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“To Free Them from Binding”: Women in the

Late Medieval English Parish Historians generally study the late medieval English parish in order to understand the Reformation. Consequently, they view the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries only as a period on the verge of major change from the perspective of later religious reform. Another hazard of letting the specter of the Reformation shadow their studies is that class and gender concerns are often subsumed under the “more important” goal of describing religious reform. In order to begin altering the static image of late medieval parishes and the undifferentiated composition of their members, scholars need to borrow concerns and methodologies from fields other than history.¹

Although literary scholars of medieval drama are influenced by the later presence of William Shakespeare, they have been successful in studying medieval drama on its own terms. In seeking to uncover the early traditions of English theater, they have discovered, in parochial records and other ecclesiastical documents, many heretofore unknown examples of local dramatic performances. Their growing list of local theatrical presentations, however, does not go far enough in asserting the dynamism of the late medieval parish; the role of drama in the parish is important in its own right, not just as a precursor to later developments. It entertained, educated, and raised money, and the sources that usually record these performances are financial ones, which permit

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1 Robert Whiting, *Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1989); Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven, 1992).

a look at the economics of individual communities and the financial consequences of staging plays and revels.²

Economic inquiry shows the rich and diverse character of parochial religious behavior prior to the Reformation. But demonstrating the economic viability of medieval theater is still not sufficient to challenge the current historical view of the medieval parish. The long-standing insight of anthropologists that religion is more than liturgy and theological discussion justifies examination of economic behavior in terms of religious practice in the late medieval parish. The expanding list of dramatic performances are part of a community's economic structure and an expression of religion as practice. Viewed from this position, English parishes become much more than staging grounds for the Reformation; they have a dynamic culture that can be analyzed for other issues, such as gender.

Influenced by such interdisciplinary concerns, recent scholarship on the late medieval English parish has increasingly focused on the corporate nature of lay parish life and worship. Not only was attendance at mass a community activity, but so was the physical care and maintenance of the church and its contents. Throughout the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, the laity increased their level of organization and involvement in their parishes.³

Unfortunately, most discussions of the resulting corporate activities are gendered male, or predominantly male, because of the difficulty of identifying women or their interests when they are excluded from public displays, or subsumed under family. Since salvation was available to both men and women, and the parish was the point of contact with the message and sources of salvation, this neglect of women's participation should not go unchallenged. Although scholars are beginning to identify corporate action by women, they have done little theorizing about gender in the parish, or what role it played in the parish's corporate

2 The University of Toronto's project—Reginald W. Ingram (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* (Toronto, 1981) (hereinafter REED)—seeks to locate and publish all surviving references to drama prior to the seventeenth century.

3 Gervase Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild," in Susan J. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750* (London, 1988), 29-55; Andrew Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval English: The Diocese of Salisbury, 1250-1550* (Oxford, 1995), 67-158; Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400-1560* (Aldershot, 1996); Whiting, *Blind Devotion*; Duffy, *Stripping*.

activities. The issue goes beyond simply asserting that parochial activities duplicated larger societal gender roles; it concerns how these gender roles were incorporated into parish involvement. What do identifiable examples of collective association by men and women reveal about their interaction? Did sex-related roles remain constant as lay involvement in the parish grew? If not, how did parishioners react when gender roles changed?⁴

In the fifteenth century, English parishes began observing a new **springtime holiday** called **Hocktide**, which lasted for two days—the second Monday and Tuesday after Easter. On Monday, the women chased the men, tied them up, and released them upon **payment of a forfeit**; on Tuesday, the situation was reversed. The parish received the **forfeit money**. The addition of feminist concerns to gender roles and women's agency found in the revels can alter the static and undifferentiated image of the pre-Reformation parish that historians typically present. Focusing on the impending Reformation obscures changes in the pre-Reformation parish that economic, anthropological, and feminist examinations reveal.⁵

Hocktide's origins are obscure; few contemporary descriptions of the festivities remain. It was thought to commemorate a victory by Anglo-Saxon women over the Vikings. According to Rossius, a fifteenth-century chronicler, people remembered the death of Harthacunute "on the day called in the vulgar 'Hox Tuisday', when they play in the villages at capturing one party with cords and with other jokes. . . ." Between 1406 and 1419, the mayor of London repeatedly forbade an activity called "hokking" carried out on the Monday and Tuesday after Easter. In 1446, when Queen Margaret was coming to London, "hokking" again was banned in an effort to clean up the city and improve public behavior for the royal visit. These proclamations linked

4 Both Duffy and Brown tend to treat gender as incidental to corporate action: Duffy, *Stripping*, 150–154; Brown, *Popular Piety*, 256–258. However, Ralph A. Houlbrooke, "Women's Social Life and Common Action in Medieval England From the Fifteenth Century to the Eve of the Civil War," *Continuity and Change*, I (1986), 171–189, and Barbara Hanawalt and Ben McRee, "The Guilds of *Homo Prudens* in Late Medieval England," *Continuity and Change*, VII (1992), 163–169, challenge the presumption of a male orientation to collective action.

5 A few communities appear to switch the days around, with the women capturing on Tuesday; other communities drop the men's portion of the events altogether. See, for example, John Payne Collier (ed.), "Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Margaret's Southwark," *The British Magazine*, 32 (1847), 493; John Ebenezer Foster (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Mary the Great Cambridge, 1504–1635* (Cambridge, 1905), XXV, 34, 35, and *passim*.

hokking with immoral behavior, gambling, and other activities that the authorities felt were too violent or inappropriate.⁶

Not until 1450 is Hocktide associated with parishes. In a letter to the almoner of his cathedral, John Carpenter, Bishop of Worcester, soundly condemned the holiday, considering it to be a “noxious corruption” and a sign of “spiritual illness.” In the process of trying to stop it, Carpenter provided its fullest description:

[For you must have known] how on one set day usually, alas, when the solemn feast of Easter has ended women feign to bind men, and on another (or the next) day men feign to bind women, and to do other things—would that they were not dishonorable or worse!—in full view of passers-by, even pretending to increase church profit but earning loss (literally damnation) for the soul under false pretenses. Many scandals arise from the occasion of these activities, and adulteries and other outrageous crimes are committed as a clear offence to God, a very serious danger to the souls of those committing them, and a pernicious example to others.⁷

The bishop demanded that all parishioners “cease and desist from these bindings and unsuitable pastimes on the hitherto usual days, commonly called “hock days. . . .” Anyone caught still participating in the holiday was to be brought before the bishop’s consistory court, the legal venue for sexual infractions.⁸

6 It is not clear which Vikings the women fought or when the battle occurred. Despite Rossius’ belief that Hocktide marked the death of Harthacunute and the accession of Edward the Confessor, Coventry celebrated it during Queen Elizabeth’s reign as a commemoration of an English massacre of the Danes on St. Brice’s day in 1012. The latter option appears to be the generally accepted explanation, although Ingram, introduction to *REED: Coventry*, notes inconsistencies in these explanations: Hocktide is a spring holiday and Harthacunute died in early June; St. Brice’s day is 13 November. John Rossius (d. 1491) (ed. Thomas Hearne), *Historia Regum Angliae* (Oxford, 1716), as quoted in Edmund K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford, 1903), I, 155 n. 1. Reginald R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London at the Guildhall: Letter-Book I (c. 1400–1422)* (London, 1909), 48, 72, 85, 124, 161, 194, 211; Henry Thomas Riley, *Memorials of London and London Life in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London, 1868), 561, 571; Journal of the Court of Common Council, IV, fol. 73v., Corporation of London Record Office. Shannon McSheffrey is responsible for this reference.

7 David N. Klausner (ed.), *REED: Herefordshire and Worcestershire* (Toronto, 1990), 349–350, 553–554.

8 *Ibid.*, 553–554.

These early descriptions suggest that women were involved in the holiday, but none of them state categorically that women were its primary celebrants. Not until the holiday began appearing in parish financial records were the separate roles for men and women visible and consequently open to analysis.

Antiquarians, struck by the sexual nature of Hocktide's activities, have used such words as "quaint," "merry," "amusing," and "sportive" to describe the holiday. Chambers, in his classic study of medieval drama, ends his discussion of the holiday with the dismissive statement, "The central incident of 'hocking' appears therefore to be nothing but a form of that symbolic capture of a human victim of which various other examples are afforded by village festivals." Current scholarship is more interested in the financial aspects of the holiday. Hutton recently described the holiday as a "great moneyspinner," and Brown referred to it as a "ubiquitous" way of raising money.⁹

Upon closer examination, none of these descriptions are adequate. They either respond to the titillating descriptions of the festival's activities, or else they ignore the issue of gender by discussing the holiday in terms of parish finances. They do not look at how it gave women an economic role in the parish that exposes assumptions about the interaction of the sexes. Both approaches, however, still allow for comments on women's unexpected successes at the holiday's end. "The ladies always appear to have been more successful than the men on these occasions."¹⁰

Recent treatments of Hocktide are usually subsumed under more general descriptions of courtship rituals, youth culture, and May Day celebrations; in many respects, these were similar kinds of holidays. Neither Hocktide nor May Day commemorated ecclesiastical occasions; both fell in the spring; and both dealt with sexual concerns. A more systematic survey of Hocktide reveals, however, that it usually took **place in town or borough parishes**, and that the principal actors were usually **married couples or**

9 J. Charles Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1913), 65; Francis A. Gasquet, *Parish Life in Mediaeval London* (London, 1906), 242; Charles Kerry, *A History of the Municipal Church of St. Lawrence Reading* (Reading, 1883), 239; Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I, 158; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), 59-60; Brown, *Popular Piety*, 84.

10 Kerry, *A History*, 239.

women, not the youth typically involved in May Day celebrations.¹¹

The holiday's function as a source of income drew upon assumed practices of parochial organization and administration. Yet, looking specifically at how this holiday was celebrated shows that often invisible, or assumed, gender roles were playfully dissolved and then rebuilt in the course of the festivities. As Davis has argued, games involving sexual role reversal and separate male and female activities expressed a number of communal concerns: They "gave a more positive license to the unruly women"; they affirmed a traditional ordering of sexual relations during times of change in the "distribution of power in family and political life"; and they negotiated the world outside of the parish and reinterpreted it through a prism of local concerns.¹²

Hocktide served as a controlled way of examining and reaffirming traditional gender roles in the face of the changing social dynamics that accompanied the growing visibility and influence of the parish in late medieval England. It was a carnivalesque holiday that upset **male–female relationships**; women captured men, tied them up, and forced them to pay for their freedom. As others have argued, games and rituals of inversion played during periods of misrule were ways of calling attention to, defining, and preserving the status quo.¹³

11 Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York, 1986), 188–267; George C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), 353–401; Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 261; Gasquet, *Parish Life*, 241–244; Christopher R. Cheney, "Rules for the Observance of Feast Days in Medieval England," *Bulletin for the Institute of Historical Research*, XXXIV (90) (1961), 117–147.

12 Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," in *idem*, *Society in Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1965), 143–147; 150; Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule," in *ibid.*, 103, 109.

13 I agree with Clive Burgess that work toward salvation was often a collective or corporate effort. In "'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented': An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Late Medieval England," in *Parish Church and People*, 56–84, he argues that voluntary support for the parish and its endowments manifested an interest in salvation, not yet another financial burden on an already resentful and over-taxed laity. The collective needs of the parishioners combined with their responsibilities to the parish to create a forum for salvation "self-help." Houlbrooke, "Women's Social Life," states, "Yet certain economic and social functions were largely reserved to them [women], and some of these brought them together in sizeable groups, arguably facilitating the development of independent common opinions" (171). These two approaches open the way for a discussion of women's specific religious concerns and their active participation in the parish.

Nonetheless, women also derived status from participating in Hocktide. Under its auspices they organized themselves, raised money, and then purchased items that the community needed. The holiday reasserted women's secondary status, but it also expanded their opportunities for participation and influence within the parish. The abolition of Hocktide in the Reformation marks the loss of an opportunity for critiquing social order. In another example of what Burke has termed the "triumph of Lent," the reformers stressed social conformity and deference to authority, replacing what they saw as disorderly and exuberant displays.¹⁴

The division of Hocktide into male and female halves need not be understood simply as conflict between the sexes. Parishes sponsored gender-related activities for married couples because conviviality, gender identification, and life stage—which all figure in the Hocktide celebrations—were also important concerns for parish communities. The holiday had no single meaning within parish culture; instead, it offered a way to locate the intersection of a number of issues relating to local religious participation. Hocktide forces us not only to read gender back into parochial life, but also to assess how concerns surrounding it were inherent in parochial interaction.

The rise of Hocktide came at a point when the parish was increasing its influence in late medieval English society. In the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, bishops focused more and more on the quality and form of religious practice at the local level, which involved episcopal demands for greater lay responsibility in supporting and maintaining parish churches. As the laity began organizing in an effort to meet these obligations, a variety of institutions external to the parish were also confronted with the parish's new position. Towns, monasteries, and cathedrals had to enter into competition with parishes for financial resources and political influence. Common law could not recognize a parish as a corporation even when it acted like one, and canon law was ill-equipped to cope with the economic contingencies that in-

14 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 192–194, 200, 207; Sally-Beth MacLean, "Hocktide: A Reassessment of a Popular Pre-Reformation Festival," in Meg Twycross (ed.), *Festive Drama* (Cambridge, 1996), 233–241, generously provided to me in an early version.

creasingly occupied parishioners as they worked to keep up their churches.¹⁵

The growth of the parish's presence in the legal, social, and religious landscapes of England was accompanied by a parallel growth in its self-awareness as a unit of association. The increased mandates for parish support required internal administration. Parishes repeatedly negotiated the volatile issues of class and gender by regulating seating arrangements, recording pious gifts in bed rolls, and arbitrating petty disputes.¹⁶

Women usually supported their parishes by performing duties in keeping with their status and roles within the family and society. Individual women were generally responsible for mending altar clothes, washing and mending vestments, sometimes cleaning the church, and providing flowers and rushes for decorations. Women also fed parish workers, even providing lodging for artisans hired by the community to work on the church.

The parish was unusual in that it offered women opportunities for collective association, on either a temporary or permanent basis. After the birth of a child, churching brought women together for their own liturgical celebration. By the late fifteenth century, women in some communities, were forming their own parish guilds, which supported side altars or chapels dedicated to

15 Charles Drew, *Early Parochial Organization in England: The Origin of the Office of Churchwarden* (York, 1954); Emma Mason, "The Role of the English Parishioner: 1100–1500," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XXVII (1976), 17–29; Burgess, "'Fond Thing Vainly Invented'"; Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild"; Kümin, *Shaping of a Community*, 1–53.

The laity's duties were expanded in the fourteenth century to include provision of such liturgical items as mass books and vestments. Mason, "The Role of the English Parishioner," 7–9; Drew, *Early Parochial Organization*, 6–11; Brown, *Popular Piety*, 49–66; David Gary Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: The City of Wells in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), 255–260; Rosser, "The Cure of Souls in English Towns Before 1000," in John Blair and Richard Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), 267–284; Fredrick Pollock and Frederic Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* (Cambridge, 1968; 2d ed.), I, 490–504, 560; Robert Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), 142–149; John H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History* (London, 1990; 3d ed.), 136–138; Richard M. Wunderli, *London Church Courts on the Eve of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 20–23; Brian Woodcock, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Courts* (London, 1952), 30–36. Parishes began turning to the new equity courts for legal redress.

16 Drew, *Early Parochial Organization*, 6–14; Margaret Aston, "Segregation in the Churches," in William J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *Women and Religion* (Oxford, 1990), 237–294; Hanawalt, "Keepers of the Lights: Late Medieval English Parish Guilds," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, XIV (1984), 21–37; Duffy, *Stripping*, 153–154, 334–337.

St. Mary or St. Margaret. The introduction of permanent seats, during the same period, placed women together on one side of the church and men on the other when they attended mass or other services.¹⁷

Large-scale renovations and other major building projects sometimes induced women to organize themselves to help raise money. During the three-year rebuilding of St. Petrock's Church in Bodmin, Cornwall, the maidens banded together and raised money for the church. In Walberswick, Suffolk, c. 1495, the wives of the town contributed 9s. for new glass windows, and in 1497, the maidens collected 2s. 10d. for a new painting of the popularly venerated King Henry VI. Hocktide was not the only parish activity that afforded women the opportunity for collective action on behalf of the parish community and their own salvation. It was unusual, however, to the extent that the specifics of its celebration explicitly called upon women.¹⁸

Although women's involvement in local religion was secondary, it was apparently on the rise. As the parish assumed a greater role in local society, women's functions within the parish grew commensurately. Outside the parish's confines, women had few opportunities for leadership or institutionalized influence. The examples of women serving as churchwardens and guild wardens, however, shows that the limits of sex-related behavior were expanded with respect to parochial involvement.¹⁹

As a new holiday, Hocktide not only reflected issues of social change; it embodied them. By overturning and restoring expected relations between men and women, Hocktide provided a means of responding to concerns about women's growing influence within the parish and the changes in gender roles that it brought. Locating the origins of Hocktide in the distant past helped to tame

17 Houlbrooke, "Women's Social Life," 174.

18 John J. Wilkinson (ed.), "Accounts for the Building of Bodmin Church: 1469-1472," in *Camden Miscellany VII* (London, 1874), 5, 10; FC 185/E1/1, fos. 241, 249, Suffolk Record Office (Walberswick CWA).

19 Judith Bennett, "Public Power and Authority in the Medieval English Countryside," in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, 1988), 19-21. The known examples of female churchwardens are to be found in the west country dioceses of Bath, Wells, and Exeter. Gasquet, *Parish Life*, 105-106; Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 6-7; French, "Local Identity and the Late Medieval Parish: The Communities of Bath and Wells," unpublished Ph. D. diss. (Univ. of Minnesota, 1993), 220-223.

the volatile issues of the sexes acting out of form. The increased influence of women was perceived as an old and familiar concern, not a new threat or sudden change.

Parishes used the holiday to raise money and reflect on the nature and form of women's parochial support and involvement. Women's commitment and success had implications for their relations with men. Collective action created moments of solidarity, and raising and spending money for the church created a physical analog of their sentiments.

The women of Walberswick or Bodmin could see in their churches the results of their combined efforts. As the moral arbiter of sexual and marital behavior, the Church was now offering parish women two messages: The first urged them, as always, to be good wives and support the parish. The second message, however, potentially undermined the first. By letting women run Hocktide, earn money, and make purchases, the Church was encouraging them to exercise their own financial and cultural prerogatives. These concerns ultimately helped to reconcile, or served to exacerbate, the sometimes contradictory ideas of required parochial involvement and gender roles.

With the exception of the descriptions cited earlier, information on Hocktide comes from churchwardens' accounts, which record in detail how the laity raised and spent money to support their parishes and show how Hocktide fits into local parish culture. Many of these sources trace Hocktide's earliest celebrations and subsequent growth and financial success. Only in those accounts that date from the sixteenth century does Hocktide appear as an already established holiday, predating the earliest surviving records. The churchwardens' accounts show not only the introduction of the holiday into the parish calendar, and its place among other parish activities, but also reveal its geographical distribution.

Although Hocktide was a recognized feature of the parish calendar, it was not celebrated in every community. From its earliest appearances in the fifteenth century to its abolition during the Reformation, Hocktide appears most often in or near towns rather than in rural communities; two parishes in London celebrated it, as did those in Reading, Salisbury, Westminster, and Canterbury. At least thirty-one of the parishes with surviving pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts celebrated Hocktide at

least once. Geographically, these communities are concentrated in central and southern England.²⁰

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Hocktide had a wider popularity than what the churchwardens' accounts alone reveal. In 1549, Shrewsbury's Hocktide activities led to tragedy when two men seeking refuge from the women hid in a cave that collapsed upon them. Coventry also had an unusually elaborate Hocktide festival. The city first held what probably became the annual Hock Tuesday play in 1416. As the city's *Annals* noted, "The pageants and Hox Tuesday [were] invented, wherein the King and Nobles took great delight."²¹

Bishop Carpenter's letter notwithstanding, the earliest identifiable parishes to celebrate Hocktide were St. Margaret's in the London suburb of Southwark, and All Hallows in London Wall. Both communities started celebrating Hocktide sporadically by the 1450s. The addition of Hocktide to an increasing number of parish calendars appears as part of a general expansion of parochial celebrations initiated in the fifteenth century. The churchwardens' accounts from St. Margaret's in Westminster show that other celebrations had increased in scope before the first Hocktide collection in 1497. In the 1480s, the parish began purchasing more church decorations for the feast of St. Margaret, and the St.

20 The initial appearance of Hocktide in town parishes intimates features particular to borough rather than rural communities. Cities, especially London, were trendsetters. Urban gender roles were in a greater state of flux because of economic opportunities and a more mobile population.

Because the survival rate for churchwardens' accounts is sporadic and fragmentary, any assessment based on them is tentative. Only about 250 sets of churchwardens' accounts predate the Reformation, the majority of which come from parishes in southern and western England and around London. The activities of northern parishes will not be well represented in any survey based on these records. For a nearly complete list from the fourteenth century to 1670, see Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, 263–293, and for his list of pre-Reformation parishes that celebrate Hocktide, 60, n. 55–57 and 87, n. 94.

21 Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I, 154–156; Ingram (ed.), *REED: Coventry*, xx, 7. Many of the original documents for Coventry are now lost, but they were partially copied in the early nineteenth century by Thomas Sharp in *Illustrative Papers on the History and Antiquities of the City of Coventry* (Birmingham, 1871). This play is quite celebrated among scholars of medieval and early modern drama. See Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I, 154–156; Ingram (ed.), *REED: Coventry*, xx. Charles Phythian-Adams—"Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year at Coventry 1450–1550," in Peter Clark and Paul Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns: 1550–1700* (Toronto, 1972), 57–85—argues that the prominent role given to women at Hocktide was an attempt to include them temporarily in events from which they were ordinarily excluded. Hocktide provided an outlet for tensions built up in a restrictive social and communal structure.

George's procession was already sporting a dragon. By 1512, the parish maidens also had their own collections for the chapel of St. Margaret. The growth of women's parochial involvement kept pace with the general growth of lay parochial activism.²²

The holiday created a certain amount of unease. In addition to the controversy concerning the sexual nature of the festivities, the financial resources generated by women's collective actions at Hocktide brought confusion to the parish community as well. Changes in the form of the celebration throughout the years suggest a careful negotiation between maintaining standards of behavior and recognizing the community's varied interests in the holiday.

At first, some communities included a Hocktide supper for the women. It did not become a permanent feature; nor was there a dinner for the men. When St. Mary at Hill in London first celebrated Hocktide in 1498, the parish contributed 16*d.* "for iij ribbes of bieff to the wyven on hokmonday & for ale & bred for them that gaderyd." The next year, there were only two ribs of beef, and in 1500 only bread and ale. The women continued to celebrate Hocktide thereafter, but the parish no longer provided a dinner.²³

Two years after Kingston-upon-Thames started its celebrations, the parish paid 12*d.* for "mete and drynke at Hocktyde." In 1510, St. Edmund's in Salisbury paid 3*s.* 10*d.* for a meal for the women "on the day of 'le Hockes." Since the women had brought in only 4*s.*, the celebrations did not raise much money that year. Twice after the women of St. Giles', Reading, took over the Hocktide festivities, the parish hosted a supper for them. Although, the cost of the supper was much less than what the women had earned, it, too, disappeared from descriptions of the celebrations.²⁴

22 Collier (ed.), "St. Margaret's, Southwark," 493, 495; Charles Welch (ed.), *The Churchwarden's Accounts of the Parish of All Hallows, London Wall, in the City of London* (London, 1912), 4, 7, 20, 23, and *passim*. Hutton erroneously attributes the first parish Hocktide celebration to 1468/1470 in the parish of St. Mary the Great in Cambridge (*Merry England*, 60). Drew, *Early Parochial Organization*, 14–16; Richard W. Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1970); Hutton, *Merry England*, 49–68; E1, fos. 260, 286, 290, 370; vol. 2, no folio numbers, Victoria Library Archives (St. Margaret's, Westminster CWA).

23 Ms. 1239/1, pt. 1, fos. 159, 164, 179, London Guildhall Library (St. Mary at Hill CWA).

24 KG2/2/1, fo. 24, Kingston Borough Archives (Kingston-upon-Thames CWA); Henry James Fowle Swayne (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Edmund and St. Thomas, Sarum: 1443–1702* (Salisbury, 1896), 57; Walter L. Nash (ed.), *The Churchwardens' Account Book for the Parish of St. Giles, Reading* (1518–1546), I (Reading, 1881), 40, 46.

The early inclusion of a feast suggests that parishes initially reacted to the women's activities as they did to the collective actions of a parish guild. Guilds earned money to support the parish or one of its endowments and sponsored an annual dinner for the membership. As Rosser recently wrote, "[f]easting and drinking were in the Middle Ages regarded as defining activities of the guilds." The annual dinners, which could range from simple to extravagant, fostered new social relationships. The meals integrated members of otherwise disparate social backgrounds into the community of the guild and allowed for the development and expansion of common ideas and attitudes.²⁵

That the suppers did not remain a part of Hocktide suggests that the holiday and its attendant activities did not sit comfortably with assumptions about community activities. The capturing and binding united the women in comic reenactment of their shared experiences with men. A subsequent feast might have rallied them further, expanding the atmosphere of conviviality and solidarity to one of defiance. If such a situation persisted, it might have permanently undermined the relations between men and women that the Church was bound to uphold. The feast loomed as such a potent forum that the parish could not afford to let it become a fixture of the holiday revelries, lest it lose control of them. Solidarity among women had to be channeled into more acceptable directions that would reestablish women's interests within traditional limits of behavior.²⁶

Hocktide needs to be viewed within the cycle of revels and celebrations already under the **aegis of parish fund-raising**. As it became a regular feature of the calendar, it earned more money, and women's financial contributions became a greater portion of parish revenue. In the pre-Reformation church, parishes employed a variety of strategies to raise money. All communities depended, to some degree, on individual pious contributions. Town parishes often took advantage of burgage tenure—the purchase of houses for renting out to tenants. Parish entertainments were yet another category of fund-raising, from modest affairs—

25 Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England," *Journal of British Studies*, XXXIII (1994), 432–433 (quotation on 431).

26 Houlbrooke, "Women's Social Life," 171–175. The lack of a male dinner and the accepted male dominance of parish administrations imply a certain wariness on the part of the male establishment. Nonetheless, even though men and women were separated sometimes both physically (church seating) and emotionally (churching), they also shared common goals for the community.

small church ales held in the church-house that earned only a few shillings—to more elaborate ones with hired actors and minstrels that attracted large profits. Parishes did not restrict themselves to one kind of entertainment; they were willing to sponsor a number of such activities.²⁷

Parish gatherings, which involved drinking and feasting, took place on ecclesiastical holidays. Such occasions, which constituted a vibrant part of local religious culture, encouraged donations to support the parish and its endowment. The 1499 churchwardens' account for St. Edmund's, Salisbury, recorded that parish coffers "receyved of diverse wiffes and maydens to save tham from byndynge in hok Tuysday in alle this yere—5s." For the wardens of St. Edmund's, this kind of communal interaction was a manifestation of pious devotion. As a later account stated, money came from the "devocyon' off the pepull apone hoke tewsdays."²⁸

The level of women's participation in parish fund-raising is directly related to their economic resources and their position within medieval society. Women generally had fewer economic options and lower status than men. More occupations were open to men than women, and women commanded lower salaries than men for the same work. Men were also the heads of the household and in control of whatever property and resources that their wives brought to the marriage. Consequently, both as individuals and as family members, **men were able to contribute more money and labor to the parish than women.**

Hocktide momentarily reversed these trends. When women organized into a coherent group with the playful goal of capturing the men and raising money for their parishes, **they breached their usual sex roles.** Although the end of the day restored normal relations between men and women, the parish permanently benefited from this temporary mock upheaval. But the money that the women were able to raise for the parish did not disappear with the end of the period of misrule. In this respect, the holiday

27 Evidence for parish fund-raising activities can be found in most churchwardens' accounts. For more discussion, see Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, 83–112; Brown, *Popular Piety*, 83–91; Burgess and Kümin, "Penitential Bequests and Parochial Regimes in Late Medieval England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XLIV (1993), 610–630; French, "Parochial Fund-Raising in Late Medieval Somerset," in *idem*, Gary Gibbs, and Kümin (eds.), *The Parish in English Life: 1400–1600* (Manchester, forthcoming).

28 Swayne (ed.), *St. Edmund*, 50, 66, 70, 71.

permitted both a temporary and a permanent expansion of women's power and influence within the community.

Hocktide was often paired with one of a number of male-oriented celebrations within the parochial fund-raising calendar—the most popular being May Day, which communities celebrated in different ways, such as with a King play, May Day dance, or Robin Hood revel. It was also the feast of SS. Philip and James, and some parishes held an ale in their honor. The two winter celebrations for men were a Christmas or New Year's collection called Hogling and Plow Monday, the first Monday after Epiphany, which inaugurated the growing season. Linking Hocktide to male festivals tended to associate it more explicitly with women, often making a men's Hocktide collection unnecessary. However, parish sponsorship of male-centered entertainments was no guarantee that the community would also hold Hocktide.²⁹

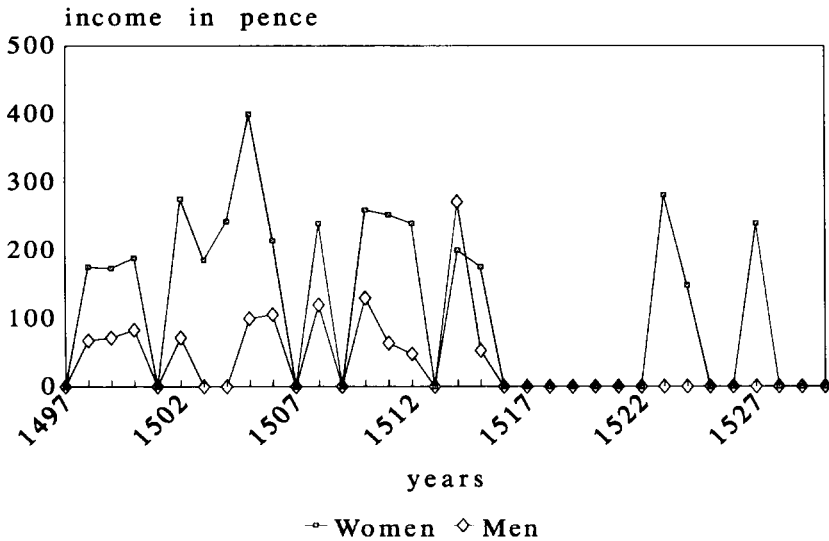
General trends emerge when the financial successes of Hocktide are compared with those of other festivals. Income levels are consistent, suggesting that parishes enjoyed Hocktide, and women were committed to running it. It brought in less money than May Day, but was more successful than the winter holidays. Similarly, when both a men's and a women's Hocktide collection took place, the women's half consistently earned more money than the men's. In the London parish of St. Mary at Hill, the women consistently raised two to three times as much money as the men (see Figure 1). The same situation prevails in other parishes, such as St. Mary's in Lambeth, Kent.³⁰

In St. Michael's, Oxford, and St. Giles', Reading, Hocktide evolved as a women's holiday paired with a male-focused Whitsun celebration. Both communities used these festivals to supplement parish rents, the primary source of income. The first surviving churchwardens' account for St. Giles' (1518) shows both a profitable Whitsuntide King play and a Hocktide collection, spon-

29 Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I, 172–175. Many antiquarians falsely assume that Hocktide and Hogling, or Hognels, are the same festivity because of their similar sounding names. See James Stokes, "The Hogners: Evidence of the Entertainment Tradition in Eleven Somerset Parishes," *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset*, XXXII (1990), 807–816; Hutton, *Merry England*, 12–13, 16–17, 50, 75, 87–89. The seventeenth-century depositions cited by Stokes suggest that, when these communities revived Hocktide, they conflated the two holidays as well.

30 Drew (ed.), *Lambeth Churchwardens' Accounts, 1504–1645, and Vestry Book, 1610* (Lambeth, 1940), 14, 18.

Fig. 1 St. Mary at Hill, London, Hocktide Income



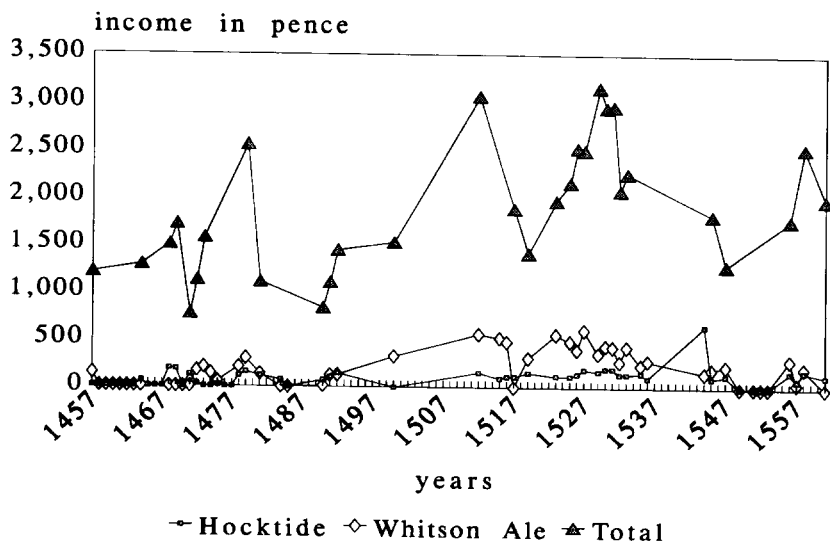
SOURCE Ms. 1239/1, pt. 1 and pt. 2, London Guildhall Library (St. Mary at Hill CWA).

sored by the men. Hocktide disappeared from the accounts after 1520, only to reappear again in 1526 with the parish wives in charge. The men's Hocktide collection never returned. It was at this point that the parish experimented with holding a wives' supper. In Oxford, St. Michael's started a male-run Whitsun ale in 1457 and added the women's Hocktide celebration in 1464. Not until the 1470s did either festivity become an annual or significant source of income. Together, both festivals in both parishes contributed between 15 to 20 percent of the parishes' annual income, but Whitsun regularly earned twice as much as Hocktide (see figures 2 and 3).³¹

Kingston-upon-Thames in Surrey celebrated Hocktide along with the popular, but sporadically held, Robin Hood revels and Mummers' dances. Comparison of the erratic, though higher,

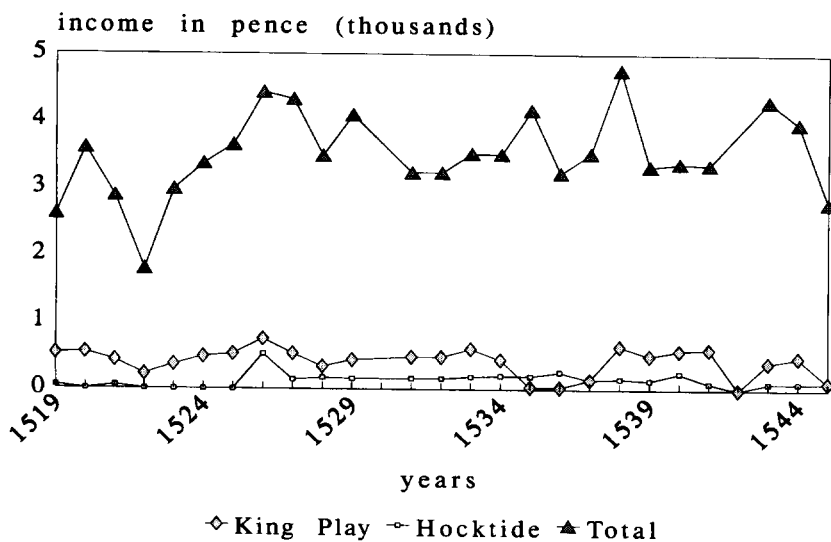
31 Nash (ed.), *St. Giles, Reading*, 3, 4, 12, 32, 39, and *passim*; Herbert E. Salter (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Michael's Church, Oxford* (Shipstone-on-Stour, 1933), 50, 61-102. In Henley, the King play was an older celebration, and it lasted longer than Hocktide (Phyllis M. Briers [ed.], *Henley Borough Records: Assembly Books 1-4: 1395-1543* [Oxford, 1960], 58, 125, 147, 189, 198, 204).

Fig. 2 St. Michael's, Oxford, Hocktide Income



—◆— Hocktide —◇— Whitson Ale —▲— Total
 SOURCE Herbert E. Salter (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Michael's Church, Oxford* (Shipstone-on-Stour, 1933).

Fig. 3 St. Giles, Reading, Hocktide Income



—◇— King Play —◻— Hocktide —▲— Total
 SOURCE Walter L. Nash, *Churchwardens' Account Book for the Parish of St. Giles, Reading* (Reading, 1881).

income from Robin Hood celebrations with Hocktide's consistent but lower income levels suggests that the latter was a more local event, drawing on the skills and resources immediately available to the parish women. The Robin Hood revels required more planning and greater organization. The effort to produce them demanded a level of commitment that may have been necessary only when the parish needed extra income to finance a large project, such as a new bell tower (see Figure 4).³²

In Boxford, Suffolk, the parish celebrated both Plough Monday and Hocktide. The Hockpot, as the Hocktide ale was called, generated more enthusiasm and greater profits, regularly earning more than £2, or 25 to 45 percent of the annual total income. Although the point is not made explicitly in the churchwardens' accounts, Hocktide's economic stability and importance would have given women a prominent role in this parish (see Figure 5).³³

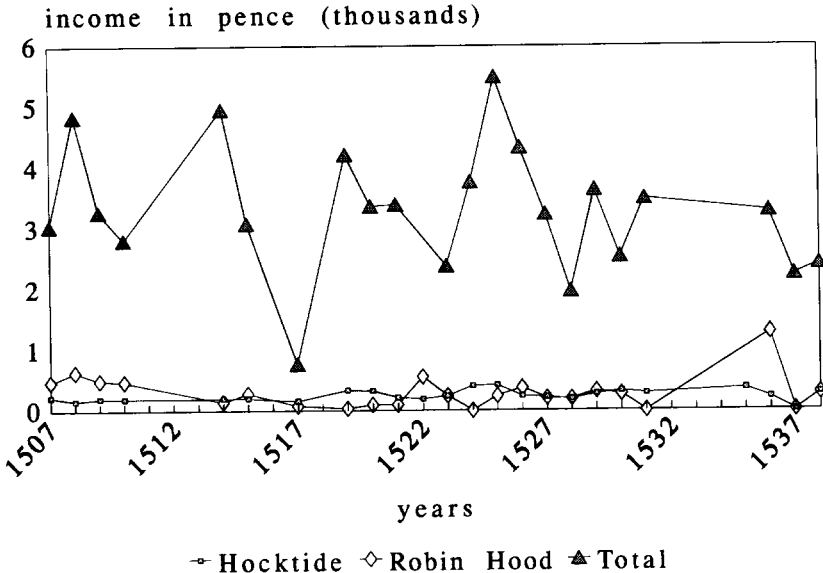
These trends are all duplicated in one unusual parish. Croscombe, in central Somerset, was distinctive for a variety of reasons. The parish sponsored numerous entertainments throughout the year, three of which were specifically for the parish men. Also unique to this community was the fact that the parish youth, not married couples, ran the Hocktide celebrations. As in other parishes, however, the Croscombe maidens earned more money than the young men at Hocktide; they also collected more than the married men's Christmas Hogling collection. But the maidens could not compete with the mens' occasional Robin Hood revel (see figures 6a and 6b); nor was there any occasion for the wives of the parish to organize and raise funds for the parish. In 1483, the wives held a dance, but it did not lead to other parish activities for married women. The preponderance of parish activities explicitly for men emphasizes the secondary nature of women's economic involvement in this parish. Hocktide came only once a year, and its successes were reserved for the unmarried women of the parish.³⁴

32 KG2/2/1, fo. 64, Kingston Borough Archives.

33 Peter Northeast (ed.), *Boxford Churchwardens' Accounts: 1530-1561* (Woodbridge, 1982), xiii.

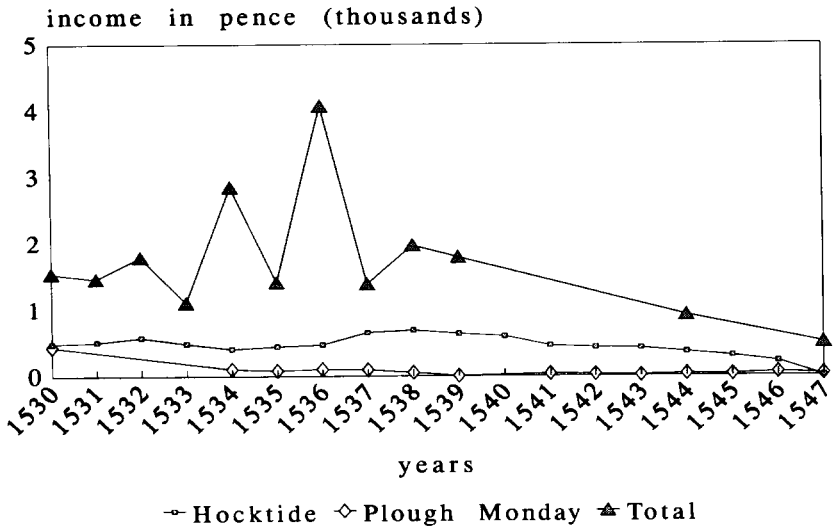
34 Edmund Hobhouse (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts for Croscombe* (London, 1890), 1-43; the originals are missing.

Fig. 4 Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, Hocktide Income



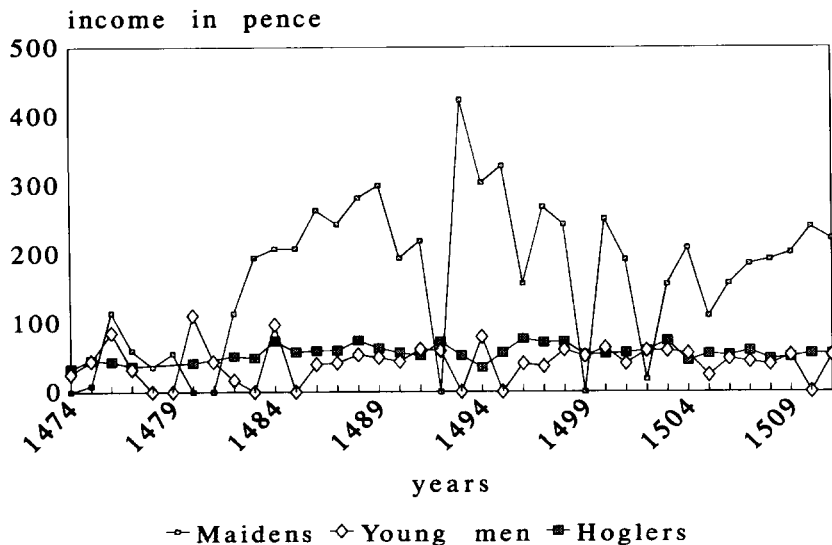
SOURCE KG2/2/1, Kingston Borough Archives (Kingston-upon-Thames CWA).

Fig. 5 Boxford, Suffolk, Hocktide Income



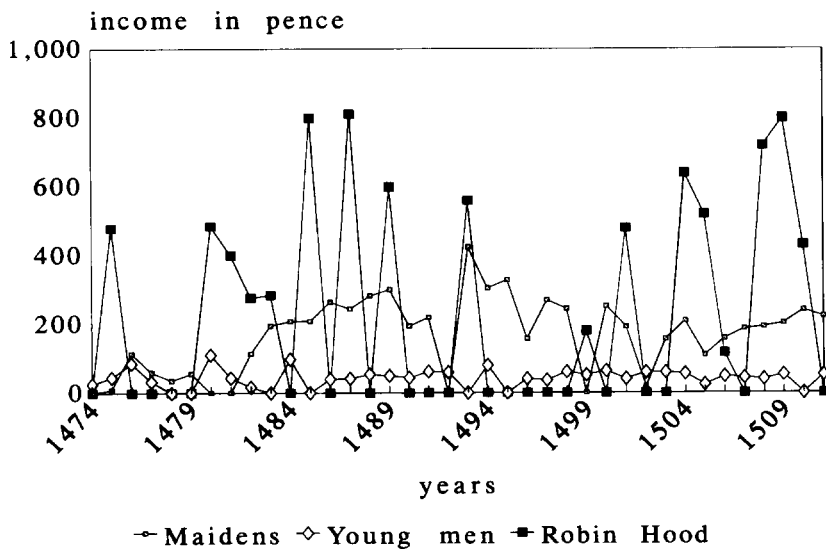
SOURCE Peter Northeast (ed.), *Boxford Churchwardens' Accounts: 1530-1561* (Woodbridge, 1982).

Fig. 6a Croscombe, Somerset, Hocktide Income



SOURCE Edmund Hobhouse (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts for Croscombe* (London, 1890).

Fig. 6b Croscombe, Somerset, Hocktide Income



SOURCE Edmund Hobhouse (ed.), *Churchwardens' Accounts for Croscombe* (London, 1890).

The financial heights of the women's collections has elicited surprise from many scholars. One possible explanation for it lies in the economic resources available to late medieval men and women. Men had more money. The forfeits that the women exacted from the men that they caught at Hocktide were higher than the ones that the men could expect when the tables were turned. Both collections relied on some form of involvement by women. When the women were not paying for their own release, they were attracting donations from the men. Although the women may have had to depend on the greater resources of the men for their donations, they still had to use their own wiles and charms to get them. This was not a scattershot attempt to make money but an effective method of fund-raising. Separating the sexes linked fund-raising with sexuality and ways of influencing members of the opposite sex.³⁵

The repetition of these trends in different communities helps to separate the local economic concerns from the general themes that the holiday addressed. In strict economic terms, Hocktide served as a means to augment income, but it did not compete successfully with the other springtime holidays that also increased parish resources. Only in Boxford was Hocktide a major source of revenue.

Too many financial demands at the same time meant that parishioners had to choose which activities to support. The added splendor of drama, costumes, and music that accompanied Robin Hood revels and King plays gave them a financial advantage over Hocktide. The relative weakness of Hocktide, compared with the male celebrations, underscores women's more limited economic options. Nonetheless, Hocktide could still earn upward of 15 to 20 percent of a parish's annual income. Steady returns also show sustained support for the holiday among the parishioners, particularly the women.

Hocktide provided women with leadership opportunities and gave status to those who participated. Usually the women in charge of Hocktide were members of prominent families in the parish and the wives of either current or past churchwardens. In 1523, the wives of the current churchwardens for the London

35 Kerry, *History*, 239; Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 261; Gasquet, *Parish Life*, 242-243; Herbert F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (London, 1919), 61.

parish of St. Mary at Hill turned over £1 3s. 6d. in Hocktide money to their husbands, in the manner of parish guild wardens. Implied in this transaction is responsibility for the prior organization needed to manage money. In one case, the woman in charge of Lambeth's celebrations even refused to turn over the Hocktide proceeds to the wardens. The women did not erase their debt to the community until the following year.³⁶

In All Hallows', London, Hocktide never earned much money—only 3 to 5s.—but the organizational skills that the women gained were applied to other circumstances. From 1482 to 1483, when the church was undergoing major renovations, the wives of the current churchwardens organized a collection to help pay for work. They also contributed £2 for the building of the church in 1527/1528 and another £2 to the glazing of the windows the next year. The women's most obvious contributions first came under the guise of Hocktide and later continued with greater success at other occasions, as the community saw fit.³⁷

At St. Margaret's in Westminster, which enjoyed both male and female Hocktide collections, prominent couples ran the Hocktide festivities. In 1498, the parish "received of Maistres Bough, Maistres Burgeys, and Maistres Morland for Hokkyng money—3s. 4d [and] received of Maister Bough, Maister Morland, and Maister Rabbi for Hokkyng money—16s. 7½d." Both Morland and Bough were described as gentlemen and former churchwardens, who would continue to serve the parish. Information from the next year's account suggests that the revels, or collections for Hocktide, were also based upon competition between wards or streets within the parish. Mistress Morland "& hir company" contributed 5s. 1d. "for hokking money"; Mistress Hachet "& hir company" gave only 3s. 10d. Both of these groups

36 In 1518, Mistress Sabyne, Mistress Halhed, and the other wives of St. Mary the Great in Cambridge collected 20s. on Hock Monday (Foster [ed.], *St. Mary the Great*, 34). Mistress Sabyne was the widow of an alderman (44); Mistress Halhed's husband was one of the parish auditors, and a collector for the Easter wax and other gatherings (16, 17, 20, 31). In the 1537–1539 account for St. Andrew's, Lewes, the parish received 20s. in hock money from Thomas Pokell's wife. Pokell had been churchwarden in 1536 (Michael Whitley [ed.], "Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Andrew's and St. Michael's, Lewes, from 1522–1601," *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, XLV [1902], 47). Of the fifteen named maidens' guild wardens for Croscombe, six of them are related to the churchwardens (Hobhouse [ed.], *Croscombe*, 1–43). Ms. 1239/1, pt. 2, fo. 488, London Guildhall Library; Drew (ed.), *Lambeth Churchwardens' Accounts*, 21, 25, 29, 30.

37 Welch (ed.), *All Hallows', London*, 24, 56, 59.

were outdone by Walter Gardener's wife and the women of her neighborhood who earned 13s. As were the Boughs and Morlands, the Gardeners and Hachets were well-to-do families.³⁸

Although Hocktide gave the parish a chance to focus on women's expanded opportunities, the community's use of the money raised by them reinforced expected gender concerns. The money earned from Hocktide was usually absorbed into the parish's general income. The churchwardens' accounts of how the community spent the Hocktide money, however, allows a possible identification of the concerns and interests particular to women.

In St. Mary the Great in Cambridge, a portion of the Hocktide revenue eventually went to support a light in the church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In 1518, the women also raised money outside the confines of Hocktide for the same light, as well as for a new tabernacle for the St. Mary statue. In 1535, when there was no Hocktide collection, the women still collected 37s. 6d. for St. Mary's light. Other parishes used Hocktide income to support women's devotions. The Hocktide collection for St. Mary Steps in Exeter went to the "damelight." In both St. Edmund's and St. Thomas' of Salisbury, some of the revenue went to the "wiefes light." The maidens' guild in Croscombe contributed part of its earnings to a maidens' light.³⁹

Hocktide money not only went to support lights, but also to provide needed furnishings for the church. In 1497, the women of St. Edmund's in Salisbury spent their Hocktide income on new windows for the church. In 1509, at St. Margaret's in Westminster, the Hocktide proceeds purchased a new banner for St. Margaret. In 1532, the women of St. Martin in the Fields in Westminster spent the money they raised on a satin altar cloth and two curtains.⁴⁰

38 E1, fo. 361, Victoria Library Archives. Bough and Morland, both gentlemen, lent the parish money on at least one occasion. Bough was a churchwarden from 1474 to 1476 and again from 1484 to 1487 (E1, fos. 361, 380, 421, Victoria Library Archives). Mistress Hachet's husband or father was a warden from 1480 to 1482, and Walter Gardener was warden from 1498 to 1500 (E1, fos. 171, 351, 380, Victoria Library Archives).

39 Ingram (ed.), *REED: Cambridge*, I, 91; Foster (ed.), *St. Mary the Great*, 34, 82; DD70914 and DD70915, Devon Record Office (St. Mary, Steps CWA); Swayne (ed.), *St. Edmund*, 79, *St. Thomas*, 274-275; Hobhouse (ed.), *Croscombe*, 21.

40 Swayne (ed.), *St. Edmund*, 47, 365; E1, fo. 574, Victoria Library Archives; John V. Kitton (ed. and trans.), *St. Martin-in-the-Fields: The Accounts of the Churchwardens, 1525-1603* (London, 1901), 31 (originals destroyed in World War II).

Women's pious concerns reflected their domestic spheres of influence. Within their families, women spun wool, washed and mended the clothes, and dressed the children. The purchase of altar clothes and banners for side altars dedicated to women saints reflected the same interests. Furthermore, altars to SS. Mary, Margaret, or Elizabeth served as comfort to women facing the uncertainty of childbirth or the fear of infertility. Hocktide, with its clear-cut gender roles and its emphasis on male and female sexual contact, incorporated women's concerns about marriage and their dealings with men into local religious life.

The disposition of Hocktide money also raises several questions about the relationship between the women's Hocktide association and more permanent ones, such as guilds. As the disappearance of the Hocktide suppers suggests, women's collective action during the festival did not achieve the kind of formal status as that of the parish guilds. It was an opportunity for women to support a preexisting endowment, or add a wives' light to a chapel or altar. Neither the women nor the parish seem to have been setting up a new or separate foundation to be maintained by a continuing order or corporation. Any money that the women raised for their lights was funneled through the parish and its administrative apparatus. Nor did the wives' support of a light dedicated to the Virgin Mary preclude other (male) parishioners from contributing to the endowment. Hocktide remained under the control of the parish, which dispensed some of the proceeds into endowments catering to women. This arrangement helped reorder the "topsy-turvy" world created by Hocktide.⁴¹

Until the Reformation forced a rearrangement of the parochial calendar, Hocktide remained a regular and popular part of yearly celebrations. St. Michael's, Oxford, and St. Mary's, Lambeth, dropped it when Edward VI acceded to the throne, revived it during Queen Mary's reign, and stopped it again with the accession of Elizabeth. Those that brought it back in Mary's reign did so with little sign of dampened enthusiasm; revenues immediately returned to their pre-Reformation levels.⁴²

41 Duffy, *Stripping*, 149. At St. Mary the Great, Cambridge, Robert Smith gave £1 "for our ladys wax" in 1539 (Foster [ed.], *St. Mary the Great, Cambridge*, 92).

42 One exception, St. Mary at Hill, stopped celebrating Hocktide in 1527 (Ms. 1239/1, pt. 2, fos. 524, 545b, 559, London Guildhall Library). Drew (ed.), *Lambeth Churchwardens' Accounts*, 69–70; Salter (ed.), *St. Michael's*, 214–231. In the 1660s, some parishes attempted to

The city of Coventry kept its Hock play until reformers prevailed in 1561. The city renewed it in 1566 and in 1573 for Queen Elizabeth. The prominent role of women at a time of budding nationalist sentiments generated much enthusiasm for the play. In a letter describing the event, Lanehame, a member of the court, wrote, "And for becauz the matter mencioneth how valiantly our English women for loove of their cuntree behaved themselves: expressed in actionz & rymez after their maner, they thought it moought moove sum myrth to her Maiestie. . . ."43

The demise of such festivals as Hocktide ended a forum for women's local leadership, organization, and collective action, and one of the most visible ways that women could financially support their parishes. Protestants sought to strengthen respect for authority, while emphasizing humility and penance. They distrusted the familiar and chaotic displays of Hocktide or May Day to which they ascribed pagan roots and popish themes. Family dues replaced ales, revels, and plays as sources of parish fund-raising. The abolition of saints' cults and other elements of pre-Reformation religious life also affected both male and female interaction with the parish. The opportunities for women's solidarity that originated in the late medieval parish were erased, and women's actions within the church more closely mirrored their position outside it.⁴⁴

By the late Middle Ages, participation in religious life included a whole range of other parochial activities beyond receiving the sacraments. Parish participation involved pious work for the benefit of one's soul, which pertained to both men and women. Consequently, when the laity tried to import the gender roles of society into the parish, they did not exactly fit. The development of parish responsibilities had inadvertently broadened women's horizons and made relations between men and women less clear. Women's growing influence challenged their

revive Hocktide. See David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley, 1989), 19–20; Hutton, *Merry England*, 87.

43 Ingram (ed.), *REED: Coventry*, xx, 273.

44 John J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), 61–84; Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England: 1500–1720* (New York, 1993), 1–97; Duffy, *Stripping*, 478–503; Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, 83–112.

inferiority to men and placed individual women in positions of authority. Parishioners had to find a way to reconcile expected gender roles with actual parochial experience.

The most popular image of Hocktide exploits its reputation for titillation, voyeurism, and lawlessness. In 1622, a woman testified in court that a Wiltshire man tried to induce her to commit adultery with him as part of his own personal Hocktide revival. He told her that “he must bind her [and then] they would do as their forefathers had done.” Moving beyond this legacy and learning what this holiday meant to those who celebrated it entails the question of how issues of sexual relations combined with concerns for parochial support in the context of the late medieval parish.⁴⁵

Because the celebration of Hocktide was an occasion to flirt with, and perhaps even engage in, surreptitious physical contact with someone else’s spouse, it implicitly and explicitly provoked parishioners’ anxieties about fidelity, dominance, and sexual relations within the context of marriage. The Church, as the arbiter of moral behavior, was committed to upholding proper behavior between the sexes and between spouses. The parish tried to assure an appropriate outcome for each sexual interaction by providing a moral context for the issues expressed in Hocktide.

Adapting an economic analysis of the pre-Reformation parish in light of more recent literary and anthropological approaches shows Hocktide as a new holiday that mixed concerns for the status quo with the changing role of the parish and the opportunities that it offered men and women. In its fund-raising capacity, Hocktide drew upon accepted parish activities, but as a platform for women, and an occasion of unusual visibility and financial import, it allowed communities to explore temporarily the outer bounds of expanding gender roles, before quickly retreating to familiar mores. Sexual relations, the foundation of medieval gender roles, were inextricably linked to issues of communal participation and local religious involvement.⁴⁶

45 Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987), 251.

46 I am not arguing for either equality or a golden age for medieval women, only for a change in their opportunities and an increase in their visibility. See Bennett, “Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide,” in David Aers (ed.), *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (Detroit, 1992), 147–175.