

MICHELLE O'CALLAGHAN

The English Wits

Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England



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Introduction

To the High Seneschall of the right Worshipfull Fraternitie of Sireniacal Gentlemen, that meet the first Fridaie of every Moneth, at the signe of the Mere-Maide in Bread-streete in London.¹

Thomas Coryate's letter from Ajmer, India, addressed to the Sireniacal gentleman is one of the remaining textual traces of the convivial societies that met at the Mermaid and Mitre taverns, both on Bread Street, in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Many of the Sireniacs also appeared among the diners named in a Latin poem often given the title 'Convivium Philosophicum', commemorating a banquet held at the Mitre in September 1611, and were among the wits who gathered in print to mark the publication of *Coryats Crudities* (1611). One can trace a web of references to wits frequenting the Mitre and Mermaid on Friday nights in this period through letters, account books, poems, plays and pamphlets. These early modern societies were distinguished from more informal gatherings through their rituals of association, which provided participants with a quasi-ceremonial space for recreation, play and table talk. The term 'wits' took on a more specific meaning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that coincided with these tavern societies; its general sense as a collective noun was made particular, and attached to a distinct milieu within early modern London that cultivated a fashionable, urbane reputation. Such urbanity is the premise of Francis Beaumont's epistle from the country to Ben Jonson in the city, 'The Sun which doth the greatest comfort bring', especially when he writes of the company frequenting the Mermaid, and their convivial meetings 'when there hath been thrown / Wit able enough to justifie the Town'.²

William Gifford's once influential account of the 'Mermaid Club', 'a meeting of beaux esprits' presided over by Sir Walter Raleigh at the Mermaid tavern, and graced by the famous wits of the times – Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, John Donne, among others – has now been discredited.³ This does not mean, however, that forms of

clubbing did not take place at taverns in early modern London. There is evidence for established rituals of dining together among a group of Inns of Court friends and their associates in London from at least the late sixteenth into the early seventeenth century that went well beyond sharing the costs of a formal dinner at a tavern. Dining and drinking were accompanied by rituals of fellowship, extempore versifying and orations, and game-playing. Even though these performances were not always recorded for posterity, traces can be discerned in representations of an associational culture that met at the Mitre and Mermaid taverns in plays, pamphlets and poems from the late 1590s to the mid-1610s. Thomas Middleton's *Your Five Gallants*, performed around 1607, for example, is peppered with allusions to the Mitre and the Mermaid taverns as fashionable places to be seen among company in London; a reminder by one character that 'tis Miter-night', prompts the response, 'Masse 'tis indeed, Friday to day, Ide quite forgot'.⁴ By collectively designating a specific day and place, meetings are turned into social events that engender their own conditions and perceptions.

Clubbing is said, in studies such as Peter Borsay's *The English Urban Renaissance*, to be a predominantly post-Restoration phenomenon, heading the development of public sociability in London and the towns. Hence the famous political clubs, like the Whig Kit-Cat club formed at the end of the seventeenth century, or the later Tory October Club, or the proliferation of coffee-house societies from the 1650s.⁵ The history of sociability is seen to enter a distinct and definitive phase in the second half of the seventeenth century as it moves decisively down the high road towards the civil society of the public sphere. Peter Clark in his overview, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800*, identifies the voluntary society as one of the principal engines of urbanisation, and points to the way it gives direction to processes of economic, social and political modernisation. Earlier tavern-clubbing tends to be overlooked within this modernising narrative since it is frequently equated with a court coterie culture, and thus belonging to an older, residual aristocratic culture.⁶ Recent work on sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century communities, however, has drawn attention to the way that social and intellectual networks, including humanist fraternities at the Inns of Court and universities, as well as print and scribal communities, decisively re-shaped early modern associational life.⁷ These studies provide a framework for re-considering the place of early tavern-clubbing in the history of sociability.

The precise composition of these early convivial societies remains shadowy, except at the points where they entered into manuscript circulation,

print or other records. This is not unusual. Lists of participants in societies and records of proceedings in general were rarely made, even in the case of later seventeenth-century clubs, and very few of these have survived the passage of time.⁸ One such example is the early seventeenth-century Latin poem on the 'convivium philosophicum' said to have been held at the Mitre – 'Signum mitrae erit locus, / Erit cibus, erit jocus / Optimatissimus' ('The mitre is y^e place decreed, / For witty jests, & cleanly feede, / The betterest of any').⁹ It opens by listing the diners through a series of Latin puns. Those present included John Donne, his lawyer friends Christopher Brooke, John Hoskyns and Richard Martin, and other close friends and associates – Hugh Holland, Inigo Jones, the courtiers, Sir Henry Goodyer and Sir Robert Phelips, and the influential men of business, Sir Lionel Cranfield and Sir Arthur Ingram. Coryate played the part of the buffoon. I. A. Shapiro surmised that the list of well-wishers at the end of Coryate's letter to the Sireniacal gentlemen identified participants in this fraternity, many of whom were familiar from the Mitre *convivium*, although others, such as Sir Robert Cotton, the lawyer William Hakewill, and Jonson, were not. He concluded that there were, in fact, two societies, an earlier dining club that sometimes met at the Mitre, which subsequently developed into the Mermaid club. Participation in these convivial societies was probably much more fluid than this suggests. It is likely there was a core group of friends, probably those who were resident or whose business frequently kept them in London.¹⁰ These individuals could thus serve as the memory of the society, providing the company with a degree of stability over a period of time by retaining knowledge of shared rituals and possession of cultural artefacts, such as company seals as well as poems and songs.

The personal and professional bonds, milieux and institutions these individuals have in common give a tantalising sketch of the rich fabric of associational life in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London. The majority of those listed among the diners at the Mitre *convivium* and in Coryate's letters to the Sireniacs had entered either the Middle Temple or Lincoln's Inn, 'the auncient Allye, & friend of the midde Temple', in the last decades of the sixteenth century.¹¹ The Inns were a paradigmatic fraternity, combining men in an association held together by the bonds of civic brotherhood. They were a vital social centre in London, a place of residence for many of these men over the course of their careers, where they could meet and entertain associates during the law year or when business called them to the capital. After decades of magnificent grand revels, drama, and poetry, the Inns of Court in the late sixteenth century possessed a well-established and rich cultural tradition. Hence, Sir Benjamin Rudyard

was able to say of the 1597–8 Christmas revels, ‘Never any Prince in this kingdome, or the like made soe glorious, soe rich a shew’.¹²

Networks among the élite in early modern London traversed a range of social spaces, including the Inns of Court, royal households, civic corporations and parliament. A number of those named at the Mitre *convivium* held positions at Prince Henry’s court, including Sir Robert Phelips, Richard Connock and Inigo Jones, while Christopher Brooke’s brother Samuel was Henry’s chaplain. The predominance of Middle Temple men in the Prince’s household may be explained by the presence of a senior Middle Templar, Sir Edward Phelips. He acted as the chancellor to the Duchy of Cornwall, which was in the process of being reconstituted to maintain the Prince of Wales’s household and was a lucrative fund for dispensing favour.¹³ It could be argued these sodalities were an aspect of a patronage culture, satellites of the court comprised of ambitious young men competing for preferment.¹⁴ Advancement did play a part, but it does not fully determine their social function. Nor does it adequately account for the part played by the group of lawyer-wits, in particular, Hoskyns, Martin and Brooke, in these societies. All were admired by their contemporaries for their wit, although they now tend to be known through their more famous literary friends – Donne and Jonson.¹⁵ They are cited as the leading game-makers orchestrating the literary performances identified with these convivial societies. These lawyers enjoyed Phelips’s patronage; however, unlike their friend Donne, they did not seek employment at court or in aristocratic households. Instead, they secured their social identity in the civic realm through the legal profession, as members of parliament and through corporations such as the Virginia Company. The lawyers draw attention to the professional dimension of these societies and, in particular, the legacy of humanist fraternities at the Inns, which combined the profession of the law and letters with office in government, from the local magistrate to the privy councillor.¹⁶

These early tavern societies can be seen as early types of political clubs. They were vital spaces in which merchants, lawyers, parliamentarians, courtiers and men of letters could hold conversations on a range of issues. The political sociability practised at the tavern clubs, Pascal Brioist argues, helped to establish the foundations of the early modern public political sphere.¹⁷ Qualifications are necessary. These fraternities were not fully-fledged political clubs, and were not politically purposeful like the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century clubs, such as the Whig Kit-Cat club. The lawyer-wits did share a professional and ideological investment in the common law that was part of the wider transformation of political culture in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ And political satire was one of

the defining features of their literary table talk. Even so these societies were not political factions with coherent agendas.

The public image the Sireniacs cultivated was that of the wits, a complex collective and convivial identity that derived from their common educational background.¹⁹ Coryate called the Sireniacs a 'fraternity', a term that generally described a 'company of men entered into a firm bond of society', and also commonly denoted contemporary urban fraternities, trade or craft guilds.²⁰ When he described the High Seneschal of the fraternity, Lawrence Whitaker, as the 'inimitable artisan of sweet elegancy', it is because his craft or profession is wit; this is the basis of his intellectual capital, like the predominantly university-educated company of 'Joviall and Mercuriall Sireniacks' (*Traveller*, p. 37). These companies had well-defined rituals based on cultures of revelling at the universities and the Inns of Court and the humanist revival of classical convivial traditions. The Sireniacs looked back to the Greek *symposium* and Roman *convivium*, as well as placing themselves in the company of the drinking societies of contemporary Europe. The safe-conduct the society composed in late October 1612 to accompany Coryate on his travels to the East offers a jocular compendium of companies of 'fellow drinkers at the crystal stream' that promiscuously ranges through various Roman military companies ending with the 'Fellowship or Fraternity'. Types of events attended by these 'fellow drinkers' are similarly eclectic, from general meetings ('cœtorum') to dining ('conviviorum') and drinking societies ('symposiorum').²¹ The texts associated with the wits revive and inter-mingle classical symposiastic and convivial vocabularies to enrich the language of learned play available to them.²² Terms of association are expansive and not as fixed as they will become later in the century when 'club' comes into common usage to denote a private society.

The humanist convivial society is the setting for recreation and civil conversations. One of its models was the humanist banquet, the ultimate *locus* for Stefano Guazzo's social ideal in his *Civile Conversation*. The occasion, 'the companie and conversation of honest and learned men', is all: it designates a privileged social space, where men can be 'private and familiar', exercise good manners and engage in learned discourse, even 'to speake freeleie what he thinketh, and to call franklie for what he lacketh'.²³ The act of voluntarily entering into social contracts with one another based on trust and sodality creates a safe place for play and performance, and the discussion of philosophy and politics. Such convivial practices were intended to facilitate social exchanges among the élite and affirm social identity, designating the participants as cultivated and learned men fit to participate in the structures of governance.²⁴

The transposition of the *convivium* from the aristocratic or humanist dining table to the London tavern can be identified with the development of 'new forms of public sociability' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as part of a broader process of urbanisation, which will coalesce in the public sphere of civil society.²⁵ The *locus* of these societies was the new metropolis, the fashionable West End of London, an area between Whitehall and the City of London. Jonson is one of the earliest dramatists of this new metropolis and puts early versions of the private society on stage in the Ladies Collegiate and the 'Wits and Braveries' of his *Epicoene*. Formed outside the jurisdiction of the state in the early modern public sphere, private societies are understood to be one of the primary mechanisms in the emergence of a civil society. The 'civilizing process', as set out by Norbert Elias, is predicated upon the pacification of social spaces that finds its ideal representation in the polite refinement of the private society. The state assumes a monopoly on violence, promulgating an ethos of moderation through the discourses of *civilité*.²⁶ A difficulty with Elias's thesis is that it overlooks tensions within cultures of civility, often arising out of the persistence of older honour codes alongside *civilité*. Verbal violence is legitimated within communities of honour, even as it is recognised that it transgresses the dictates of civil behaviour, thus generating debates about its place within the public realm.²⁷

Clubbing at the Inns of Court in the late sixteenth century incorporated ritualised forms of aggression that, in fact, helped to constitute the social space of the convivial society, the arena in which social competence is produced and cultural value attributed.²⁸ The wits practised flyting, a type of verbal duelling associated with communities of honour that aggressively defined the in-group. These societies were exclusive, and developed complex vocabularies of social distinction and taste that combined the verbal violence of satire with the conviviality of banquet literature. Jonson refines this language of distinction in his early plays through game-playing as well as a satiric rhetoric of urbanity that aligns judgement with wit. By identifying his own plays and performances with humanist traditions of learned play, Jonson sought to give credibility to the professional dramatist. It was, to a certain extent, a defensive posture, a means of distinguishing himself from other dramatists and popular entertainers, such as John Taylor, who were modelling their own craft on Jonson. Coryate was a similarly troubling figure, who transgressed social distinctions through his eccentric occupations. Like Jonson, the wits had invested heavily in their intellectual capital. They used the satiric resources of the mock-encomium in the 'Panegyricke Verses' at the front of *Coryats Crudities* to set in place a

convivial language of social discrimination in order to distinguish themselves from Coryate, in the guise of the lower-class buffoon, and to place themselves above the popular print marketplace. One effect was to clarify the emerging social and cultural distinctions between the élite tavern and the lower-class alehouse, illustrated so starkly in William Marshall's 1617 engraving 'The Lawes of Drinking',²⁹ which provided the frontispiece to Richard Brathwaite's *Solemne Joviall Disputation . . . briefly shadowing the Law of Drinking*.

The inhibition of passionate and violent words in theories of the civil society has its corollary in the concentration on principles of civic rationality as the communicative basis of the public sphere. This has meant that discourses of civic humanism and public reason are often prioritised in studies of associations and communicative practices, and alternative traditions within humanism side-lined.³⁰ Laughter had a recognised and strategic role to play in religious polemic and political critique. A seminal text setting out the traditions of learned play or *lusus* for humanist audiences was Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. His letter to Martin Dorp argued that jesting was necessary because it was a vital medium for healthy frank speaking within the commonwealth: 'If you think that no one should ever speak freely or reveal the truth except when it offends no one, why do physicians heal with bitter medicines and place *aloe sacra* [holy bitters] among their most highly recommended remedies?'³¹ Serious laughter, as a medium for satire and polemic, was a much-debated topic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It raised numerous questions about the limits of ridicule and the decorum of disputation that were continually revisited but not resolved. Laughter was valuable rhetorical strategy in the forum, as Cicero pointed out, because it persuaded through an appeal not to reason but to the emotions.³² Learned play often aims to discover the limits of rational debate and favours more speculative forms of critique.

The 1597–8 Middle Temple revels, the 'Convivium Philosophicum', the 'Parliament Fart' and the 'Panegyricke Verses' before *Coryats Crudities* attest to the concerted effort to reinvigorate classically low and ludic genres, such as burlesque and the mock-encomium, and to experiment with rhetorical forms; hence Hoskyns is credited with inventing English nonsense verse.³³ Rituals of play infused the sociable practices and literary performances defining this company. The extemporised element to ritualised play permits certain freedoms and rhetorical licence, opening a space for creative manoeuvre and dissonant voices in the interstices of the cultural codes it parodies and dismantles.³⁴ The literary performances of the wits participate in the late humanist critique of the equation between the persuasive powers

of rhetoric and civic rationality that had been the cornerstone of an earlier civic humanism.³⁵ Hoskyns's mock-oration delivered at the 1597–8 revels, for example, is a witty parody of humanist oratory that by separating sound and sense, matter and meaning, rhetoric and ethics produces a type of anti-rhetoric or nonsense. The wits parody ceremonies and traditions in which they are thoroughly acculturated to create pseudo-ceremonial spaces open to improvisation – the mock-convivium at the Mitre tavern, the House of Commons in the process of censuring a fart, and the mock-encomiastic 'Panegyricke Verses' before *Coryats Crudities*. They are attracted to literary forms that are multivocal, thus open to the sounds of dissonance. Hence, the *convivium* may have offered humanist writers a paradigmatic communal space for civil conversations governed by an ethos of moderation. Yet, the pleasures of the table could easily spill over into satire, parody and burlesque, and open an extemporised space for exploring the dimensions of laughter and pleasure, imagining forms of 'uninhibited discourse', from fantastical linguistic play to satires on the Church and State.³⁶ The space for this ritualised play is the private political realm. The public forum and private table were distinguished in terms of rhetorical practices. This does not mean, however, that this 'private' space did not shape political identities or influence public debate, but rather that it was an arena with its own rules of engagement.

Coryats Crudities, along with *Coryats Crambe* also published in 1611, turns the humanist book into just such a pseudo-ceremonial space. Despite the wits' resistance to print culture, Coryate's books provided subsequent writers, editors and readers with a model of print fellowship that was open to a wider readership outside the intimate circle of the coterie. The way the publication of Coryate's travels was turned into a print event illustrates how contemporary practices of sociability structured the print marketplace. Coryate improvised a persona within the tradition of orator-buffoons. He experimented with the rhetoric of presence, helping to shape a new print genre which explored analogues for live performance through the medium of print. This rhetoric of presence infuses his travel writing to produce a discourse of sight-seeing. His travel-writing partakes of the improvisatory elements of play through its curiosity which unsettles established discourses of humanist travel from within, opening travel to different communities and other ways of seeing.

I begin with the Inns of Court in the late 1590s, an associational culture providing the lawyer-wits with the ideological resources and intellectual capital that enabled them to perform effectively across a range of social arenas from the tavern to the House of Commons. The 1597–8 Middle

Temple Christmas revels are pivotal in that they initiate a tradition of clubbing in the context of the factional libellous politics of the late 1590s. Subsequent chapters trace this culture of clubbing through the composition of the 'Parliament Fart', which coincided with James's first parliament in session from 1604 to 1610, and the performance cultures and genres of tavern poetry illustrated by the 'Convivium Philosophicum' and Coryate's promotion of his *Crudities* and his travels to the Middle East and Eastern India. The 1614 'addled' parliament appears to bring to a close this phase of tavern-clubbing. Hoskyns was imprisoned for his sharp wit in this parliament, and meetings do not seem to have been revived after his release from the Tower in 1615.

The final chapter looks forward to the immediate and longer term legacy of early tavern-clubbing. The 1620s sees the reinvigoration of clubbing: fraternities proliferated in an environment unsettled and energised by the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, court scandals, corruption trials, and the recalling of parliament after almost seven years. This is the context for Jonson's creation of the 'Tribe of Ben' and his transformation of the Apollo Room at the Devil and St Dunstan tavern into a symposiastic space. The popular 'Parliament Fart' circulated widely in manuscript well into the second half of the century. It is first printed in the Royalist anthologies *Musarum Deliciæ: or, the Muses Recreation* (1655) and *Le Prince d'Amour, or the Prince of Love* (1660). *Musarum Deliciæ* assimilates the literary play of the wits to a libertine tradition of burlesque, separating it from its humanist origins. The publication of the 'Parliament Fart' in this collection of 'drollery', a new popular print genre, attests to the process of democratising previously élite modes of sociability in the second half of the seventeenth century. The 'English Wits' and early tavern-clubbing are therefore pivotal in the history of early modern sociability in Britain.

Gentleman lawyers at the Inns of Court

The early convivial societies were shaped at a fundamental level by the fact that many of the participants had been trained at the Inns of Court. The *convivium* held at the Mitre tavern and the Sireniacal fraternity were dominated by men from the Middle Temple and its ancient ally Lincoln's Inn.¹ That the early history of the private society is closely associated with the Inns of Court derives from their status as a voluntary professional society and a physical community that brought together a body of educated, élite men. The Inns were instrumental in the Tudor civic renaissance, which witnessed the emergence of different forms of association, including the early convivial societies.² The Inns have a unique institutional status within this history of associations. Unlike guilds or the universities, they had never been incorporated by royal charter, had no legal existence as a corporate body, nor were they bound together by a written constitution. Instead their corporate identity resided in acts of living and working together as a professional fraternity, and relied on rituals and cultural fictions to bind individuals in a voluntary contract.³ The performance of contracts of fellowship began with entry into an Inn. The student was sponsored by 'two others formerly admitted of the House, [who] enter into Bond with him, as his sureties, to observe the Orders, and discharge the duties of the House'.⁴ The diarist John Manningham was bound with Hoskyns when he entered the Middle Temple in 1598, and this contracted fellowship gave him privileged access to Hoskyns's social circle. His diary from 1602 to 1603 assiduously records the witticisms of Hoskyns, Martin and the lawyer William Hakewill, noting the gossip about Sir Henry Neville's fortunes following the disastrous 1601 Essex rebellion, copying Donne's poems and paradoxes circulating among this group of friends, and joining in their libellous attacks on John Davies – Hoskyns had been bound with John Davies, a fellow student from Winchester and Oxford, but Davies had dramatically fallen out with both Hoskyns and Martin during the 1597–8 Christmas revels.⁵ When Donne entered Lincoln's Inn in May 1592, he was bound

together with Christopher Brooke; Brooke and Donne shared chambers, and remained close friends. The particular spatial organisation, professional rituals and institutional practices of the Inns thus deeply ingrained habits of *communitas*, of sharing space, of conversation, and of entering into contracts, ranging from friendships and informal fellowships to more formal obligations.⁶

The associational culture of the Inns had clearly defined ideological foundations. A civic ideology that assimilated classical humanist theories of the *polis* to the structures and practices of the legal community had begun to emerge at the Inns in the early sixteenth century. That said, it was only during Elizabeth's reign, when the Inns embarked on an ambitious rebuilding programme and hosted a succession of magnificent entertainments, that the image of the Inns as the ideal commonwealth was consolidated in the Inns' physical and cultural fabric.⁷ Hoskyns, Martin, Donne, Brooke and a number of others who participated in the early seventeenth-century societies were admitted to the Inns of Court in the 1580s and 1590s at the height of this period of institutional expansion and cultural consolidation. These men were instrumental in the promotion of civic fictions at their Inns throughout their careers, creating and executing entertainments from the Elizabethan 1597–8 Middle Temple revels to Jacobean court entertainments, magnificently exemplified by the *Memorable Masque* (1613). The distinctive civic structures and discourses of *communitas* promulgated at the Inns in the sixteenth century authorised the early convivial societies, informing their social and symbolic practices, as well as providing these men with powerful ideological resources on which they could draw as actors within and across a range of social arenas from parliament and the law courts to taverns and private tables.

That said, the 1597–8 revels are distinguished by the liberties taken in their law sports.⁸ Pressure was placed on languages of association at the Inns during the late 1590s, disclosing tensions between a masculine honour culture and notions of civility, and within rhetorical traditions. The fraught, often combative expression of *communitas* during these revels, and in satires and other poems produced within this milieu, speaks to the bitter factionalism of the late 1590s. The Inns were caught up in the libellous politics of these years as Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex struggled to regain authority at court. More broadly, the culture emerging at the Inns in this period is highly responsive to tensions within humanist rhetorical traditions.⁹ Ceremonial forms and oratorical traditions are subjected to critique in the 1597–8 Middle Temple revels. The 'clubbing' inaugurated during these revels is part of a process of experimentation and

improvisation. Its ritualised modes of play unsettle received doctrines and, through parody and burlesque, open a space for creative manoeuvre within available discourses and ceremonial forms.¹⁰

‘THE FOUNDATION OF A GOOD COMMON WEALE’

Gerard Legh’s account of the 1561–2 Inner Temple revels in his *Accedence of Armorie* (1586) is a seminal text in the constitution of the Inns of Court as the ideal commonwealth. It is not simply a description of the revels, but a careful and elaborate cultural fiction intended to define and make manifest the philosophical basis of the Inns’ customs and practices of association. Legh clearly reworks Thomas More’s *Utopia* through his traveller’s tale, thus magnifying the civic humanist and utopian dimension of its political vision.¹¹ Legh, ‘Sir Herehaught’, a foreign visitor to London, hears cannon shot calling the Inner Templars to commons, and questions an ‘honest citizen’:

He answered me, the province was not great in quantitie, but ancient in true Nobilitie. A place said he privileged by the most excellent Princes, the high Governour of the whole land, wherein are the store of Gentlemen of the whole Realme, that repaire thether to learne to rule, and obey by Law, to yeelde their fleece to their Prince and common weale, as also to use all other exercises of body and minde where-unto nature most aptly serveth, to adorne by speaking, countenance, gesture, and use of apparell the person of a Gentleman, whereby amitie is obtained and continued, that Gentlemen of all Countries in their young yeares, nourished together in one place, with such comely order, and daily conference are knit by continuall acquaintance in such unity of minds and manners, as lightly never after is severed: then which is nothing more profitable to the common weale. And after he had told me thus much of the honour of the place, I commended in mine owne conceit the pollicie of the Governour, which seemed to utter in it selfe, the foundation of a good common weale. For that the best of their people from tender yeares trayned up in precepts of Justice, it could not chuse, but yeeld forth a profitable people, to a wise common weale.¹²

Like many of his contemporaries, Legh equates the Inns of Court with the Aristotelian city state, training men to live profitably as virtuous citizens for the benefit of ‘a wise common weale’.¹³

For Legh, the Inns constitute an environment in which *civitas* artfully coincides with *urbanitas*, the cultivation of mind and manners among just men that for Cicero defined the civic strength of the republic.¹⁴ Its social type is the gentleman lawyer who combines civic office with the exercise of civility. The notion of the Inns as a place where ‘Gentlemen of the whole Realme’ gathered to learn the arts of gentle behaviour was