

### **Parish office-holding: some sceptical reflections**

In the last thirty years, the reappraisal of early-modern parish office-holding has been associated with all of brokerage, the middling sort and state formation ('incorporation'). More recently, the competence of, for example, constables has been rehabilitated against the aspersions contained in contemporary drama, at least in the City of London. We should, nevertheless, not completely dismiss the critique from the literary world. Efficiency was not the paramount concern, although concentration on Shakespeare may convey that impression. Other dramatists, such as Middleton, Jonson, and Massinger, articulated different, inter-related criticisms: partiality; venality; illiteracy; and the social status of the bearers of office leaving them susceptible to browbeating. Obviously dramatic representations, yet the characterizations should not be dismissed in retaining some nuanced approach to central-local relations in which amateur, elected (conscripted) status combined with distance could compromise relationships.