on Town Close were destroyed by what Neville called 'the scum of the City'. The following day, when Kett's forces camped at Eaton Wood, near the western edge of the city, they were met by 'wretched conspirators' from Norwich. These 'conspirators' carried 'little boughs' as a prearranged mark of their involvement in the rising, which the rural rebels recognised as a sign that they should concentrate 'all their cursed companies ... together into one place'.[44] There appears to have been a close relationship between the social geography of mid-Tudor Norwich and the twists and turns in rebel and royal military strategy. Rebels seemed to move with impunity through the poor northern parishes across the Wensum.[45] At the height of the fighting on 25 August, when he proposed the destruction of the bridges that linked the rich centre of the city to the northern fringes, the earl of Warwick recognised the rebels' easy control of this area. In the earliest military encounters, it looked as if the rebel presence might manifest itself anywhere within the walls. In the night before the first rebel attack, the aldermen decided 'that it was ... safest for the gentlemen [hitherto captives of the rebels] that had been let out of prison to be shut up again, least the rebels finding them abroad should murder them'. This decision was taken because 'certain of the citizens that favoured the rebels had let a great number of them into the city'.[46] Similarly, Northampton's forces were kept constantly confused as to rebel movements by continuous shouting from the darkened streets that surrounded the marketplace. Concerned for the security of his force, Northampton anxiously illuminated the marketplace and appointed watches. The effect of the rebels' effective mobilisation of their urban support was to deny the military initiative to Northampton. Neville identified the social basis of this urban support with some

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[44] Woods, *Norfolke Furies,* sig. B4v-r; Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, p. 964.
[45] Beer, ed., '"The Commoyson"', p. 92.

clarity: whereas 'the Citizens' were kept 'easily in order', 'the unruly ... whom no good order could command' clamoured for Kett.[47]

In the aftermath of the rebellion, the governing elite of the near-ruined city of Norwich had reason to feel vengeful, grateful and guilty. This knot of unhappy emotions was expressed in three forms: in the prompt execution of defeated rebels in the public places of the city, and in the longer process of repression that followed; in excessive displays of loyalty and gratitude to the earl of Warwick; and in the immediate commemoration of the supression of Kett's rebellion. On the day after his defeat of the rebels at Dussindale, Warwick attended a service of thanksgiving at the richest parish church in the city, St Peter Mancroft. Following this, the corporation funded an elaborate masque in his honour. The earl's arms, the bear and ragged staff, were mounted alongside the royal arms on the gates; especially enthusiastic members of the elite also displayed them outside their own houses. These men knew that they had much to live down after Kett's rebellion; their displays of loyalty formed an ironic contrast to Warwick's earlier scepticism at Cambridge. As late as July 1552, one of the Paston family could still taunt the mayor of Norwich with the accusation 'That their was a Rebellion late at Norwich and that is not yet oute of Mr Mayors stomake nor a great many of them besides'.[48]

The governors of mid-Tudor Norwich found the traumatic memory of Kett's rebellion difficult to manage. No doubt, like Alexander Neville, they too wished that the uprising 'had either never hapned, or (if it could be) the remembrance of [it] were utterly rooted out of the minds of all men'. But (again like Neville), recognising that so large an

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[46] Blomefield, *Norfolk*, p. 235.

[47] Woods, *Norfolke Furies,* sigs. E4v, F2v, F4v, G1r.

[48] NRO, NCR, 16A/6, p.198. For the post-rebellion repression in Norwich, see Wood, *Insurrection*, chapter

event could not simply be forgotten, they instead set to reshaping its meaning. On 21 September 1550, the Assembly decreed that the anniversary of the battle of Dussindale, 27 August, should 'from hensfurth for ever' be kept as a holiday, to be marked by the sounding of every parish church bell in the city, a memorial sermon at St Peter Mancroft, and the reflection of 'both man and woman and childe' on the sins of rebellion.[49] Like the Elizabethan historiography of the rebellion that followed it, the city's celebration of 'Kett's Day' constructed a collective memory of the 'commotion time' around ruling class priorities. In this official memorialisation, Robert Kett appears as diabolically-inspired leader of senseless insurrection; his followers became 'Country clownes', joined by a mere smattering of 'the scum of the City'; and the rulers and citizens of Norwich were firmly established as the victims of the story.

In contrast to their loss of control over their city in 1549, the governors of Norwich succeeded in perpetuating this hegemonic myth until the early nineteenth century. Like George Orwell, they knew that 'Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past'.[50] But the assertion of power always engenders resistance. In the immediate aftermath of the 1549 rebellions, and for a long time afterwards, the official commemoration of Kett's rebellion stimulated opposing memories of the insurrection. For generations afterwards, mention of Robert Kett's name could be a way both of defying official ideology and of hinting at the possibility of resistance. That struggle over the meaning of the rebellion began within weeks of the defeat at Dussindale: in November 1549, a Norwich man called Claxton was asked his opinion of recent events within his city. Claxton is said to have replied 'that he did well in keping in

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[49] NRO, NCR,16D/1, Proceedings of the Municipal Assembly, 1491-1553, fo 239r.

ketts campe and so he wolde saye'. Asked 'what he did think by kette ... he sayed nothing but well that he knewe ... he trusted to se[e] a newe day for suche men as I was.'[51] Claxton's defiant words (whether he spoke them or not) retain a resonance today. And so by virtue of its everyday setting, the image of Robert Kett and the rude boy in the Castle Mall mural represents both a victory and a historical retrieval: a victory over earlier, officially-sponsored condemnations of Kett, and a retrieval of the diversity of rebel ideology in 1549, and of the inversive, mocking fun that comes from cocking a snook (or baring an arse) at authority.

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[50] G. Orwell, 1984: a novel (London, 1949), p. 199.
[51] NRO, NCR, 16A/6, p. 3.

<u>Suggested illustrations:</u>

1. Samuel Wale's early 18th century painting of Kett receiving the royal herald under the Oak of Reformation -- this is now in the Castle Museum

2. the section of the Castle Mall mural depicting Kett receiving the royal herald, etc -- I have a copy of this, best to use this, rather than take a photograph of the actual mural -- I will explain

3. PRO map of Norwich & Mousehold Heath, dated I think 1586, taken in the course of Exchequer proceedings concerning common rights on the Heath -- Andy Hopper is searching out the original; there is a copy on the open shelves of the NRO. I would like the image of the Oak of Reformation, and its surrounds. (Carole and Richard may want an image of the full map for the book -- it is very striking.)

4. Early 20th-century Pen-and-ink sketches of Kett's rebellion -- very nicely imagined, graphic scenes, in the NRO -- I will find them and get back to you .

5 proposed statue to Robert Kett, to be erected in the Castle Gardens, date: just post-war. In the NRO, I will find it and get back to you.