

The Margins of Late Medieval London, 1430–1540. Charlotte Berry.
New Historical Perspectives. London: University of London Press, 2022. xl + 244 pp.
\$35.

On his popular TV program of some years ago, Mister Rogers would open by saying, “It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood.” And though Charlotte Berry’s study of late medieval London might not endorse this sanguine view of life, her turn to the marginal men and women of fifteenth-century London and the neighborhoods in which they lived leads us away from the more familiar world of a city we generally look at in terms of its wards, parishes, guilds, and mayoral elections. Neighborhoods were not homogenous entities, and they invariably included the marginal (and even the homeless) as well as the affluent and well-connected.

Two basic premises run through this book and lie behind its exposition of the rich data that was being preserved from the very moments of its creation. The sources illustrate the extent to which the neighborhoods of London were a mix of well-to-do citizens (mostly male-headed households of merchants and craft masters), of the more marginal working class, and—quite often—of the various categories of foreigners (people coming to London from elsewhere in England, perhaps as chain migrants, in addition to genuine foreigners from the Continent with their Dutch bowling alleys and names like Tuss Bolybrand). The other guiding light or premise is that the walls of the city were permeable in terms of economic and social life, and that they are guidelines to rather than barriers for a study governed by drawing out the distinctions and similarities of within and of without legal boundaries. Much of what is discussed is offered in terms of zones of the city and its suburbs or its extramural extensions, rather than in terms of its legal and political divisions, with maps and tables to endorse this approach. We see the linkage of within and without in a comparison of rents charged (and paid): North-west Without, with more people of substance and with higher rents, in contrast to North-east Without, with a less affluent population and accordingly lower rents (12).

The main bodies of material are records of rents, an analysis of last wills and testaments, and a look at the activities and findings in legal sources such as the consistory courts. If we look at the material offered by some wills, we can gauge a testator’s “sense of urban space” (74), well illustrated by maps that show the parishes or institutions, other than those in the testator’s home parish, in which a religious foundation or a fraternity was named as a beneficiary. Those who lived and were buried in St. Katherine Cree also spread their benefactions to sixteen other recipients throughout the city, and those with a home parish of St. Botolph Bishopsgate followed a similar pattern of disbursement (78). Neighborhood was central, perhaps, but bits of the city—without as well as within the walls—were also part of both one’s identity and social world.

Consistory court records let us look at how the women of the neighborhood could be victims—whether deserved or not—of gossip, bad reputation (*fama*), or forced

movement to a different neighborhood where here too they might be unwelcome: “Why did she have to leave her old neighborhood?” was often asked. It was not always easy to live in a surveillance society, and, as we would imagine, the marginal were forced to pay the price.

Berry offers a different, if not wholly novel, approach to a city that before the plague may well have numbered 100,000, inside and out. While her distinction between the explanatory value of *neighborhood* and *marginality* is not always clear, we can easily argue that the fault lies with medieval London and its diverse Londoners, within and beyond the walls, rather than with our author.

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The Rise of Majority Rule in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire.

William Bulman.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xiv + 280 pp. \$99.99.

At the base of representative government stands a custom so conventional as to seem without a history: majority voting. In contrast with consensus systems, a majoritarian system decides by and accords normative weight to vote tallies. In William J. Bulman’s telling, majority voting emerged as the dominant practice of the House of Commons at a “Turning Point,” dated to December 1642–April 1643 (120).

To be sure, majority voting had long existed in many settings and had been an established option in the House of Commons. An introduction situates voting practices historically and comparatively to frame the story as the development of majoritarian voting practices in nationally representative institutions where consensus had been the norm. This approach excludes not only numerous local and corporate entities, but also the House of Lords. It also tacitly excludes Italy, early star of the Atlantic Republican narrative. Florence merits a single reference (15n32) and the voting system of Venice, much discussed of late, is not mentioned. For Bulman, the *telos* is rather the linkage to the world historical importance of British and American parliamentary voting practices (248–49). These defined, for better or for worse, modern majoritarian norms, in turn generating and sustaining party systems and making competitive elections meaningfully majoritarian.

Using natural language processing (27n18), Bulman studies a “unique database of over 150,000 formal decisions recorded in the Commons journal between the reigns of Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II, and tens of thousands of formal decisions made in the colonial lower assemblies in the century and a half prior to the American Revolution” (4). To parse patterns, Bulman engages in a careful, sometimes vote-by-vote analysis using diaries and contemporary comments. Prior to an emergent breakdown in the traditional