Citizenry and Nationality: The Participation of Immigrants in Urban Politics in Later Medieval England
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Published in:
History Workshop Journal

DOI:
10.1093/hwj/dbaa013

Publication date:
2020

Document Version:
Submitted manuscript

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

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INTRODUCTION: TOWN GOVERNORS, CITIZENS AND ALIENS

Over the past forty years, historians have debunked the assumption once widely held that political decision-making in England during the later Middle Ages was inherently elitist. In a seminal article in 1978, John Maddicott highlighted the many ways in which a politically articulate public in the localities interacted with the English central government on the level of the county.¹ Ever since, a multitude of studies have demonstrated how people below the ranks of the gentry were both politically aware and active in England during this period. The first survey of these findings, Mark Ormrod’s 1995 Political Life in Medieval England, convincingly argued that during the later Middle Ages a larger cross-section of the English population than ever before became conscious of, and responded to, national policy making.² In 2004, John Watts showed how, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, often sophisticated political ideas were widely diffused throughout all layers of English society and this awareness informed public expectations which strongly affected the actions of political elites.³ More recently, a similar line of enquiry has been pursued in relation to the division of political power in later medieval English cities and towns. In his 2017 book Contesting the City, Christian Liddy questioned the usefulness of the paradigm of urban oligarchy that has dominated the urban historiography of later medieval England since the nineteenth century, in which small and exclusive magisterial elites projected their authority onto passive and accepting town populations. Inspired by the study of so-called ‘citizen politics’ by continental historians, Liddy claims that the contestation of the power of town governors in English cities and towns was not momentary and episodic, as has so far been argued, but was the very essence of being part of the citizenry or ‘the freedom’, the community of freemen that had been
granted self-governance by the crown. In his account, urban politics in later medieval England emerges as a constant process of negotiation between changing groups of governors and the politically conscious and active commonalty, or the citizens who did not hold office. Still, even in Liddy’s more inclusive view, the social reach of citizen politics in England had its limits. Providing the main forum for urban political life, the citizenry remained a privileged minority which included very few women and none of the economically more marginal groups or the poor.

One group whose involvement in English urban politics is still virtually unknown is that of the country’s aliens or immigrants, that is, people who were resident in the kingdom but who were born abroad. The problem is not an unimportant one: the recent ‘England’s Immigrants, 1330–1550’ research project has demonstrated that, in the fifteenth century, nearly all urban centres in England were home to a significant minority of non-English residents. Estimates based on the records of the alien subsidies, a tax imposed on the country’s immigrant population between 1440 and 1487, suggest that between 1.2 and 1.5 percent of the total English population in 1440 were immigrants. Most of these foreign-born residents originated from Scotland, Ireland, France, the Low Countries and the German territories, with smaller numbers from the Channel Islands, Iceland, the Italian city-states, the Iberian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean. Only a handful of taxpayers were said to have come from outside Europe and none was identified as Jewish or Muslim. England’s immigrants were not distributed equally across the country, and the greatest concentrations of aliens were to be found in the kingdom’s cities and towns. Immigrants made up nearly 7 percent of the population of London in 1440, between 6.8 and 12.5 percent of the population of Southampton and between 10.2 and 11.6 percent of the population of Bristol. In this article I will explore how far these alien minorities were able to participate in Liddy’s political negotiation process in later medieval English cities and towns.

There is little evidence to support the recent claim by Barbara Hanawalt, developed in the context of later medieval London, that immigrant newcomers constituted a subservient and politically uneducated mass needing to be taught the norms and values of civic life by English city governors. Hanawalt assumed that these people arrived as clean slates, never considering the political capital and literacy they may have brought with them. Yet England during this period was home to many people from the Low Countries and, in specific parts of the country, from Italy, where cities
were significantly larger than their English counterparts and had century-old traditions of urban self-governance. During the fourteenth century London and other towns in England attracted hundreds of immigrants who had been exiled from Flanders for defending the civic autonomy of their communities against the centralizing tendencies of the princely authorities. Many of them had served as office holders in Bruges and Ghent, semi-independent cities which, even after the Black Death (1347–51), had over 40,000 inhabitants. England’s immigrants from Ireland, although it had less of a civic tradition, included a former mayor of Drogheda, a town with over two centuries of self-governance. In their new home country too immigrants showed a desire to be active politically. In many English cities and towns, aliens paid a fee to enter the freedom, which, as noted above, was the primary platform for local politics. Becoming a freeman or burgess was a requirement to set up in trade and sell by retail, but also to take part in political discussions, to vote and to be eligible in civic elections. Freeman status could be acquired through purchase, by inheriting it from one’s father or by completing an apprenticeship with a master craftsman who was himself a burgess. In York, twenty of the seventy-two male immigrants assessed towards the payment of the alien subsidy in 1440 (when it was first collected), or nearly 28 percent, could possibly be linked to an entry in the city’s registers of freemen. In at least thirteen of these twenty cases, the freeman would have paid to become a burgess. In Exeter (Devon), alien heads of households in the 1430s and 1440s entered the freedom only slightly less often (30 percent) than the town’s general population (34 percent) in 1377, when comparable data is available. All but one of these immigrants purchased their burgess status and many paid substantially more than the standard entrance fee. Immigrant groups in England petitioned the crown, the royal chancery, the royal council and parliament to report political problems and even organized collective actions to have their voices heard.

Yet political interest does not guarantee political participation. The question remains whether citizen politics in English cities and towns was inclusive enough to allow these politically engaged alien residents a significant part in the decision-making process or whether they were barred because of their nationality. At the end of the thirteenth century the royal government had first introduced the category of the alien, referring to anyone born outside the kingdom. Distinct from the urban category of the foreigner, which denoted those who did not come from a particular city or town, the concept was adopted in national government policy in subsequent decades.
This could result in the temporary legal, fiscal or political discrimination against immigrants as a whole or against specific groups of aliens based on their nationality: the alien subsidies discussed above, for example, were taxes imposed only on the non-English population of the realm. Yet it was never the intention of the state to create a permanent institutional binary between people born in the kingdom and those born abroad. Throughout the later medieval period, the crown continued to approach nationality in a highly pragmatic way, singling out alien groups only in very specific contexts.\(^1\) This raises the question how much of an impact nationality had in a civic political context. Was the national concept of the alien applied in urban politics or did other categories prevail? Did governors or the citizenry in English cities and towns discriminate politically against non-English residents? If so, was this discrimination permanent and generalized or prompted by the specific and volatile interests of those who happened to be in charge? I will answer these questions first by looking at the regulatory activity of city and town governments. Then I will analyse the experiences of immigrants who tried to make an impact in English urban politics. In the final section, I will assess the wider role of nationality in civic political life in England during the later Middle Ages.

### REGULATING ALIEN POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Admission to the freedom, the election of urban governors and the organization of governing bodies in cities and towns were addressed in numerous civic ordinances and other regulations. The earliest stipulations concerning the participation of aliens in any of these activities appear only in the second decade of the fifteenth century. In 1413, the mayor and aldermen of London issued an ordinance that in the future, only English-born men of English fathers could be elected as aldermen, the representatives of the wards who effectively ruled the city and from whom the mayor was chosen.\(^1\) In 1427, the common council, which represented the citizenry, excluded aliens from the capital’s political life still more by ruling that henceforth only denizens, that is, people within the allegiance of the English king, would be admitted to the freedom.\(^1\) Similar measures were taken in provincial cities and towns. In 1415, the citizenry of Norwich decided that immigrants could not be elected into any public office in the city.\(^1\) In Ipswich in 1435, it was ordained that no alien burgess would be admitted into the assembly, the meeting of the town’s freemen. In 1483, and again in 1485,
anyone born outside England was also barred from entering the freedom in Ipswich, as had happened in London nearly fifty years earlier.\textsuperscript{20}

As far as is known, no civic regulations about alien political activities were issued in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In some of the places mentioned above, immigrants even held office during this earlier period. In London, Italian pepperer families such as the Bokerels and the Romains rose to the mayoralty in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{21} In the 1370s, the vintner and financier Richard Lyons, who was probably born in Norfolk of a Flemish mother, was elected alderman in the capital.\textsuperscript{22} It is tempting to conclude from the evidence presented above, then, that English cities and towns became progressively more hostile towards the participation of aliens in citizen politics in the course of the fifteenth century. Moreover, it is striking that measures against the involvement of immigrants in urban political life were taken both in the name of the town governors and of the citizenry at large. For all the contestation that took place in English cities and towns between the \textit{probi homines}, or those deemed worthy to hold office, and the commonalty, or the remainder of the citizens, both groups were apparently united in one common cause: the exclusion of aliens. In one case, indeed, unity among the citizens was quite explicitly promoted at the expense of immigrants: the 1415 stipulation that stated that aliens could not be elected to public office in Norwich was part of the ‘New Composition’, a constitution which, after years of discord, sought to restore cohesion between the city’s \textit{probi homines} and its commonalty.\textsuperscript{23}

It is important, however, to take into account the interests of those who controlled both the government and the citizenry in those places where regulations against immigrants’ political involvement were issued. During the fifteenth century, craftsmen and merchants in English cities and towns struggled with the economic competition of outsiders. These outsiders did not necessarily all come from abroad. In London, for example, Matthew Davies has shown that the chartered companies of local craftspeople and tradesmen complained about those who came to the city and worked or sold without having been granted the freedom to do so, be they English or alien.\textsuperscript{24} At the same time, however, many petitions survive in which native artisans and merchants specifically denounced the economic activities of non-English immigrants, making clear that they perceived alien workers and traders as the most serious threat to their interests. These petitions first appeared in the early fifteenth century, also the period when the first measures against the political involvement of
aliens were taken.\textsuperscript{25} We should therefore wonder whether the ordinances in London, Norwich and Ipswich do not say more about native attitudes towards economic competition from immigrants than about their political participation. The alien subsidy records make clear that between 1440 and 1487 these three towns were home to strong concentrations of immigrant artisans and, in the case of the capital, immigrant merchants.\textsuperscript{26} Where craft guilds organized economic life, alien newcomers often had the tendency to reject their authority.\textsuperscript{27} It is no coincidence, then, that ordinances against alien political participation were issued in places where guilds had a strong impact on political decision making. In London, the companies supplied the mayor and the aldermen and elected the members of the common council.\textsuperscript{28} In Norwich, the New Composition of 1415 was agreed under pressure from the guilds.\textsuperscript{29} There is no surviving record of craft guilds in later medieval Ipswich, but its various trades and crafts had some degree of organization and coherence.\textsuperscript{30}

Often, the decisions made in these cities and towns not only excluded those competing with native artisans and traders from participation in urban political life, but also served the latter’s economic interests more directly. Denying aliens admission to the freedom prevented them from voting and holding office, but also made it impossible for them to trade retail and to engage in certain occupations in the city or town. In many cases, measures preventing immigrants from political involvement were taken in tandem with more openly protectionist regulations, such as restrictions on the hiring of apprentices by outsiders. Most of these rules not only excluded immigrants from certain activities but also gave up the citizenry’s control over them and were, therefore, largely counterproductive. In the port town of Great Yarmouth (Norfolk) the protection of citizens’ economic interests, particularly in the lucrative hostelling business, led to aliens and other outsiders being barred from joining the freedom. As a result, immigrants simply started working outside the civic franchise. As their business burgeoned, that of the citizenry contracted, forcing the latter to change its admissions policy at the end of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{31}

In some places, restrictions on the political activities of aliens of a particular nationality were introduced. In 1439, Bristol passed a decree that prohibited anyone born in Ireland from being admitted to the common council.\textsuperscript{32} Economic competition may also have inspired this decision: Bristol attracted high numbers of Irish artisans and merchants, the very occupations in which most of the citizens were engaged.\textsuperscript{33} In that same year Bristol’s craft of coopers also forbade its members to hire Irish
apprentices or servants. In 1455, the Irish merchant Henry May claimed that the mayor of Bristol refused to let his Irish apprentice join the freedom. When May opposed the town governors, he and four Irish supporters were stripped of their citizenship.

An ordinance issued in York in 1419 which prohibited ‘Scots and other aliens’ from entering the common hall and holding any civic office in the city is more difficult to interpret. Scottish immigrants were probably targeted for security reasons: having come to England predominantly to work as labourers and domestic servants, they posed little economic threat to Englishmen. Much more considerable was the military risk, with Scottish raids into the north of England continuing throughout the period. In 1415, a small English force halted the advance of a large Scottish army in the Battle of Yeavering in Northumberland. In 1419, the year of the ordinance in York, the Scots allied with the French against the English. With the threat of a military invasion looming large, York’s citizens must have found it advisable not to give Scottish residents any political responsibility within their walls. This probably explains why, in the ordinance, it was also stressed that none of the city’s confidential business could be disclosed to outsiders. It is much less clear, however, why ‘other aliens’, who would have caused no military harm, were excluded. It is possible that some within the citizenry took advantage of the security concerns about the Scots in order to discriminate against immigrants who did compete with Englishmen’s economic interests: the alien subsidy records and the city’s registers of freemen demonstrate that York was home to many non-Scottish immigrants who earned a living as specialized craftsmen. In exceptional circumstances, most commonly when the security of the entire realm was at stake, national legislation was issued that affected the political position of aliens in the localities. The most far-reaching of these measures was taken during the Glyn Dŵr revolt in the early fifteenth century. In 1400, the Welsh rebelled against the English domination of their principality and proclaimed magnate Owain Glyn Dŵr prince of an independent Wales. The revolt quickly spread over the entire principality, threatening not only English rule in Wales but also the stability of King Henry IV’s regime in England. English control was restored after 1406, but it took until 1415 to crush the final pockets of resistance. At the height of the rebellion, in the parliament of 1401–2, the English commons asked for, and were granted, a series of restrictions on the liberties of both the Welsh in Wales and those in England, who increasingly
came to be seen as a fifth column. Part of this legislation concerned Welsh participation in English urban politics: in the cities and towns of the Welsh Marches, or the borderlands with Wales, no full-blooded Welshmen, that is, men born of two Welsh parents, could henceforth be admitted into the freedom. Those who were already enfranchized had to provide evidence of their loyalty to the English king or lose their status. No resident from Wales could be elected mayor, bailiff, chamberlain, constable or warden of the ports or prisons, nor be accepted into the common councils of the Marcher cities and towns. Later in the same parliament, a second statute was passed denying burgess status, and thus the holding of civic office, to Welshmen in the whole of England.

Yet it is the response to these statutes that illustrates most tellingly how the political involvement of immigrants in English urban centres was determined by localized rather than national concerns. Situated in the Marches, the city of Chester was heavily affected by the Glyn Dŵr revolt and took additional punitive measures against the Welsh in 1402. But its economy was also strongly dependent on regular contact with Wales and many in the city were eager to maintain these ties. This led the citizens, who must also have included a number of native Welshmen, to disregard the 1401 parliamentary statutes and elect John of Ewloe as their mayor in 1405. Ewloe was a full-blooded Welshman from Flintshire, a county which, only two years before, had joined the Glyn Dŵr rebellion, and openly flaunted his Welsh identity, employing and supporting many Welsh servants and retainers. In 1408, after he had been re-elected twice, his position was contested by the constable of Chester castle, a representative of the central authorities. Ewloe was accused of colluding with the enemy and in 1409 the king suspended both men from office. In 1410, however, after the suspension had ended, Ewloe was elected mayor once again. Welshmen would continue to hold the highest civic offices in Chester in subsequent decades.

In Bristol, which was not part of the Marches but was separated from southern Wales only by the Severn estuary, the statutes of 1401 did not have much effect either: men of Welsh origin held 10 percent of all high civic offices in the city between 1390 and 1525. The contrast with Bristol’s Irish, who, as explained above, had effectively been excluded from the city’s political life after 1439 by a civic ordinance, is striking. Statements that the statutes of 1401 ‘implied that the Welsh ... could not be part of the political nation of England’, as Robert Rees Davies put it,
should, therefore, be qualified. Immigrants in English localities participated in urban political life by the assent of their co-citizens, not the English parliament.

**ALIENS IN URBAN POLITICS**

That the exclusion of immigrants from political activities was dictated by the particular interests of those who, at any given time, were in control of the town government and the freedom rather than by a generalized and permanent sentiment against alien political participation is further illustrated by the careers of immigrants holding office across fifteenth-century England, sometimes even in those places where civic regulations concerning alien involvement in urban politics were issued. In Dartmouth (Devon), the Gascon Edmund Arnold served as mayor between 1404 and 1408 and in 1414–15 and was elected to parliament for the borough four times between 1395 and 1415. Ten years before the ordinance against ‘Scots and other aliens’, the German Henry Wyman was mayor of York for three successive years, between 1406 and 1409. In Bristol, the Irishman Nicholas Devenyssh acted as bailiff in 1416–7, sheriff in 1426–7 and mayor in 1436, three years before the decree banning the Irish from the town’s common council. Southampton was particularly open to alien office holders. In the 1420s, the Irishman William Overey served as mayor twice, as alderman six times and as an MP for the town in 1426. The Venetian Gabriele Corbizzi, known locally as Gabriel Corbet, became steward in 1441, water bailiff in 1443 and sheriff in 1453. Another Italian, Christoforo Ambruogi or Christopher Ambrose, from Florence, was elected mayor twice, in 1486 and 1497.

It is no coincidence that the professional backgrounds of the alien office holders in English cities and towns were remarkably similar. Wyman was a Hanseatic merchant who traded with the Baltic. Arnold was also heavily involved in overseas shipping, as well as in privateering. Ambrose traded in Mediterranean goods, supplying to wealthy noblemen, and acted as a commercial agent for other Florentines. Corbet was a mariner serving in the wars with France first but devoted himself to both international and inland trade in the later stages of his life. Most of these men were pretty well integrated into their English communities as well. Arnold had lived in Dartmouth since 1369 and had married the widow of an Englishman. Wyman joined the franchise in York in 1389 and was married to Agnes de Barden, daughter of a former mayor of the city. Ambrose had been living in Southampton since the 1460s.
and Devenyssh had resided in England since 1394. Commercial influence and integration thus trumped nationality, at least where and when local merchants believed their town benefited more from collaboration with foreign traders than from opposition.

It is also important, however, that, apart from Devenyssh and Overey, all of the alien office holders discussed here had taken out so-called letters of denization before they started their political ascendance. Granted by the royal chancery since the 1380s, these documents bestowed upon the recipients in return for the payment of a fee a number of rights that were usually reserved for English-born people (denizens). It is not clear if and how letters of denization supported the pursuit of public office in cities and towns: they usually allowed immigrants to own real property, to sue in real cases before English courts and to pay taxes at the lower, native rates. Only one case is known in which a recipient explicitly drew on his newly-acquired denizen status for the purpose of obtaining office. Henry Market, another Hanseatic merchant resident in York, secured letters of denization in 1430 and became chamberlain, the officer in charge of the city’s finances, in 1437. In 1441, Market sought a royal writ confirming his denization, charging the mayor ‘to allow him all privileges, offices and customs in the city’.

Possibly people had opposed his ambition to run for office, referring to the 1419 ordinance. If so, the confirmation proved effective, as Market became sheriff, one of the highest offices in the city, one year later. In the other cases there is no such direct connection. Letters of denization may have made the recipients’ alien status less problematic in the eyes of their English co-citizens, but they may also simply have enabled the economic and social ascendance of the recipients, which then facilitated their election to office.

That immigrant office holders could take out denization while continuing to be perceived as aliens is clear from the case of John Wetter. Unlike most other alien office holders Wetter was not a merchant, but a taverner who had migrated from Flanders, in the Low Countries, to Lincoln. He petitioned the central government several times for denization and was finally granted papers at an unknown date in the 1430s, after having lived in England for twenty-four years. Whereas many recipients of denization letters were allowed the lower tax rates that native Englishmen were entitled to, the endorsement of Wetter’s successful petition reads that he had to continue paying ‘customs, subsidies and other dues as a stranger’.

Therefore, he was also assessed towards the alien subsidies, the direct tax on alien residents, from 1440.
onwards.\textsuperscript{63} Meanwhile, Wetter had been successful in the race for civic office: in 1435–6 he became sheriff, in 1443 mayor.\textsuperscript{64} As a result, he is the only person known both to have been in charge of the administration of the alien subsidy, which, in Lincoln, was the responsibility of the mayor, and to have been assessed as one of the alien taxpayers in one and the same year.\textsuperscript{65} The episode is quite revealing for the differences in attitudes towards the inclusion of immigrants as part of the community on a civic and on a national level: while the central authorities in Westminster believed that Wetter, after having lived in the country for over two decades, did not even meet the requirements to pay taxes as an Englishman, his urban co-citizens decided he did meet all the requirements to govern one of England’s major provincial cities.

We should reiterate, however, that, as Liddy has demonstrated, office holding was only the most visible part of English citizen politics. Like their native-born fellow-citizens, immigrants engaged with the political decision-making process of their places of residence in England in a myriad of other ways. In Salisbury (Wiltshire), the Irishman William Barbour and the Breton Peter Devereux regularly attended meetings of the assembly, which elected the officers and discussed civic matters. The Normans Bartholomew de Champs, Denis Goldsmith and John Norman subscribed to a loan which the citizenry of Salisbury made to the king in 1441–2.\textsuperscript{66} In Exeter, fourteen immigrant burgesses served as members of juries, securing the proper functioning of civic courts.\textsuperscript{67} These politically engaged aliens, too, came predominantly from artisan or merchant backgrounds. They were also exclusively male. Yet the same applied to native-born residents: in nearly all English cities and towns, women and economically marginal people were a priori excluded from the citizenry.\textsuperscript{68}

The attitude of these aliens invested in citizen politics was not necessarily one of acquiescence and tacit collaboration with the city or town governors. We have already referred to the case of Henry May, the Irish citizen of Bristol who confronted the mayor over an issue with his apprentice. His stand-off with the city government lasted for over four years and led to the withdrawal of his citizenship as well as other consequences.\textsuperscript{69} In Southampton, the Genoese Damiano de Peyso took on the mayor, John Williams. De Peyso had been a freeman of the town for fifteen years, duly paying his taxes and doing whatever else was expected of a good burgess, when, at an unspecified date, the city government ‘wrongfully and without cause’ confiscated his
stock of oil. Seeing his protests ignored by the mayor, the Genoese directly petitioned the royal chancellor with a request to correct Williams.\textsuperscript{70}

De Peyso was certainly not the only Italian in Southampton denouncing civic abuses before the royal chancery. During the early 1460s, the town was governed by a clique around John Payne, originally a Londoner. Intent on taking complete control of Southampton’s trade, Payne replaced the town’s traditional foreigner-friendly policy with an openly hostile course. He and his followers excluded foreign merchants politically, extorted money from them, denied them justice and even imprisoned them unlawfully. Unable to get redress in the civic courts, several Italian traders complained to the royal chancellor. One of these petitions eventually led to the mayor’s downfall: anxious to maintain English-Italian commercial relationships, King Edward IV broke with the usual civic autonomy in immigrant matters, deposed Payne and ordered the burgesses of Southampton to elect a new mayor in 1463.\textsuperscript{71} It should be stressed, though, that few alien residents in English cities and towns had as much political influence on the central government as the Italian merchant community. The majority of immigrants therefore relied on the citizenry and its institutions to help shape the political course of their new homes.

‘THEY SAY HE IS AN ALIEN’: URBAN POLITICS AND THE ROLE OF NATIONALITY

It thus appears that foreign nationality did not automatically obstruct immigrants from political participation in English cities and towns but that it could be relevant in citizen politics in more indirect ways. Case studies of the political crises in two of England’s major provincial towns will serve to develop this point. In October 1411, James Nicholasson, also known by the alias James Patenmaker, was elected as an MP for Lynn in Norfolk. Only a few days later, however, he and his fellow-MP John Bilney were replaced by two other citizens. The reason for the replacement of Nicholasson can be found in Lynn’s Asshebourne’s Book, a register of memoranda kept by the town’s common clerk, where, immediately after the presentation of the MPs, a testimonial letter from the mayor Roger Galion was copied in. Galion, speaking in the name of the town of Lynn, certified that his co-burgess James Nicholasson had sworn to them and was known to them only by that name, had been conceived by a woman named Catherine in Lynn and had been baptized in the town’s
St Margaret’s church. Since his birth, the letter concluded, Nicholasson had lived in the town as an honest man of good fame. 72

Apparently, people had raised doubts about James Nicholasson’s origins. These insinuations should be seen against the background of a wider crisis that involved not just his election as an MP but the political constellation of the whole town. Until the early fifteenth century, the government of Lynn had been controlled by the so-called potentiores, or the wealthiest group of citizens. Tired of the financial mismanagement and arrogance of some of these leading citizens, the mediocres, or the rest of the citizenry, joined forces with the inferiores, or the non-burgesses, and took control. In August 1411, Roger Galion, who wrote the letter in favour of Nicholasson, was elected as the first mayor representing the mediocres. In May 1412, a committee of mediocres and inferiores introduced financial and political reforms, deciding that, in the future, the mayor and major office holders had to be elected by all burgesses collectively. 73 As Nicholasson, who had joined the freedom in 1395, was elected during the mayoralty of Galion and was supported by the reformist mayor, he probably was part of the mediocres as well, or at least sympathetic to their ideas. 74 In this context, it is very likely that his replacement as an MP was the result of a counter-attack by the discredited potentiores, who had tried to disrepute him by suggesting he was an alien and not an Englishman.

In September 1412, Galion attempted to defuse the allegations against Nicholasson in a second testimonial letter. 75 At about the same time, however, the potentiores intensified their campaign. In 1413, they contended that the mediocres were guilty of the very malversations and monopolization of power they accused the potentiores of and that they admitted outsiders of little note and wealth as freemen. 76 Following the new attack, James Nicholasson accepted defeat. In June 1413, he acquired letters of denization from the chancery in Westminster. The document stated that he was ‘born in England of an alien father’. They do not say so explicitly, but the fact that the letters instructed all royal officers to henceforth treat him as an English denizen and a faithful liegeman of the king implies that some had used his father’s alien birth to argue that James, too, was an alien. 77 Yet even letters from the crown could not contain the disruption caused by the rumours and public talk that had been circulating. 78 In November 1413, the king wrote to the mayor of Lynn, complaining that Nicholasson’s property had been attacked by unknown malefactors and announcing that he had ordered the justices of the peace to do anything in their power
to restore order. By 1415, the mood had calmed down sufficiently for Nicholasson to run for office again, being elected chamberlain in the last months of the *mediocres* regime. In June 1416, the *potentiores* managed to have the new system of government revoked and things went back to what they were before 1411.

Did Nicholasson wilfully mislead his fellow-citizens? The emphasis on his mother’s roots and the omission of any information about his father in the testimonial letters suggests that he and his fellow-*mediocres* were at least aware of a potential problem. Were they concerned that his alien origins would have prevented him from making a political career? Unlike London, Norwich and Ipswich, Lynn had no legislation barring immigrants or their children from obtaining the freedom or holding office. Nicholasson had also been elected chamberlain in 1402–3, and nobody had disputed his origins then. Material advantages may have played a more significant role: between 1387 and 1405, long before his entry to the freedom and any political involvement in the town, Nicholasson had been importing and exporting wool, woolfells and materials for making pattens, or wooden clogs, through Lynn. He had done so as a denizen or native, paying national custom rates which were substantially lower than the tariffs for aliens, in the case of wool even three times as low. When, in the specific context of the developments after 1411, Nicholasson posed a threat to the interests of some of the *potentiores*, this complicated part of his past left him politically vulnerable.

The wealthiest group of citizens exposed Nicholasson’s pedigree not because of his alien origins, but because it allowed them to question his integrity. The testimonial letters written by mayor John Galion never explicitly mentioned Nicholasson’s nationality. What was emphasized strongly instead, was that he was an honest man of good fame. Christian Liddy has demonstrated that honesty and a good reputation were the most essential virtues expected from burgesses in English cities and towns. By proving that Nicholasson was hiding part of his past, the *potentiores* wanted to show, above all, that he did not have the necessary qualities to be a good citizen of Lynn (something of which, as we have seen, they also accused others), let alone to represent the town in parliament. That he benefited from the situation materially as well would also have seriously undermined the criticisms by the *mediocres* of the *potentiores’* financial malpractices. This, rather than a supposed hostility towards political participation of immigrants, explains why the revelation of Nicholasson’s alien
origins resonated so widely, leading to his replacement as an MP and an attack on his property.

Raising suspicion about someone’s pedigree also proved destructive in Salisbury in the 1460s. In 1466, John Aport Junior, a wealthy merchant and landowner, was elected mayor of the city. His hopes of serving the interests of Salisbury’s citizens, however, were immediately thwarted by a personal matter. In October 1466, twelve anonymous people had declared to the crown’s officers in Wiltshire that Aport’s father, John Aport Senior, was not an Englishman, as everyone believed, but an alien, born in Brittany. After his move to Salisbury, in 1422, John Senior had acquired twenty messuages, or houses with outbuildings and land, and subsequently held them for over forty years. As aliens in England were not entitled to own or inherit real property, he had acted against the laws and customs of the kingdom. Neither had he ever obtained letters of denization or a licence from the king which would have allowed him to take possession of the land. After his death, in 1456, the twenty messuages had been unlawfully inherited by his son John Junior who, the informants had added, was also an alien and had never taken out denization or a royal licence either. As a result, the property should be confiscated by the king.

In December 1466, John Aport Junior appeared in the royal chancery to rebut the allegations. His father was not born in Brittany, he argued, but in Poole (Dorset), some thirty miles south of Salisbury, during the reign of Henry IV (1399–1413). He himself, Aport Junior continued, was no alien either, but born in Salisbury. The whole inquest, he concluded, was ‘by sinister labour made against all conscience by persons rigorously disposed against the said John and the city’. Even though John Junior never said so explicitly, it is highly likely that, as in the Nicholasson case, the personal attack was connected to a much wider political controversy. Salisbury had a long-standing feud with the local bishop, the lord of the city, which centred around the citizens’ attempts to obtain greater self-governance and the clergy’s encroachments on civic property. In 1465, a new conflict had erupted when Bishop Richard Beauchamp had granted a plot of land which the citizens considered theirs to a man called John Swayne. The case had come before the royal council, where John Hall, Aport’s predecessor as mayor of Salisbury, had been imprisoned because of his improper behaviour towards the bishop. Revealingly, the insinuations against John Junior were made on exactly the same day that an inquest was launched into the
Swayne case and just two days before Aport was elected mayor and took over from Hall as the leader of the city’s opposition against Beauchamp. In December 1466, the chancery ordered that Aport’s twenty messuages had to be confiscated pending the outcome of a full investigation into his father’s origins. At an unspecified date in the course of this inquest, John Junior directly petitioned the king and presented a slightly different version of the facts: his father John Senior was not born in Poole in England, he stated now, but on the Channel Island of Guernsey. In strict constitutional terms, this island was not part of the English kingdom but was nevertheless still ruled by the English king in his capacity of duke of Normandy. John Junior argued that it should therefore also fall under the same laws regarding landed property and asked for the king’s grace in the case. On 13 February 1468, Edward IV issued a letter in response to the petition in which he explained how anyone born on the Channel Islands had always been considered a subject of the English king in England, not an alien. As a result, he recommended that the investigation against Aport be dropped. In May 1468, the king’s attorney presented the letter at the exchequer, the royal court responsible for property matters, which decided to restore the twenty messuages to John Junior.

As with James Nicholasson, the revelation of John Aport Junior’s non-English background had little to do with anti-alien hostility. The sources do not allow us to establish whether Aport had initially been aware of his father’s foreign birth. John Senior’s will, proved in 1456, includes bequests to churches in Poole and on Guernsey, which suggests he would at least have spent time in both places during his life. John Junior was executor of this will, and thus familiar with its dispositions. Also if he was aware, there are no reasons to assume that John Junior kept this part of his past hidden out of political calculation: no laws or ordinances are known that denied citizenship or office holding to Salisbury’s first or second-generation immigrants. As in Nicholasson’s case, material considerations will have been more important: under national legislation, the revelation of his father as an alien would have put Aport’s considerable property portfolio at risk.

The mayor’s political opponents disputed his pedigree because it allowed them to expose this property fraud, which would seriously damage his credibility as the city’s spokesperson in a property-related dispute with the bishop. In this context, the choice to portray Aport Senior as coming from Brittany, a region whose inhabitants could easily be confounded with Guernseymen but who, unlike Channel Islanders, were
unmistakeably aliens and therefore not allowed to own land in England, was highly effective. It also forced John Junior to alter his statement in court, which could have cast further doubts on his honesty and suitability as an urban office holder. In contrast to the Nicholasson case in Lynn, the attack against Aport failed, at least as far as his political support within the city was concerned: John Junior was re-elected mayor three more times between 1467 and 1470. The threat from an external enemy in the person of the bishop clearly led the citizens of Salisbury to stand firm behind their leader, whatever the outcome of the attack against him. Richard Beauchamp and his allies did succeed, however, in their wider feud with the city of Salisbury: in 1474, the citizens submitted to the bishop, having conceded on nearly all points at stake.95

Both the Aport and Nicholasson cases highlight the particular problems surrounding the nationality of second-generation immigrants. At law they were considered English denizens, but there remained a lot of insecurity about their status: there are, for example, instances in which they were subjected to the payment of the alien subsidies.96 As set out above, the governments of some cities and towns in England also issued ordinances reserving the participation in urban politics for sons of English fathers. An example that demonstrates the uncertainty concerning the status of second-generation immigrants even more explicitly than the Nicholasson and Aport stories is that of John Swolle. Swolle was a merchant and the English-born son of William Swolle, who had migrated from Utrecht, in the Low Countries, to Great Yarmouth before 1427.97 Even though he was a denizen at law, John took out letters of denization in 1437. His grant contained the habitual clauses about lower taxes and the ownership of real property, but also a stipulation which does not appear in any other denizations and suggests opposition to his activities: that he was given these privileges, ‘notwithstanding any ordinances, proclamations or statutes saying the contrary that are made because the said William [his father] was born in the parts which are called alien’.98

Possibly reaping the benefits of his new denizen status, Swolle was elected bailiff one year later, in 1438. Yet in 1439–40, his status was still not clear to everyone: he was first fined because, the Great Yarmouth borough court rolls say, ‘he was not a burgess’ but undertook activities that were reserved for burgesses, and subsequently had his fine cancelled because, it was added, ‘he was a burgess’.99 What may have further complicated John Swolle’s case, was that, during these years, there was a shoemaker in Great Yarmouth with exactly the same name, who, coming from
Guelders in the Low Countries, was a first-generation immigrant. When, in 1440, the alien subsidy was introduced, John Swolle the shoemaker was assessed. John Swolle the merchant was not assessed, but his servants, who came from the Low Countries, did have to pay. To avoid further confusion, the assessors found it better to add that they worked for John Swolle, ‘the denizen’.

However instructive these cases are for the use of nationality in a civic political setting, it should be stressed that outing the alien origins of politically active individuals, both first and second-generation immigrants, was not a regular feature of political life in English cities and towns. Apart from the ones discussed here, the only known example is that of John Breton, mayor of Bodmin (Cornwall), who saw his landed property seized by the crown in 1388–9 after it had been revealed that his father came from Brittany. Bodmin obtained the restoration of these estates upon the payment of a fee. In his case, however, there is no evidence that the revelation was prompted by issues related to urban politics. In Maldon (Essex) in 1457–8, Giles Morvyle had his house confiscated when a civic investigation brought to light that he was not from the Channel Islands, in the allegiance of the English king, as he claimed, but from Flanders, in the Low Countries. Yet, as far as is known, Morvyle had no political ambitions in the town. The same applies to Richard Johnson, a resident of Colchester who, in 1493, was suspected of having been born abroad, rather than in the town. Alien status was mobilized against individuals engaged in English citizen politics only in very specific circumstances: when, for whatever reason, they had obscured their origins and the revelation would call their honesty into question, or when it served to disable them by taking away their real property.

Also telling is the absence of explicit references to nationality in the civic sources that helped reconstruct these cases. Whereas the issues about John Aport’s father’s origins left a substantial paper trail in the records of the royal chancery and exchequer, the affair was never even mentioned in Salisbury’s General Entry Book, its ledger books or other urban records. The controversies surrounding James Nicholasson and John Swolle did leave traces in the civic documents of Lynn and Great Yarmouth. Still, it is only because they took out letters of denization, enacted on the patent rolls of the royal chancery, that we know that the nationality of both office holders was at stake. The distinction between aliens and denizens, and their respective sets of rights, was one which was made and developed at the level of the English central government. While this categorization could be employed for political
benefit in an urban context within the particular circumstances set out above, it was not a defining feature of citizen politics in English cities and towns.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this article was to establish to what extent aliens or immigrant residents were able to participate in the civic politics of English cities or towns during the later Middle Ages. It has shown that, unlike gender or economic status, alien status or foreign nationality was never a reason for people to be a priori excluded from urban political activities. These factors could be relevant, but only in second instance. What mattered most was whether or not the economic and political interests of the alien newcomers aligned with those of the people who controlled the governments and citizenries of cities and towns. When and where immigrant groups or individuals posed an economic threat to English producers and traders, the developing national category of the alien could provide a convenient tool to distinguish them from the majority of burgesses and to exclude them from the political decision-making process.

This happened in some large cities where native artisan and merchant guilds exercised considerable power, such as London, Norwich and Ipswich. Such attitudes were not necessarily permanent but depended on the economic climate of the time. In York, for example, severe restrictions on alien political participation were introduced only ten years after the German Henry Wyman had been elected mayor for three consecutive years. When office holders of alien origin opposed the political plans of others inside and outside the citizenry, their nationality could also be mobilized to damage their interests, raising suspicion about their trustworthiness or depriving them of their property base. As the cases of James Nicholasson, John Aport Junior and John Swolle showed, second-generation immigrants were just as vulnerable to these strategies as more recent newcomers.

When and where the economic and political interests of immigrant residents were complementary with those of local elites, however, they were given every opportunity to take part in the political life of their new homes. All in all, these cases were more numerous than those where aliens were excluded from citizen politics. Certainly in port towns which depended heavily on overseas connections for their economic prosperity, such as Dartmouth and Southampton, or in smaller inland centres where guilds were less powerful, such as Lincoln, immigrants engaged with citizen politics in a multitude of ways. In many of these places, well-integrated aliens were frequently
elected into the highest civic offices, while they made up only a minority of the
citizenry. If politically involved individuals with an immigrant connection were more
vulnerable to opportunism, as the Nicholasson, Aport and Swolle cases suggest, it is
remarkable how rarely this weakness was exploited. The importance of economic
influence also explains why certain national groups were more successful than others
politically: alien office holders in English cities and towns were mostly people from
the Low Countries, Italy, the German territories and, to a lesser extent, Ireland, who
came to England as merchants and skilled artisans, but hardly ever Scots, who worked
predominantly in lower-status jobs as servants and labourers. In many instances, civic
attitudes towards the political participation of aliens were more open and inclusive
than those of the national authorities. In Lincoln, the burgesses elected the Fleming
John Wetter as their mayor, who, despite his repeated petitions for denization, was not
allowed by the royal chancery to pay taxes at the same rates as English natives. In
Chester and Bristol, citizens defied national legislation against the political
involvement of Welshmen and continued to award some of the highest civic offices to
immigrants from Wales.

In exceptional circumstances, economic considerations even prompted English
burgesses to prefer an immigrant resident as their governor over a native. It is
probably no coincidence, for example, that the Florentine Christopher Ambrose was
elected mayor of Southampton after the destructive regimes of John Payne and his
followers, when the citizenry tried everything in its power to restore connections with
Italy.\textsuperscript{105} New and exciting trade opportunities were opening up in the Mediterranean
during this period, which the town’s burgesses hoped to benefit from.\textsuperscript{106} In this
context, someone like Christopher Ambrose, who could provide a bridge both to
Italian merchants visiting Southampton and to authorities in Italy, must have offered
perspectives that no English mayor could match. For the burgesses of cities and towns
in England during the later Middle Ages, the immigrants who came to live in their
midst were first and foremost prospective business partners or competitors and
potential political allies or opponents. It was these considerations that led them to
either accept or reject the alien newcomers as participants of their local political
community, and only then their foreign birth.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES
An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference in honour of Mark Ormrod in York in September 2017. I would like to dedicate this article to Mark, in recognition of his unwavering support of early-career historians over many years. I am also grateful to Maryanne Kowaleski, Jonathan Mackman, Susan Maddock, Josh Ravenhill, the participants of a HOST seminar at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and a staff seminar at Birkbeck College, and to the reviewers for History Workshop Journal for their help and advice during the preparation of this article.


6 The returns of the subsidies are part of the E 179 series at The National Archives (hereafter TNA). They can be searched in the online database ‘England’s Immigrants, 1330–1550’: www.englandsimmigrants.com (accessed 13 Dec. 2018).

7 The Jews were expelled from England in 1290, but there is discussion about whether they were completely absent from the country in subsequent centuries: W.
8 Ormrod, Lambert and Mackman, *Immigrant England*, pp. 51–70. The national figure is based on the number of aliens assessed in 1440, to which estimates of the numbers of immigrants exempt from payment of the alien subsidy were added. Estimates for the total English population in this period range between two and 2.5 million. The London figure similarly includes numbers of aliens assessed in 1440 and estimates for those exempt. The total population of the capital in this period is commonly believed to be around 50,000. In want of population data for the fifteenth century, the figures for Southampton and Bristol express the number of alien taxpayers in 1440 in relation to the total number of people who were assessed towards the poll tax in 1377 and the subsidy of 1524–5.


10 Marc Boone, *À la recherche d’une modernité civique. La société urbaine des anciens Pays-Bas au Bas Moyen Âge*, Brussels, 2010; Patrick Lantschner, *The Logic of Political Conflict in Medieval Cities: Italy and the Southern Low Countries, 1370–1440*, Oxford, 2015. Aliens from the Low Countries and the German territories, with whom the former were often lumped together, made up 18 percent of all immigrants recorded with a nationality across the country in the alien subsidy returns in 1440. Italians made up 35 percent of all aliens listed with a nationality in the alien subsidies in London in 1443 (TNA, E 179/144/52), 54 percent in Southampton in 1463 (TNA, E 179/173/133, m. 1) and 93 percent in Sandwich in 1456 (TNA, E 179/235/55, m. 1), but were virtually absent elsewhere in England.


13 TNA, E 179/217/245, mm. 2–4; Sarah Rees-Jones, ‘Scots in the North of England: the First Alien Subsidy, 1440–43’, in *Resident Aliens in Later Medieval*
In seven of the twenty cases where an immigrant could be linked to an entry in the registers of freemen the burgess status could have been inherited. In none of the twenty cases was the freeman said to have acquired citizenship through apprenticeship.

14 Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘The Assimilation of Foreigners in Late Medieval Exeter: a Prosopographical Analysis’, in Resident Aliens, ed. Ormrod, McDonald and Taylor, p. 285. Kowaleski used the 1440 and 1441 returns of the alien subsidy and a list of immigrants from the Burgundian Low Countries who swore an oath of fealty to the English crown in 1436 to identify the alien heads of household. Her analysis of the general population in 1377 is based on the poll tax returns of that year. While Kowaleski states in this study that ‘some’ aliens in Exeter would have obtained freeman status upon completion of an apprenticeship, she specified afterwards that this was in fact the case for only one immigrant, Simon le Cave of Guernsey. The children of aliens inheriting citizenship from their fathers referred to in the same study would have been born in England and would therefore not have been considered aliens or first-generation immigrants themselves (personal communication from Maryanne Kowaleski, 2 April 2020).


19 Liddy, Contesting the City, p. 198.
20 British Library, Additional Manuscripts, 30158, ff. 6b, 41b.


23 Liddy, Contesting the City, pp. 195–203.


25 Ormrod, Lambert and Mackman, Immigrant England, p. 33. The only petitions condemning the activities of immigrant craftspeople before the early fifteenth century are those by the English weavers in London in their specific conflict with the Flemish textile workers in the capital: Lambert and Pajic, ‘Immigration and the Common Profit’.

26 In London in 1449, forty-six alien merchants were assessed towards the alien subsidy: TNA, E 179/235/23. The subsidy returns for the capital in 1483 list thirty-five immigrants who were working as cappers, thirty-two as cobblers, twenty-eight as goldsmiths, seventeen as tailors and many more in other specialized crafts: TNA, E 179/242/25. In Norwich in 1440, occupations were recorded only fragmentarily, but aliens were still assessed as tailors, cordwainers, glaziers, cobblers, doubletmakers, pattenmakers and pinners: TNA, E 179/149/130. In Ipswich in 1483, twelve immigrants were found working as shoemakers, ten as tailors, nine as souters [cobblers], six as hatmakers and smaller numbers as pattenmakers, capmakers, goldsmiths and painters: TNA, E 179/180/111, rot. 6.


29 Liddy, Contesting the City, p. 45.


42 *SR*, II, 129. There is no common petition related to this statute on the parliament rolls.


52 Kermode, Medieval Merchants, p. 179.


About the professional activities of Nicholas Devenyssh we know nothing.


56 Kermode, Medieval Merchants, p. 179.


62 TNA, SC 8/86/4269. For Wetter’s other petitions, see TNA, SC 8/148/7351 and SC 8/150/7492.
63 TNA, E 179/270/32, Part 1, m. 2.

64 The History of Lincoln; Containing an Account of the Antiquities, Edifices, Trade, and Customs of that Ancient City, London, 1816, p. 181.

65 TNA, E 179/136/216, m. 2. The commission to organize the collection of the tax, endorsed by Wetter, was later detached from the inquest for 1443 and attached to the inquest of the following year, in which Wetter was also assessed as a taxpayer: TNA, E 179/136/210, m. 2.

66 The First General Entry Book of the City of Salisbury 1387–1452, ed. David R. Carr, Wiltshire Record Society, 54, 1998, pp. 36, 46–8, 50, 58, 60, 65, 78, 93, 143–4, 150, 159–63, 165, 177, 181, 183, 189, 190, 193, 196–7, 199, 203, 233, 235, 241, 244. For their identification as aliens, see TNA, E 179/196/100, rots 3d, 4d; E 179/196/105, m. 2; E 179/387/8, Part 1, mm. 4, 7.


68 Liddy, Contesting the City, pp. 22–3.


70 TNA, C 1/32/313. The outcome of the complaint remains unknown. The petition was not dated, but was addressed to the archbishop of York, who was chancellor of England from 1450 to 1454 and from 1470 to 1471. John Williams was mayor of Southampton in 1448, 1455, 1456, 1469 and 1470. This makes it likely that the incident happened in 1469 or 1470. One year later, in 1471, and again in 1472, de Peyso took out letters of denization: CPR: 1467–1477, London, 1900, pp. 236, 361. I am grateful to Josh Ravenhill for providing me with a transcript of de Peyso’s petition.


This second letter was very similar to the first but, ignoring the division in the town and making the support for Nicholasson seem more substantial than it actually was, was written in the name of ‘the whole community of the town’ and sealed with the common seal, the symbol of Lynn’s corporate body: NRO, KL C 10/2, f. 5.

Woodger, ‘Bishop’s Lynn’.

TNA, C 66/392, m. 13.


Woodger, ‘Bishop’s Lynn’. Nicholasson held no more civic offices after 1416 but continued to sit on the common council until his death in January 1421: NRO, KL C 6/5, m. 5. I would like to thank Susan Maddock for providing me with this reference.


TNA, E 122/93/31; E 122/94/8, m. 4; E 122/95/3, mm. 10–13, 21.


Liddy, Contesting the City, pp. 133–4.


TNA, E 159/245, Recorda Easter, rot. 11.
89 The case between Beauchamp and the city is analysed in detail in Fanny Street, ‘The Relations of the Bishops and Citizens of Salisbury (New Sarum) between 1225 and 1612’, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 39, 1917, pp. 230–56.

90 For these confiscations, see *Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: 1461–1471*, London, 1949, pp. 189 (original of December 1466), 207 (renewal of September 1467).

91 For the status of Channel Islanders in England during the later Middle Ages, see Ormrod, Lambert and Mackman, *Immigrant England*, p. 16.

92 Though they were made to pay the alien subsidies until November 1440: Ormrod, Lambert and Mackman, *Immigrant England*, p. 46.

93 TNA, E 159/245, Recorda Easter, rot. 11.

94 TNA, PROB 11/4/110, f. 6v–7r.

95 During the final hearing of the case between the bishop and the city before the exchequer in 1474, Aport was made to provide evidence again that he was entitled to own the twenty messuages inherited from his father: TNE, E 159/250, Recorda Michaelmas, rot. 32.

96 See, for example, John and Thomas Janyn, born in England but still assessed towards the alien subsidy in Barling in Essex in 1440: TNA, E 179/108/113, m. 4.


98 TNA, C 66/44, m. 23. The clause was included at Swolle’s request: his petition to be granted these letters contained an identical stipulation: TNA, SC 8/195/9714.

99 NRO, Y/C 4 (Great Yarmouth Borough Court Rolls), 149 (1439–40), m. 13. His name was never included in the annual lists of newly admitted freemen that were sewn into the borough court rolls from the late 1420s onwards.

100 *CPR: 1429–1436*, p. 572.

101 TNA, E 179/149/126, m. 5.


105 Nine years after Payne’s deposition, discussed above, his followers again seized power in the town. This time, they were ousted by the citizens, in 1475. Ruddock, *Italian Merchants*, p. 181.


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Abstract:
This article explores the participation of immigrants, or people born outside the kingdom, in urban politics in later medieval England. It demonstrates that the nationality of these newcomers was of only secondary importance. What mattered most was whether immigrants’ economic and political interests aligned with those of the civic political elites. If they did not, aliens’ nationality could be mobilized to exclude them from urban politics. If, however, immigrants’ activities complemented those of the urban elites economically and politically, they had every chance to engage with all aspects of civic political life and be elected into the highest civic offices.