CONCLUSION

The preceding pages have utilised a range of case studies to provide a new perspective on the local authority of manorial officials in late medieval and early modern England. This conclusion recaps the main arguments of the book and also explains the wider implications of the findings in questioning a narrative of late medieval decline, supporting a more positive perception of lord–tenant relations, reframing the rise of the middling sort and explaining England's early growth of state capacity. Finally, it provides a brief discussion of how the structures described here for England compare with European equivalents.

This study has sought to make four interlinked arguments. Firstly, manorial structures, which officials shaped, remained a vital instrument of community governance across the late Middle Ages and early modern era. As is demonstrated in Chapter 1, this was due to their flexibility, which allowed them to be used in community management and the transfer of land, even as lords and the crown increasingly did not exercise their authority through this organ of local governance. Moreover, as Chapter 4 shows, bylaws allowed courts and their officials to be adapted to new functions such as controlling misconduct and managing common resources.

Secondly, and intimately linked to this first point, the impetus for the continued vitality of manorial institutions was the active and willing participation of communities of tenants. Chapter 1 shows that even in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, courts had a significant focus on community management, which became even more central to their operation in the early modern period. The work performed by officials for lords was relatively unobtrusive, while the crown showed little interest in channelling state formation through leet structures. Moreover, as Chapter 3 highlights, the link between serving in office and servility was weak, and officials generally enforced aspects of unfreedom which were not prejudicial to tenants' interests.

Thirdly, the impact of this continued governance through manorial structures could help create a degree of inequality and hierarchy in village communities. The analysis in Chapter 2 demonstrates that tenants rather than lords often shaped the choice of officials. This led to the exclusion of women and the landless and created an elite who could dominate manorial institutions through repeat service. Moreover, as Chapter 4 shows, on manors containing nucleated villages and fenland, concerns about labour, access to commons and waves of policing of misconduct helped create something akin to governance by a middling sort. However, trends towards inequality were also constrained and differed between manors. At all communities, office seems to have been spread widely among the male population after the Black Death. Moreover, in dispersed communities and areas with higher levels of enclosure and complex boundaries, manorial institutions do not seem to have seen much innovation to serve the purposes of elites.

Fourthly, state formation did not radically disrupt these manorially based structures. As Chapter 5 shows, even as churchwardens increasingly became agents of the crown in the locality, the men who held this office continued to serve prominently as manorial officials. Chapter 6 demonstrates exactly the same pattern for constables as servants of JPs, alongside the use of manorial structures to ensure constables met the vill's obligations to the state stretching back to the Middle Ages. Rather than the civil parish or quarter session simply eroding the position of the manor and its officials as an organ of community governance, these different structures were used in tandem to meet common objectives.

The implications of these empirical arguments are far reaching and support ongoing reassessments of several important debates in preindustrial political, economic and social history. The vibrancy of manorial governance institutions, and the political culture built around them, lends support to arguments refuting the narrative of decline which has sometimes permeated late medieval economic and social history.[1] This is true both in the narrow sense of the continued utility of manorial courts, but also in a wider sense of the growth of the politics of the commons highlighted by Watts and Johnson.[2] While manorial courts may have decayed as an instrument for the imposition of lordship or the prosecution of statute legislation, they remained vital to the organisation and management of rural communities. The individuals who served as manorial officials were not passive servants of lords or crown, but political actors who adapted manorial institutions to organise agriculture, conserve environmental resources, maintain law and order, and manage complex

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[1] For an overview of the decline literature, see pp. 6–11.   [2] Johnson, *Law in Common*, 270–5.

tenurial relations, increasingly without active oversight from external authorities. They incorporated the new structures of civil parish and quarter session as further tools to meet these objectives. Their commitment to using the manor to meet their own needs prevented a vacuum of governance from emerging in the countryside with the decline of traditional lordship in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

That tenants themselves were heavily invested in the manorial system also contributes to revisionist interpretations of late medieval lordship by highlighting the more consensual rather than conflictual relationship between lords and tenants. While Marxist analyses of lord–tenant relations have been under sustained challenge since the 1980s, revisionist approaches have tended to focus on showing that lords' powers over their tenants were relatively weak, or that lords promoted their tenants' activities as individual economic agents.[3] This book suggests this argument should be taken even further. Manorial officeholding created a link between lord and tenants and allowed these two groups to collaborate to manage local communities for their mutual interest. The subset of tenants that served frequently as officials recognised the utility of manorial structures, both in terms of managing the community to make public governance work, but also undoubtedly in improving their own economic and social status.

While lords are often presented as having to govern through local notables as officers, suggesting a pre-existing status for these elites, it can also be argued that these elites were invested in a manorial system that bolstered their authority.[4] Office transformed a status accrued through factors such as age, masculinity, wealth, acting as an employer and longevity of a family in the community, into power that was to some extent political, and allowed elites to monitor the behaviour of their neighbours. Far from resenting the manorial system, or engaging with it reluctantly, by this token local elite tenants were beneficiaries of it, and therefore may have seen the lord as a key ally in maintaining their authority locally. There were, of course, occasions when this relationship could break down, as is evidenced on a limited scale in everyday acts of resistance such as concealment of presentments and refusals to serve, or on a larger scale by the number of manorial officials seen in the 1381 and 1549 risings.[5] However, typically the institution of manorial officeholding strengthened the commonality of objective between lord and elite tenants. Elite tenants largely did not resist limited seigniorial exactions,

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[3] Hatcher, 'Serfdom and villeinage', 7–14; Bailey, 'Villeinage in England', 451–4
[4] Dyer, 'Power and conflict', 3–4
[5] Eiden, 'Joint action', 26–8; Wood, *1549 Rebellions*, 181–2.

because they indirectly gained status and authority through the exercise of lordship via office.

The mentions of elites in the previous paragraph highlights the long history of inequality and governance of which manorial officeholding was a significant part. While studies that have begun in *c*.1550 or later have argued that this period saw a growing degree of social differentiation, leading to the creation of a new middling sort and thus dramatic social change, the evidence of manorial officeholding demonstrates that these trends are visible to some extent in the medieval period.[6] Forrest has argued bishops' reliance on 'trustworthy men' as active agents to provide information was dependent on inequality, both as a way to identify such 'trustworthy' individuals and owing to elites' capacity to provide uncontested judgements. The same arguments can be made about manorial officeholding. Most notably, manorial governance excluded certain groups, marginalising the landless and women as did the reliance on trustworthy men.[7] Even among the adult male tenants who served, a core group dominated office through repeat service. In villages with strong incentives to govern, marked by nucleated settlements and open fen commons, officers also exercised their authority in ways that promoted inequality. In this way, manorial officeholding created a set of 'chief inhabitants' who look very similar to the middling sort identified by historians of the early modern village.

This questions the degree to which state formation had a transformative impact on pre-industrial village communities. While the incorporation of local elites into the state was a novel shift that may have created a new degree of 'integration nationally', stating that it caused hitherto unseen levels of 'differentiation locally' within villages underestimates the significance of pre-existing manorial structures.[8] There is, of course, more to the theory of the rise of the middling sort than simply stronger links between local elites and the state through officeholding, such as 'participation in a literate culture', the 'language of sorts' or identification with the 'concept of gentility' and 'ideology of profit'.[9] Moreover, the level of political inequality in manorial governance systems and the extent to which they worked for elites were complex. The existence of a two-tier system suggests an element of commonality, as many adult males would serve in office at some point across their lifetimes. Moreover, in dispersed villages or

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[6] Wrightson, *English Society*, 222–7.   [7] Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*, 351.
[8] Wrightson, 'Social differentiation', 40.
[9] *Ibid.*, 40–1; K. Wrightson, '"Sorts of people" in Tudor and Stuart England' in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke, 1994), 28–51, at 36–40; French, *Middle Sort of People*, 27–8, 264; Muldrew 'The "middling sort"', 291–2, 304–5.

heavily enclosed landscapes, manorial office does not seem to have been used to meet the needs of elites. These observations concur with more cautious assessments about the middling sort made by early modernists, including Wrightson himself.[10] These note a significant amount of regional variation in the degree to which this group emerged as a result of factors including local cultures of exclusion, the power of landowners and the degree of the magistracy's involvement in poor relief.[11] None of this is to deny the rise of a middling sort as a significant historical process. However, this phenomenon should be seen as part of a longer story, stretching back to the Middle Ages, of the interaction of governing structures with varied local conditions, including landscapes and village forms, and change across time, including periods of population growth and decline.

That early modern state formation itself was fundamentally mediated through pre-existing manorially based governing structures with deep roots, and that the officers of the civil parish and quarter session were incorporated into these governing structures, has implications for thinking about the growth of 'state capacity'. This refers to the historical development of nation-states and, in particular, their ability to tax their populace, maintain law and order, and supply 'public goods' such as road networks, all of which helped promote economic growth. Noel Johnson and Mark Koyama have recently summarised this literature and highlight that England was 'precocious' in its high level of state capacity by the early modern period and especially after the English Civil War. They argue that this early development was supported by the high degree of homogeneity in the people and geography of England.[12] The findings of this book suggest that the crown's ability to build on pre-existing and developed local governance structures was also potentially significant. These provided a set of elite volunteers at the village level who were not only experienced in governing their localities but also able to channel state initiatives through long-established local institutions.

Similarly, these institutions also constrained the power of rulers. While attention has been lavished on the role of parliaments in limiting the ability of monarchs to expropriate their subjects, less has been said about the role of lower-level institutions.[13] The fact that rulers relied on local

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[10] Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, 211–14.
[11] Pitman, 'Tradition and exclusion', 43; J. Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society: the Verneys and the Claydons, 1600–1820* (Cambridge, 2004), 173–5, 192–5; Healey, 'Development of poor relief', 572.
[12] N.D. Johnson and M. Koyama, 'States and economic growth: capacity and constraints', *Explorations in Economic History*, 64 (2017), 1–20, at 3–5.
[13] J.L. van Zanden, E. Buringh and M. Bosker, 'The rise and decline of European parliaments, 1188–1789', *EcHR*, 65 (2012), 835–61; A. Henriques and N. Palma, 'Comparative European institutions and the Little Divergence, 1385–1800', *Journal of Economic Growth*, forthcoming.

231

elites and structures of governance, which were long-standing and inter-twined, but certainly not reliant on the work of states, ensured they could not override their subjects' demands. Thus the structures of manorial lordship, and their flexibility, potentially paved the way for long-term English economic development by creating a powerful but constrained state.

<p style="text-align:center">ENGLISH MANORIAL STRUCTURES AND AUTHORITY
IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT</p>

How do the English manorial structures described in this book compare with equivalents in the rest of pre-industrial Europe? This is a vital final question, as it gets to the heart of whether these structures were to some extent exceptional, and thus may have had a particular set of economic and social effects as described above. For purposes of comparison, two regions will be explored.[14] The first covers north-western and central Europe for the thirteenth to eighteenth century, and encompasses Scandinavia, the Low Countries and lands in the Holy Roman Empire. The second region covers central and eastern Europe for a slightly later period, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, during the period which has been labelled the 'Second Serfdom'. While chronologically further from the material explored in this book, this region is a useful comparator as it provides a further manorial context that is well documented. The essential features of each region will be outlined briefly and then some final comparisons drawn.

North-Western and Central Europe

Communal officials existed throughout Scandinavia, the Low Countries, modern-day Germany and Tyrol. They fulfilled a range of functions important for village life and agricultural production, including organising field systems, administering common rights, regulating land transfers, policing law and order, and monitoring misbehaviour, although exact responsibilities differed between regions.[15] Moreover, while these institutions

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[14] These regions have been chosen owing to the accessibility of English-language material on their rural communities. Interesting comparisons could, of course, also be made for southern Europe and urban communities, and it is hoped that future studies will carry out such investigations.

[15] P. Blickle, 'Conclusions' in Blickle (ed.), *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe: 13th to 18th Centuries: Resistance, Representation and Community* (Oxford, 1997), 325–38, at 328; T. Iversen and J.R. Myking, 'Peasant participation in *thing* and local assemblies, *c.*1000–1750' in T. Iversen, J.R. Myking and S. Sonderegger (eds.), *Peasants, Lords, and State: Comparing Peasant Conditions in Scandinavia and the Eastern Alpine Region , 1000–1750* (Leiden, 2020), 121–77, at 122–3; B. van Bavel, *Manors and Markets: Economy and Society in the Low Countries, 500–1600* (Oxford, 2010),

<p style="text-align:center">232</p>

have sometimes been seen as democratic and community-based alternatives to hierarchical structures, in reality they frequently worked to promote inequality and reinforce the position of peasant elites.[16] The scholarship characterises village offices in the Low Countries, Scandinavia and Tyrol as being controlled by a peasant 'elite' and Govind Sreenivasan shows that in the villages of Ottobeuren, the office of mayor, the council of four and the position of churchwarden, which controlled the communal *Gemeinde*, were dominated by the largest landholders.[17] These office-holders shaped local governance institutions to advance their own economic and social position.[18] For instance, in the Low Countries and German lands, elites excluded the landless from common rights and apportioned these rights by the size of landholdings.[19] Daniel Curtis suggests that across western Europe pre-industrial commons had no impact on reducing inequality for this reason.[20] Examining German village bylaws, Oliver Volckart has even argued that a degree of inequality was necessary for collective village institutions to function, as he suggests that wealthier peasants were willing to bear the economic costs of the sanctions necessary to maintain cartelised village activity and thus keep prices for agricultural products high.[21]

How did these institutions, and the officials who managed them, interact with external authorities such as lords and monarchs? Traditional interpretations, such as that argued by Robert Brenner, present strong communal structures and lordship as in competition.[22] This view can also be found in more recent accounts, for instance Bas van Bavel suggests that village communities in the Low Countries were in conflict with seigniorial lords and the strongest village governance structures developed in areas where lordship and manorialism were weaker.[23]

93–101; T. Scott, *Society and Economy in Germany, 1300–1600* (London, 2001), 48–9; O. Volckart, 'Village communities as cartels: problems of collective action and their solutions in medieval and early modern central Europe', *Homo Oeconomicus*, 21 (2004), 21–40, at 24–7.

[16] Blickle, 'Conclusions', 332.

[17] van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 100; Iversen and Myking, 'Peasant participation', 122; G.P. Sreenivasan, *The Peasants of Ottobeuren, 1487–1726: A Rural Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2004), 44–5.

[18] Sreenivasan, *Peasants of Ottobeuren*, 46–50.

[19] van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 100; Sreenivasan, *Peasants of Ottobeuren*, 45–6; M. De Keyzer, The impact of different distributions of power on access rights to the common wastelands: the Campine, Brecklands and Geest compared', *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 9 (2013), 517–42, at 533–7; Scott, *Society and Economy*, 48–9.

[20] D.R. Curtis, 'Did the commons make medieval and early modern rural societies more equitable? A survey of evidence from across western Europe, 1300–1800', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 16 (2016), 646–64, at 657–8.

[21] Volckart, 'Village communities as cartels', 36.

[22] Brenner, 'Agrarian class structure', 55–60; Blickle, 'Conclusions', 328–9.

[23] van Bavel, *Manors and Markets*, 94–6.

Yet, revisionist interpretations of communal governance structures argue that in many instances collaboration rather than conflict characterised the relationship between lords and the elite tenants who held office. van Bavel also highlights that local justice was exercised in collaboration with lords, through the leader of the village court called the *schout*, 'who often was both confidential agent of the lord and representative of the village community'.[24]

However, when it comes to thinking about monarchs, the elites who managed local governance institutions are frequently described as allying themselves with higher powers, including the crown and burgeoning states, as a way to resist seigniorial lords. In the Low Countries, village communities allied with territorial lords against seigniorial lords, a process which, in combination with outside options for serfs, led to the early dissolution of serfdom in this region.[25] In Tyrol, Norway and Sweden peasants similarly allied with princes to gain jurisdictional control at the expense of seigniorial lords or even the vassals who held estates of these princes.[26] Elsewhere, resistance was more about negotiation, as at the villages of Ottobeuren, where appeals to the Holy Roman Emperor were a first step in gaining concessions from their monastic lords.[27] Therefore, a brief overview of the relevant literature suggests that much of pre-industrial north–western and central Europe was characterised by village-governing structures which promoted inequality. The officials who controlled these structures could collaborate with seigniorial lords, but often chose instead to ally with greater lords and princes to resist seigniorial lords.

Central and Eastern Europe in the 'Second Serfdom'

Communal structures which regulated significant aspects of village life were also present in Bohemia and Russia under the 'Second Serfdom'. These too were controlled through communal offices, which were monopolised by the wealthiest serfs in in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at the Russian estate of Voshchazhinikovo.[28] Moreover, these officials, in both Bohemia and Russia, not only regulated tax burdens and access to land and resources, but also controlled demographic behaviour through monitoring migration, marriage and sexual activity, and were

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[24] *Ibid.*, 95.   [25] *Ibid.*, 87–101.

[26] T. Iversen and J.R. Myking, 'Summary and conclusion' in Iversen, Myking and Sonderegger (eds.), *Peasants, Lords, and State*, 178–202, at 188–9.

[27] Sreenivasan, *Peasants of Ottobeuren*, 35.

[28] T.K. Dennison and S. Ogilvie, 'Serfdom and social capital in Bohemia and Russia', *EcHR*, 60 (2007), 513–44, at 520.

thus even more powerful than officials in Scandinavia, the Low Countries and lands in the Holy Roman Empire.[29]

In terms of the relationship with seigniorial lords, Sheilagh Ogilvie and Tracy Dennison's examination of the co-dependency of communal social networks and hierarchical serfdom at the estates of Friedland and Voshchazhinikovo suggests a high level of collaboration, in opposition to the argument that weak communes explain the strengthening of serfdom east of the Elbe in the early modern era. They present a picture of a serf elite who utilised their position to enforce seigniorial authority, but also to enrich themselves via exercising this, and suggest that 'this parasitic collaboration . . . was systematic rather than incidental'.[30] Thus, they present a dualistic view, arguing that both strong lordship and strong communes worked together to maintain serfdom.[31] Lords were reliant on strong communes owing to their distance from their estates, and the large size of them, which meant that central estate officials 'were too few, too costly, and too distant' to perform much direct monitoring of village officers.[32] This made officials very powerful in their relationship with their fellow tenants. For example, as the office of headman in Bohemia was attached to a heritable landholding, lords could eject this officer but tenants had limited recourse against them.[33] On the other side of the coin, elite tenants in Bohemia and Russia were seemingly highly reliant on the manorial system for economic security and the upholding of their privileges owing to the power of lords and the lack of legal protection.[34]

Unlike in north-western and German-speaking central Europe, the local elites who controlled village communes in Bohemia and Russia had little opportunity to ally with monarchs. The more powerful position of aristocrats meant that the state devolved military and taxation obligations on to lords to organise on their estates. While many lords pragmatically left the practical organisation of levies to peasant communes, the involvement of lords presumably limited the potential for local elites to collaborate with growing states.[35] Therefore, central and eastern Europe during

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[29] *Ibid.*, 521–39.

[30] Dennison and Ogilvie, 'Serfdom and social capital', 521–40; T. Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, 2011), 129–30; S. Ogilvie, 'Communities and the "Second Serfdom" in early modern Bohemia', *P&P*, 187 (2005), 69–119, at 113–14, 118–19; S. Ogilvie, 'Village community and village headman in early modern Bohemia', *Bohemia*, 46 (2005), 402–51, at 431–3, 439–41.

[31] Ogilvie, 'Communities', 118.   [32] Dennison and Ogilvie, 'Serfdom and social capital', 529.

[33] Ogilvie, 'Village community', 408.

[34] Dennison and Ogilvie, 'Serfdom and social capital', 541; Ogilvie, 'Village community', 403–4, 413–20; Dennison, *Institutional Framework*, 43–6.

[35] S. Brakenseik, 'Communication between authorities and subjects in Bohemia, Hungary and the Holy Roman Empire, 1650–1800: a comparison of three case studies' in W. Blockmans, D. Schläppi and A. Holdenstein (eds.), *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence*

the 'Second Serfdom' was similar to north-western and central Europe in terms of the existence of communes which regulated village life and promoted inequality. However, these appear to have relied far more on strong relations with powerful lords and were isolated from princes.

England in Comparison

Comparison between local governance structures in England and those found in other parts of late medieval and early modern Europe reveals significant similarities in terms of the ubiquitous existence of a local elite which governed its community, and did this in part for its own interests. This is perhaps unsurprising as the basic functions that such local governance institutions carried out, such as keeping the peace, maintaining infrastructure, regulating land transfers and organising common rights and field systems, were integral to communal life and agriculture, and it is hard to imagine a pre-industrial village which could have coped without some system to administer these basic needs. As Wim Blockmans has highlighted, at all levels medieval communities of all sizes were capable of creating complex associations with public authority.[36] Whether such systems naturally created, or perhaps relied on, some level of inequality is a far more open question, but from the evidence explored here, the historical reality seems to be that such structures operated within a context of social hierarchy throughout pre-industrial Europe.

However, the interaction of village governors with seigniorial powers and the state varied widely, depending on the balance of power between lords and the crown, the role of individual as opposed to collective liability of tenants to lords, and the extent to which elites relied on the support of the community or lord to maintain their position. In this regard, England perhaps was to some extent exceptional. The manorial institutions found in England differed from communal village governing structures found elsewhere in that they were heavily involved in the exercise of lordship. Thus, in England manor and vill were often closely connected, as manorial courts performed many functions such as monitoring commons and policing behaviour which were in the remit of communal courts elsewhere. Therefore, this study of manorial courts does not support the thesis that village political structures were formed in areas where lordship was weaker; instead, at least in England, priorities of lords and tenants were met through the same institution.

of the State in Europe, 1300–1900 (Farnham, 2009), 149–62, at 152–4; Ogilvie and Dennison, 'Serfdom and social capital', 521–2; Dennison, *Institutional Framework*, 44–6.

[36] W. Blockmans, 'Citizens and their rulers' in Blockmans, Schläppi and Holdenstein, *Empowering Interactions*, 281–92, at 289–90.

Yet, England also did not see the same 'parasitic collaboration' between lords and peasant elites observed by Dennison and Ogilvie east of the Elbe. While those holding office undoubtedly were invested in manorial structures, their greater capacity to resist their lords and the opportunities of their fellow tenants to sanction them, alongside the wider access to office seen after the Black Death, placed them in a different position. They were less reliant on seigniorial power to maintain their position, but also more reliant on their neighbours. Moreover, the fact that manorial structures continued to be used for village governance after the decline of direct seigniorial interest in courts in *c.*1550 shows that lords were not central to the exercise of local authority through the manor in England.

Similarly, manorial structures in England were not generally used in collaboration with monarchs to resist seigniorial lords as in the Low Countries, Tyrol and Scandinavia. On the other hand, these manorial structures were also not largely excluded from the state as in Russia and Bohemia. Manorial structures sat alongside, and interacted with, structures associated with the state. This allowed elites to use structures associated with lordship (the manor) and those associated with the state (civil parish and quarter session) to achieve similar goals. Serving lords, state, local community and themselves, often all through manorial structures, seems to have been a possibility for officeholders in a way less true of systems where overlords and lords were in conflict, or the state had less direct involvement with localities owing to mediation through seigniorial structures.

Thus, the interaction of manorial officers with seigniorial powers and the state in England does seem to have some distinctive features in the particular fusing of manorial and state governing structures which allowed certain individuals to serve lord, state, community and themselves at the same time. However, such an argument must not be taken too far. As the preceding study has shown, even within English manorial structures there were significant differences across space and time, and this is obviously even more the case when considering village governance structures for the whole of Europe, meaning that the short discussion here can only present broad characterisations. Thus, the thoughts outlined here can only be speculative, and it is hoped that future studies can address this issue more precisely through adopting comparative approaches.

Returning to Swallowfield

This book began by detailing the celebrated Swallowfield Articles, and the references therein to the governing structure provided by the manorial leet and tithings even in 1596. The intervening pages have revealed

the reasons why the 'chief inhabitants' of Swallowfield, struggling with concerns over the reformation of manners and dispensing charity in a period of rising population, looked to the manor and its officeholding structures as part of the solution to their concerns. Manorial officeholding had long provided a way to govern local communities, partly stimulated by the external authorities of lord and crown, but also to meet both the needs of the community as a whole and the narrow needs of an elite, which, even if office was spread relatively widely, could still wield a disproportionate influence on the manor through the concentration of service in the hands of a few. These structures persisted even as the civil parish and quarter session became increasingly central to royal govern-ance, and thus the manor had an important role in structuring the process of state formation. If the 'politics of the parish' is an essential facet of the social history of early modern England, then the 'politics of the manor' was the essential foundation upon which this later politics was built.

238