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'Imagined Families': Research on Friendly Societies

Bentley Gilbert's view, expressed in 1966, that 'friendly society membership was the badge of the skilled worker', was largely accepted in the 1970s and was bolstered in the 1980s by studies of the artisanate of mid-Victorian south London and Edinburgh.[1] Those who considered rural friendly societies concentrated on their 'romantic folksy image'.[2] Since 1990 there has been a move away from such categorisation. Numerous studies have indicated the importance of societies for those who were poorer than the urban artisanate, notably rural workers and women. These studies draw attention to the significance of ethnicity, nationality, patronage and pre-industrial traditions. There were often upper and lower age limits but a range of societies existed to cater for different income and status levels. Membership was not tied to a particular social stratum nor did it embody a limited range of characteristics. Countervailing arguments have been put to Harrison's view that Victorian respectability 'required shunning the pub'.[3] Friendly societies have been revealed as enjoying a wider range of ideological positions than those associated with the labour aristocracy.[4]

The first section is an outline of contemporary economic and political imperatives which encouraged a renewed interest in the history of friendly societies. The second section is about recent guides to sources. Analysis of different sources to those previously used, together with the broadening of scholarly focus as part of a wider interest in mutuality and social trust, has led to the new understanding of friendly societies. In the third section it will be shown that the result of this has been a wider recognition that for much of the period since Victoria's accession membership of a mutual aid organisation was the aim of the majority within the labour market. It will also be argued that while it is important to construct new models that provide space for both economic and social structures and historical variety, macro-level analysis can have the effect of underplaying the complexities of the dialectic between social structures and individual agency. The most significant research has not developed within a sub-discipline but in the places where disciplines merge.

1 Bentley B. Gilbert, *The evolution of national insurance in Great Britain* (London, 1966), pp. 166–167; Donald Read, *England 1868–1914*, (London, 1979), p. 127; G. Crossick, *An artisan elite in Victorian Society, Kentish London 1840–1880* (London, 1978), pp. 174–198 and R. Q. Gray, *The labour aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh*, (Oxford 1976), pp. 33, 40, 122–126.

2 David Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830–1914*, (Hull, 1991) pp. 4.

3 Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom* (Oxford, 1982) p. 180.

4 Simon Cordery, 'Friendly societies and the discourse of respectability in Britain, 1825–1875', *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995), mapped the meanings of respectability, often presented as central to the labour aristocracy, and showed it to be a dynamic concept and an important resource for friendly societies.

Welfare and trust

Although few of those writing about friendly societies have overtly acknowledged the significance of the rise in interest in social capital, Gorsky's prize-winning essay being a notable exception, the intellectual fashion of the 1990s has promoted interest in mutual aid.[5] A prominent contributor, Robert Putnam, tried to make an empirical case for what de Tocqueville argued in *Democracy in America*, that voluntary associations contribute to the working of democracy. He stressed the extent to which the energy and potential for development of a society is rooted in everyday activities that generate and maintain trust, and accorded friendly societies an honoured place. His claim was that, in Britain, they were 'invented by mid-Victorian social reformers to restore community bonds'.[6] He argued that the societies generated social trust and aided the functioning of democracy by encouraging the development of the networks, norms and trust that enabled participants to act together effectively in the pursuit of shared objectives.[7] In 1996 Frances Fukuyama argued that trust was important for economic performance and its absence had detrimental social implications.[8] From a different perspective, John Garrard has also recognised the importance of civil associations to the generation of 'a liberal consensus, a passionate desire for full citizenship [and] an ability to articulate it', and called the friendly societies the 'most democratically impressive' of working-class voluntary organisations.[9]

During the 1990s there was extensive recognition of a widening welfare delivery gap. Costs rose while lower birth rates and greater life expectancy increased the number of people and precentage of the population dependent on the welfare system. Governments emphasised that individuals should contribute to the cost of their personal welfare. Although private sector provision increased, there was wider recognition of the core competence and competitive advantages of friendly societies in this field.[10] They handled the regular collection of small cash sums, engendered consumer trust and confidence and acted as vehicles for the development of social capital among financially and socially disadvantaged communities. Influential UK think tanks, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and Demos, perceived friendly societies as of importance in the new order.[11] The latter urged Labour to develop mutualisation

5 Martin Gorsky, 'Mutual aid and civil society: friendly societies in nineteenth-century Bristol', *Urban History* 25:3 (1998).

6 Robert Putnam, 'Let's play together', *Observer* March 25 2001.

7 The argument that friendly societies provided training grounds for democracy had already been made. See, for example, David Green, *Working class patients and the medical establishment: self-help in Britain from the mid-nineteenth century to 1948* (Aldershot, 1985).

8 Francis Fukuyama, *Trust. The social virtues and its creation of prosperity* (Harmondsworth, 1996).

9 John Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 6, 184.

10 George Yarrow, *Social security and friendly societies: options for the future. A report commissioned by the National Conference of Friendly Societies* (London, 1993); J. Doward, 'Full circle for societies friendly to the poor' *Observer* July 5 1998; Ferdinand Mount, *Clubbing together. The revival of the voluntary principle*, W.H. Smith Contemporary Papers 12 (unpublished, 1993).

11 Charles Leadbetter and Ian Christie, *To our mutual advantage* (London, 1999). Demos describes itself as 'an independent think tank and research institute based in London. Launched in 1993, its role is to help reinvigorate public policy and political thinking and to develop radical solutions to long term

with all the energy put into privatisation in the 1980s. Labour sought to promote structures that engendered trust and Frank Field, Minister of Social Security between May 1997 and July 1998, proposed that 'stakeholder' welfare could be administered through friendly societies.[12] Nigel Waite argued that friendly societies were potentially 'an important part of [the Labour government's] Third-Way approach to solving the problems associated with the financing of future welfare.[13] This questioning of the inevitability or desirability of the current construction of the welfare state was related to a turning away from the teleological assumption that voluntarism had necessarily and universally been superceded by the state. Many have turned towards a perception that while there have been changes in the roles of and relationships between families, charities, the state and the market these have not been linear.[14] Rather, there has been a 'moving frontier' between different types of provision.[15] It has been recognised that the balance between these elements is not best explained in terms of a 'rational choices' approach. Individual decisions are tempered by familial, social and community considerations and conventions and cannot be situated within a rigid economic framework of absolute rationality and an unwavering goal of utility-maximization, even assuming that an assessment of the services is possible. For example, while Victorian friendly societies were popular as a means of risk-sharing among skilled manual workers, lower-middle class clerks, whose income was no higher, had a different social and economic life-style and tended to favour the Smilesian doctrine of independent self-help. Johnson has shown that:

Clerks avoided benefit clubs which involved fellowship and mixing with manual workers, a form of behaviour incompatible with their aspiration to the respectability of the middle-class household.[16]

Within the context of recent intellectual and political developments it is no great surprise that there has been a heightened interest in friendly societies, with their rational actuarial tables and health provision and their rituals, all of which helped to build democratic participation and respect for the law.

problems'. Robert Whelan, *Involuntary Action. How voluntary is the 'voluntary' sector?* (London, 1999), 11. The IEA describes itself as 'the UK's original free-market think-tank, founded in 1955. The IEA's goal is to explain free-market ideas to the public, including politicians, students, journalists, businessmen, academics and anyone interested in public policy.'

12 Frank Field, *The State of Dependency* (London, 2000). Frank Field, *The Future of Welfare Reform* (London, 1998); Frank Field, *How to pay for the Future: Building a Stakeholder's Welfare* (London, 1996).

13 Nigel Waite, *Welfare and the consumer society. New opportunities for the Third Way* (London, 2001), 95. At the same time A. Etzioni, *The new golden rule: community and morality in a democratic society* (New York, 1997) popularized a communitarian critique of goverment..

14 C. Maier (ed.), *Changing boundaries of the political: essays on the evolving balance between state and society, public and private in Europe* (Cambridge, 1987).

15 The term moving frontier derives from G. Finlayson, 'A moving frontier: voluntarism and the state in British social welfare, 1911–1949, *Twentieth Century British History* 1 (1990), pp. 183–206. See also G. Finlayson, *Citizen, state and social welfare in Britain, 1830–1990* (Oxford, 1994).

16 Paul Johnson, *Saving and spending. The working-class economy in Britain 1870–1939* (Oxford, 1985), p. 62.

In the 1980s Green, Johnson and Marland, who produced work on the welfare provision of friendly societies, all pointed to the policies of sources [17]. In the 1990 the welfare policies of friendly societies was the focus of James Riley who found a previously little used source. Drawing on late nineteenth-century sickness benefit claim statistics compiled by the Ancient Order of Foresters in order to study morbidity, he assessed the finances, organisation and operation of friendly societies, illuminated how occupations and living conditions influenced the outcome of disease and uncovered considerable regional variation.[18] He also investigated the relationship between the societies and the doctors they employed. There were considerable tensions. Some societies encouraged doctors to bid against one another for contracts. Some doctors put the interests of their employer, the societies, before those of the patient. While a debate has been sparked which focuses on Riley's quantification, in terms of the study of friendly societies there is no doubt that Riley has provided fresh information and a new approach.[19] A team based at the University of Southampton made up of, Edwards, Gorsky, Harris and Hinde has examined Riley's claims regarding sickness by a comparative study of the philanthropically based Hampshire Friendly Society which served the population of that county between 1825 and 1989. A number of papers have been given and a publication is expected. Woods has also taken issue with Riley's use of friendly society records for the study of morbidity.[20]

In 1911 the British state took greater control over health care and sick pay. A number of prominent friendly societies secured their own position within the new system by becoming the instruments through which the scheme was handled. However, their competitors also secured this right. Cronin calls this 'a worthwhile compromise for the societies got the subsidy that came with the administration of health insurance'.[21] Noel Whiteside has argued that legislation enabled friendly societies to sustain and indeed extend their 'traditions of conviviality and community activity'. However she recognises that for many societies 'central regulation throttled the possibility of popular participation'.[22] Sokolovsky

17 Green, *Working class;* Johnson, *Saving;* Hilary Marland, *Medicine and Society in Wakefield and Huddersfield 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1987).

18 James C. Riley, *Sick not dead. The health of British working men during the mortality decline* (London, 1997). For another examination of the medical provision of Ancient Order of Foresters see Audrey Fisk, *In sickness and the promotion of health. The part played by the Ancient Order of Foresters*, (Southampton, 1998); Audrey Fisk, *Welfare and thrift in a country town. A short history of Court 'Brownlow' No. 6444 in Berkhamsted, Herts* (Southampton, 1998).

19 James C. Riley, 'Why sickness and death rates do not move in parallel to one another over time', *Social History of Medicine* 12:1 (1999) pp. 101–124; 'Bernard Harris, Morbidity and mortality during the health transition: a comment on James C. Riley, 'Why sickness and death rates do not move in parallel to one another over time', *Social History of Medicine* 12:1 (1999) 125–132; James C. Riley, 'Reply to Bernard Harris: Morbidity and mortality during the health transition, a comment on James C. Riley', *Social History of Medicine* 12:1 (1999), pp. 133–138.

20 Robert Woods, 'Sickness is a baffling matter'. A reply to James C. Riley', *Social History of Medicine* 10:1 (1997), pp. 157–163.

21 James E Cronin, *The politics of state expansion. War, state and society in twentieth-century Britain* (London, 1991), p. 40.

22 Noel Whiteside, 'Private provision and public welfare: health insurance between the wars', in David Gladstone (ed.) *Before Beveridge. Welfare before the welfare state* (London, 1999), pp. 33, 41.

has pointed out that at that time friendly societies did not provide a good service as the physicians were paid little and then only on a *per capita* basis. Their loyalty was to their paymaster, not to the individual patient. Friendly societies were encountering financial difficulties to as life expectancy had increased.[23] Daunton has suggested three long-term disadvantages for the friendly societies. The threat from commercial insurance companies, the scepticism of the Labour Party about reliance upon non-state organisations and the fact that the government prevented societies from extending or making their services more attractive as it did not want to increase its contribution. The friendly societies were used as a buffer against pressure for the expansion of welfare.[24] It has also been argued that the legislation was a decisive step towards uniform central control and away from welfare which was 'highly localised, amateur, voluntaristic and intimate in scale.[25] Furthermore, it marginalised the alternative institutional framework that existed based on the poor law medical service and the district medical officers of health.[26] This debate about Edwardian welfare reform is not echoed in the debate about Labour's alterations after the Second World War. There is scope for work charting how the creation of the National Health Service resulted in a decline in friendly societies.

Sources

The renewal of interest in present-day mutuality has been reflected in the historical literature and by the publication of guides to sources.[27] The largest collection of friendly societies' rulebooks, a run from the 1850s to the present day, is at the Public Record Office in Kew and a new guide has been produced.[28] The groundbreaking work by Gosden is based on these records of registered societies of England during part of the nineteenth century. He argued that 'useful manuscript material … seems to be practically non-existent'.[29] However, those who

23 J. Sokolovsky, 'The making of national health insurance in Britain and Canada: institutional analysis and its limits', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 11:2 (1998), 247–280. For an assessment of the limitations of voluntary sector welfare prior to 1870 see Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (London, 1999).

24 Martin J. Daunton 'Payment and participation: welfare and state-formation in Britain 1900–1951', *Past and Present* 150 (1996), pp. 169–216.

25 Jose Harris, 'Political thought and the welfare state, 1870–1940: an intellectual framework for British social policy, *Past and Present* 135 (1992), p. 116. Republished in Gladstone.

26 Sokolovsky, 'The making'.

27 Simon Fowler, *PRO Readers Guide Number 12, Sources for Labour History* , (London, 1995), p. 24–25; David Neave, 'The local records of affiliated friendly societies: a plea for their location and preservation', *Local Historian* 16:3 (1984), pp. 161–167; Roger Logan, *An introduction to Friendly Society Records* (Bury, 2000). See also Ian MacDougall, (compiler and ed.), *A catalogue of some labour records in Scotland and some Scots records outside Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1978). Another useful guide to sources is the *Friendly Societies Research Group Newsletter*, available from Dan Weinbren, Social Sciences, Open University.

28 Jeremy Sumner Wycherley Gibson, *Quarter sessions records for family historians: a select list* 3rd ed. (Baltimore, 1992).

29 P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The friendly societies in England 1815–1875*, (Manchester, 1961), p. 245. See also P. H. J. H. Gosden 1973 *Self-help, voluntary associations in the nineteenth century*, (London, 1973).

have engaged in local studies have found original records of individual societies that have proved 'overwhelming and a profusion of minute, proposition and account books'.[30] David Neave examined the friendly societies of part of the East Riding of Yorkshire.[31] Countering Gosden's focus on legislation, Neave makes no reference to the Friendly Society Acts of 1829, even though a local perspective on this might cast it as a victory for collective action under local artisan leadership. Rather, he links the development of friendly societies to local factors, notably prices, the state of the labour market, Primitive Methodism, savings, trade unionism and spatial factors. Despite Eric Hobsbawm's appeal for further research into friendly societies, made in 1957, and echoed in the same, now renamed, journal in 1984 and again in 1999 has not reached some fields of inquiry. Moreover, there has been an unequal spread of studies in geographical terms. As for the time period considered, most studies have focused on the nineteenth century.[32] Despite attention being drawn to Scotland by the collation of information about records there in the 1970s and the publication of Robbie Gray's study of Edinburgh's artisanate, Scotland's friendly societies were largely ignored in the 1990s.[33] There has also been an expansion of interest in friendly societies in other countries.[34] For example, in reference to New Zealand, Jennifer Carylon argued in 1998 that 'before this last decade friendly societies had been generally either ignored by historians or, with one exception, [an MA thesis] dismissed as insignificant'.[35] The web has allowed information to be shared.[36] However, work on international links is very limited.[37] Little has been made of recent theory about space and ceremonies or oaths and banners. In 1995 UK friendly societies reorganised their four main bodies into the Association of Friendly Societies, which actively promoted research and historical evaluation.[38] However, there are no studies of the bodies that went to make up the AFS. Although there was often a symbiotic relationship between

30 David Neave, 'The local', p. 162.

31 Neave, *Mutual Aid.*

32 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Friendly Societies' *Amateur Historian* 3:3 (1957), 81–101; Neave, 'The local'; Audrey Fisk, 'Friendly societies and local history', *Local Historian* 29:2 (1999), pp. 91–101.

33 Norma Denny, 'Self-help, abstinence and the voluntary principle: the Independent Order of Rechabites, 1835–1912'*, Scottish Labour History Society Journal* 24 (1989), pp. 24–46; Gray, *The labour*; MacDougall *A catalogue*; Ian Levitt and Chris Smout, *The State of the Scottish Working Class in 1843: A Statistical and Spatial Enquiry based on the Data from the Poor Law Commission Report of 1844* (Edinburgh, 1979). In 1707 Scotland joined England and Wales in forming a single Parliament for Great Britain, but the three countries had shared a monarch since 1603. Legislation regarding friendly societies was different in Scotland to England and Wales and there was less incentive for friendly societies to register north of the border. This partly accounts for the difficulty in locating records.

34 Marcel van der Linden, M. Dreyfus, B. Gibaud and J. Lucassen, (eds.) *Social security mutualism. The comparative history of mutual benefit societies* (Bern, 1996).

35 J. Carlyon, 'Friendly societies 1842–1939', *New Zealand Journal of History* 32:2 (1998), p. 122.

36 R. W. Moffrey, *The rise and progress of the Manchester Unity IOOF 1810–1904* (1905*)* is now available on the web at http://www.ee.surrey.ac.uk/Contrib/manx/history/socs/odf_mdly.htm.

37 Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings. Social politics in a progressive age* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 1998), does examine the links between European and American mutual aid. However, the subject is not central to his work.

38 The AFS has sponsored the Friendly Societies Research Group. Some AFS member societies have also provided histories. See, for example, G. Magrath, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society', *Past Forward* (1998), pp. 14–15.

Freemasons and friendly societies, both being descendants of the gilds, the links with Freemasonry have also not been fully explored.[39]

New views of membership

Estimates of the membership of friendly societies in Britain made between the 1960s and the 1980s suggest that there were between four and six million members in the 1870s and somewhere between 6.3 and 9.5 million members in 1910.[40] Ferdinand Mount claimed that, in regard to the provision for sickness: 'the friendly societies were well on their way to covering the vast mass of the working population by the end of the nineteenth century'.[41] This throws into question the legitimacy of state intervention and, as a corrective to such views, Nicholas Deakin highlighted the deficiencies of friendly societies:

coverage for women, the low-paid and groups categorised as 'bad risks' was virtually non-existent through the nineteenth century and always intermittent before the Second World War … an inefficient mechanism for providing partial coverage … Active involvement of the membership and effective accountability, even among the locally based friendly societies, was patchy at best and, by the time Beveridge came to write his [1943] report, had almost entirely disappeared.[42]

One of the reasons for uncertainty is that the methods used to collect the national statistics has been challenged by contradictory evidence from local sources. Neave shows that in the East Riding from 1830 to 1914 membership of the affiliated orders of friendly societies covered just under half the adult male population, which makes them the major form of organization of labourers, both urban and rural. He showed that members received significant benefits and that the societies played an important role in the development of a clearly distinguishable rural working-class culture. O'Neill discovered evidence of well over 1,000 friendly societies in Nottinghamshire.[43] She also mapped the friendly societies of

39 The 1996 Prestonian Lecture by John Goodchild was entitled 'The Freemasons and the friendly societies. An historical study'. Walter Cooper, *The Ancient Order of Foresters Friendly Society,150 years 1834–1984* (Southampton, 1984), p. 2 notes that the origins of the Foresters lay in freemasonry. For a recent case study see Robert Cooper, *An introduction to the origins and history of the Free Gardeners* (London, 2000).

40 Gosden, *The friendly* cites the estimate of four million members made in 1872 by the secretary to the Royal Commission on Friendly and Benefit Societies, J. M. Ludlow. W. Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today* 8th edition (Lexington, 1998), argues for six million in 1874. Gilbert, *The evolution,* plumps for 4.25 million members in the early 20th century; N. McCord, 'The poor law and philanthropy', in Derek Fraser, (ed.), *The new poor law in the nineteenth century* (London, 1976) suggests that there were 5.5 million in 1900; Johnson, *Saving,* maintains that there were 6.3 million in 1910. Green, *Working class,* 31 proposes 9.5 million at that point.

41 Mount, *Clubbing,* p. 12.

42 Nicholas Deakin, 'Voluntary inaction' in Whelan, *Involuntary Action*, p. 29.

43 Julie O'Neill, '"The spirit of independence": friendly societies in Nottinghamshire 1724–1913' Ph.D. Nottingham Polytechnic; (1992); J. J. Turner, 'The frontier revisited: thrift and fellowship in the new industrial town, c 1830–1914', in A. J. Pollard (ed.), *Middlesborough, town and community 1830–1950* (Stroud, 1996).

Lincolnshire.[44] The Royal Commission on Friendly Societies 1874 reported that there were 460 female registered friendly societies in England and Wales with a total membership of 27,107. This membership included neither members of 177 other societies that made no return, nor the many unregistered societies. A survey of Berkshire's friendly societies in 1872 indicated that 46.5% of them were unregistered; while in Nottinghamshire in 1886 only 31 of at least 120 female friendly societies were registered.[45] Furthermore, it was probably the case that by the 1870s the number of female friendly societies had peaked.[46] A continual problem has been to define who was a member. In the nineteenth century there was a considerable blurring between friendly societies and trade unions. In 1830 a federal Friendly Society of Coal Mining was founded in Bolton. It enjoyed some success as a trade union and spread from Lancashire to Staffordshire, Wales and Derbyshire but in the face of lock-outs, blacklegging and legal repression it crumbled in 1831.[47] As Chase notes, 'a rigid distinction between friendly and trade societies is as impractical as it is unhelpful to our understanding of the early industrial worker's world'. One reason is that it was not until 1871 that the term 'trade union' appeared in legislation.[48] Simon Cordery has suggested that there is another reason, arguing that 'historians have artificially segregated trade unions from friendly societies, examining the latter only in the context of working-class communities and ignoring or marginalising the insurance provisions of the former'.[49]

Studies of female friendly societies have provided a significant challenge to the view that friendly societies were principally for skilled men. Gosden devoted one page to female friendly societies and in 1982 Pat Thane suggested that it was only in Lancashire that female societies flourished.[50] Certainly there were obstacles for women who wished to form friendly societies. The 1834 Poor Law (Amendment) Act, a spur to the growth of the friendly societies in England and Wales (it did not cover Scotland) encouraged men, particularly fathers, to work. Poor women were seen in moral terms, as both cause and consequence of unregulated sexuality. If they were poor and widows, deserted wives or married to Service personnel they deserved aid. Until the Married Women's Property Act, 1882, husbands had the right to their wives' friendly society benefits. Furthermore, women were often paid less than men and were perceived to be a higher insurance risk and unable to run their own societies. Neverthe-

44 Julie O'Neill, 'Friendly societies in Lincolnshire', in Stewart Bennett and Nicholas Bennett, *An historical atlas of Lincolnshire* (Hull, 1993), pp. 90–91.

45 Malcolm Bee, 'Providence with patronage: the Royal Berkshire Friendly Society 1872–1972', *Southern History* 16 (1994), pp. 100–101.

46 Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 35–39; Dot Jones, 'Self-help in nineteenth century Wales: the rise and fall of the Female Friendly Society' *Llafur* 4:1 (1984), pp. 25–26.

47 John K. Walton, *Lancashire a social history 1558–1939*, (Manchester, 1987), pp. 148–150.

48 Malcolm Chase, *Early trade unionism, fraternity skill and the politics of lab*our, (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 2, 107.

49 Simon Cordery,' Friendly Societies and the British Labour Movement Before 1914', *Journal of the Association of Historians in North Carolina* 3, (Fall 1995), p. 39. See also a forthcoming article by Cordery in *Labour History Review* in which he will show how trade unions followed and then transcended the friendly societies established by railway companies.

50 Pat Thane, *The foundation of the modern welfare state*, (London 1982), p. 21.

less, women did form independent friendly societies.[51] 'In County Durham, 'all female friendly societies were very common, particularly catering for coal miners wives'.[52] Male friendly societies provided scope for men to take responsibility for their families without socialising with them and often had rules regarding drunkenness and fighting. While reciprocity and cross-subsidy are associated with idealised families, the moral rules for women were different. Many female societies, for example the Ilchester Young Female Society, Somerset, the Hucknall-under-Huthwaite Female Friendly Society, Nottinghamshire and about 10% of the female societies which provided the government with copies of their rule books in 1793, made childbirth payments only to married mothers. The Curry Rival Female Friendly Society, Somerset, was open only to women who had not given birth to illegitimate children, while the rules of the Ruddlington Lying-In Friendly Society, Nottinghamshire, indicated that a member who gave birth to an illegitimate child would be expelled.[53] Such regulations may reflect the views of members as well as patrons. A female friendly society in Ashford, Derbyshire which had no patrons provided for the first illegitimate child, but, and this may indicate economic considerations, it would not pay out for illegitimate twins.[54] Although a Birmingham female society had a rule banning adulterous members, there are accounts of intemperate drinking and feasting by women as well as men.[55] Furthermore a society run by a man in Nottinghamshire still had open voting among the women members.[56]

As the stark declaration of the Friendly Society of Ironfounders: 'We are men and will be treated as such', made clear, masculinity and fraternity have been identified as of importance to the friendly societies.[57] A crucial characteristic of independent workers 'was the belief that those who were independent and in possession of their manhood were those able to maintain dependants.'[58] Friendly societies aided the ambitions of such men. Fraternalism has also been seen as a vehicle for an ideology that mixed claims of a mystic brotherhood and craftsmanship, notions of aristocratic virtue and liberty in thought, enlightenment idealism and nine-

51 Evelyn Lord, 'Weighed in the balance and found wanting', female friendly societies, self help and economic virtue in the East Midlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Midland History* 22 (1997), pp. 100–112; Audrey Fisk, (ed.) *Female foresters. A century of landmark*s (Southampton 1992); Jones,'Self-help'; Julie O'Neill, '"*In the club*". *Female friendly societies in Nottinghamshire 1792–1913'* (Nottingham, 2001).

52 Turner, 'The frontier', 91.

53 M. D. Fuller, *West Country friendly societies. An account of village benefit clubs and their brass pole heads* (Reading, 1964), pp. 153–154; O'Neill 'The spirit', p. 94; Peter Clark, *British clubs* and *societies 1580–1800. The origins of an associational world* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 376–377.

54 Quoted in Lord, 'Weighed in the balance', 110. The rules of female friendly societies are discussed in Clark, *The struggle,* pp. 35–38.

55 Dorothy Thompson, *Outsiders* (London, 1993), 81. See also Clark, The struggle, pp. 38, 54, 69.

56 Rules of the Barton-in-Fabis Friendly Society, reprinted in *Friendly Societies: seven pamphlets* (New York, 1974). See also Sue Andrews, The Barton-in-Fabis Female Friendly Society, *East Midland Historian* 3 (1993), pp. 15–23.

57 Keith McClelland, 'Masculinity and the "representative artisan" in Britain, 1850–1880', in Michael Roper, and John Tosh (eds.*), Manful assertions, masculinities in Britain since 1800*, (London, 1991), p. 82.

58 Keith McClelland, 'Time to work, time to live: some aspects of work and the reformation of class in Britain, 1850–1880', in P Joyce (ed.) *The historical meanings of work,* (Cambridge 1987), p. 206.

teenth-century moral nationalism.[59] Rituals that promoted fictive brotherhood have been seen as undermining kinship by loosening ties created by the moral economies of kin and local communities.[60] This may have been beneficial to members in that societies opened doors to enable people to form the 'loose networks' necessary to escape poverty.[61] As Tarrow argues 'the ties of homogenous groups are inimical to broader mobilisation. Weak ties among social networks that were not unified were much stronger than the strongest ties of workbench or family'.[62] On the other hand, Carnes argues that by setting their ceremonies in primitive cultures, or in an Old Testament environment of tribal clans, fraternal organisations ensured that contemporary issues could not challenge family relations.[63] An understanding of the past is the social capital upon which are built not just the ideas of the nation but local and familial ones as well. Recruitment of sons was commonplace within friendly societies right up until the 1930s. As Whiteside notes, 'there is little evidence that new entrants shopped around for the society best suited to their needs. Most joined the society neighbours, friends or parents knew'.[64] While 'an understanding of the ties of kinship is essential to analyses of working-class communities in the past', all networks have a darker, obverse, of exclusion, oppression and vulnerability to fragmentation and fracture.[65] While ritual may have attracted young men in the nineteenth century it may have also repelled them in the twentieth when there was less desire among young men, or women, to follow their fathers into the same pastimes and workplaces. Eric Hobsbawm argued that while inventing traditions can legitimate an organisation, it can also prevent it changing.[66] There has also been little attention to the attitude epitomised by the eponymous hero of *Billy Liar*, published in 1959. On hearing the coded conversation between 'members of the Ancient Order of Stags, or whatever it was' prior to their lodge meeting in the pub and learning that his father is to join, he is 'filled with an accumulation of nausea'.[67]

In their promotion of security through longevity many friendly societies made use of ritual. The Druids claimed links with Moses, the Foresters with the Garden of Eden and the

59 Hannah Gay and John W. Gay, 'Brothers in science: science and fraternal culture in nineteenth-century Britain, *History of Science* 35:4:110, (1997), p. 427.

60 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Manchester, 1963), p. 154; R. J. Morris, 'Clubs, societies and associations', in Thompson F. M. L. (ed.) *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750–1950 iii* (Cambridge 1990), pp. 395–443.

61 Perri 6, *The power to bind and lose: tackling network poverty* (London, 1997).

62 S. Tarrow, *Power in movement: social movements, collective action and politics* (Cambridge 1994), p. 60.

63 Mark C. Carnes, *Secret ritual and manhood in Victorian America,* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 105–106. There has been much about working class ritual in the works of Paul Pickering. See in particular, 'Class without words: symbolic communication in the Chartist movement', *Past and Present* 112 (1986), pp. 144–162. See also James Epstein, *Radical expression* (New York, 1994).

64 Whiteside, 'Private', p. 37.

65 D. Burns and M. Taylor, *Mutual aid and self-help. Coping strategies for excluded communities* (London, 1998), p. 12.

66 E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), The invention of tradition (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 1–14.

67 Keith Waterhouse, *Billy Liar* (Harmondsworth, 1959), pp. 115–117.

Rechabites with ancient Egypt.[68] Considering the increased interest during the last decade the literature about imagined pasts and invented traditions there has been relatively little work about the creation myths and rituals of friendly societies. A study of the legend of Robin Hood in nineteenth-century Britain devoted less than a page to the 'considerable use' that the Ancient Order of Foresters made of Robin Hood in its rituals and ceremonies. Furthermore little evidence is produced that this was 'a symbolic representation of the desire of working people for independence'.[69] There has been little by way of assessment of local friendly societies' artefacts and public ceremonies in the 1990s.[70] There has been a study of one of the principle banner makers for the movement, George Tutill.[71] Apart from Tony Buckley 's examination of the tradition of brotherhood through analysis of the symbols of the Orange Order and its sibling Protestant organisations, the Royal Arch Purple Chapter and the Royal Black Institution, there has been little on secret activities.[72] This despite Vincent's view that oath taking, which was central to many societies, 'persisted well beyond the period of outright repression'.[73]

Although David Cannadine's work on rituals is not focused on the friendly societies' sense of hierarchy with their elaborate rankings and lodges throughout the Empire, he has provided a framework for a new assessment of their pageantry. He argues that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of 'unprecedented honorific inventiveness' and that they became 'an essentially Gothic enterprise, concerned as they were with costume, ceremony, heraldry, religion and monarchy'. Such proliferation of honours was echoed within the friendly societies with their jewels and ranks. For Cannadine this reflects the view that the British had of themselves as belonging to an unequal society characterised by a seamless web of layered gradations, which were hallowed by time and precedent, which were sanctioned by tradition and religion and which extended in a great chain from the monarch at the top to the humblest subject at the bottom.[74]

68 The current Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity website claims, 'The Oddfellows can trace its origins back to the exile of the Israelites from Babylon in 587BC.'

69 Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and national identity in nineteenth-century Britain. The legend of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 79–80.

70 M. Fisher and D. Viner, "'Go thou and do likewise': the Ebington Friendly Society (1856–1920) and its banners," *Folk Life* 37 (1998–99), pp. 64–79; N. Doran, 'Risky business: codifying embodied experience in the Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), pp. 131–154; P. Martin, The ??????????????????

71 John Gorman, *Banner Bright*, (Harmondsworth 1973 and 1986). See also N. Emery, *Banners of the Durham coalfield* (Stroud, 1998). A lengthier assessment of the literature appears in Nicholas Mansfield, *Radical rhymes and union jacks: a search for evidence in the symbolism of19th century banners,* Working paper No 45 Department of History, University of Manchester (Manchester, 2000).

72 A.D.Buckley, 'The chosen few. Biblical texts in a society with secrets' in A. D. Buckley and M. C. Kenney (eds.)*, Negotiating identity. Rhetoric, metaphor and social drama in Northern Ireland* (Washington, 1995). On the significance of the swearing of friendly society oaths see Chase, *Early*, p. 167.

73 David Vincent, *The culture of secrecy: Britain, 1832–1998* (Oxford, 1998), p. 59. Following the 1834 prosecution of six Dorset men for swearing illegal oaths as part of a friendly society initiation ritual the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity abolished its traditional oath of mutual support.

74 David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism. How the British saw their empire* (London, 2001), pp. 4, 85, 99, 105.

Humphrey and Laidlaw's account of the significance of religious rites can also serve as a framework for analysis of friendly society rituals.[75]

Another approach has been adopted by Kevin Hetherington who examined the character of social order and the significance of marginal space in relation to issues of order, transgression and resistance.[76] His view is that a focus on the processes that produce social ordering, their ambiguity and the spaces in which they emerge, aids understanding of the character of modern societies. He employs Foucault's analysis of heterotopia, that is spaces of alternate ordering, in order to examine the role of the Masonic lodge in the creation of modern social ordering. Much of his analysis might be applied to the role of the friendly societies' lodges and halls about which little has been written.[77]

Attention has moved from the nineteenth-century artisanate towards interest in the societies' own creation myths and a questioning of the periodisation of their development. The well-established view that friendly societies benefited from industrialisation has received fresh support. Turner's study of Middlesborough, reveals a rapid growth in the membership of friendly societies and a considerable interest from a number of local patrons just at the time when the town was growing rapidly.[78] Nevertheless, there has been a new focus on the gradual evolution of the societies from religious gilds, abolished in 1540. Gild members, like friendly society members, visited sick members, paid alms from a common chest, attended funerals, imposed fines on those who failed to attend or whose behavior was not respectable, elected their officials and held annual feasts. Many features of friendly societies, their rituals, elective forms of internal government and provision of sickness and burial benefits, derived from the traditions of craft guilds.[79] Some medieval parish guilds, held annual banquets for paupers in honour of patron saints.[80] There is evidence of charitable feasts being held before the first millennium and of their continuation within friendly societies.[81] In 15th century London there were 160 cofraternities. In these oath-bound, lay-controlled voluntary organisations while 'the spiritual agenda always took precedence over any monetary benefits', hooded members marched in funeral processions to pray for their brethren. Furthermore, 'in theory and to a great extent in reality, cofraternities were democratic and egalitarian.'[82] Keith Wrightson, in showing how the friendly societies developed some of the ideas of the gilds 're-

75 Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlow, *The archetypal actions of ritual* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 3–5.
76 Kevin Hetherington, *The badlands of modernity* (London, 1997).
77 T. H. Storey, 'Oddfellows Hall, Grimsby, and its place in the social life of the town', *Lincolnshire history and archaeology* 12 (1977).
78 Turner, 'The frontier'.
79 Susan Brigden, 'Religion and social obligation in early sixteenth-century London', *Past and Present* 103 (1984), pp. 104–107.
80 Elaine Clark, 'Social welfare and mutual aid in the medieval countryside', *Journal of British Studies* 33 (1994), p. 404.
81 Judith M. Bennett, 'Conviviality and charity in medieval and early modern England', *Past and Present* 134 (1992), pp. 33–35.
82 David T. Beito, '"This enormous army": the mutual aid tradition of American Fraternal Societies before the twentieth century', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14:2 (1997), p. 22–23.

vived a comparison that has been made by commentators since at least the 1790s.[83] In 1926 Clapham argued that graveside duties and drinking were Anglo-Saxon in origin and referred to 'innumerable humble eighteenth-century societies, most of which left no memorial'. He called the friendly society, 'an ancient, widespread, and natural growth, its roots running deep into 'solemn and great fraternity' and gild and primitive funeral feast.'[84] A number of recent local studies refer to the antecedents of friendly societies lying in specific gilds.[85] Peter Clark's account of the rise of British associations in the early modern era illuminates the origins of friendly societies and their polycentric developmental pattern. He illustrates how ubiquitous was the concept of the voluntary society a century earlier than is often supposed by citing the example of how in the eighteenth century heaven was visualised as one large friendly society.[86] Stephen Yeo recognises the roots lay in both non-conformity and medieval gilds and that significance to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The history of membership was transformed by the history of older co-operative and mutual enterprises from the 1790s onwards. The key phrase here is 'members unlimited' as used in the rules of the London Corresponding Society in 1792 … These rules were part of a making of a culture of co-operation and mutuality among English working people between 1790 and 1890.[87]

There has also been a growth of support, within Foucauldian accounts of risk, for the view expressed by Keith Thomas in another context, of an identification of insurance as an important hallmark of modernity.[88] Life insurance was a thriving business in the 16th century.[89] However, it was in the 1820s and 1830s that the statistical movement developed. Central to this was life insurance and there was a transformation of the social and economic treatment of work-related accidents.[90] Friendly societies often lauded themselves as the conveyers of scientific reform.[91] Nob Dora, while arguing that it was the development by friendly societies of

83 Keith Wrightson, *Earthly necessities* (New Haven, 2000). In 1797 Frederick Eden also remarked on the similarities between gilds and friendly societies and comparisons were made throughout the nineteenth century. See F.M. Eden, *The state of the poor. Volume I* (London, 1797), pp. 595–597.

84 J. H. Clapham, *An economic history of modern Britain volume I* (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 295–298.

85 See, for example, Jacqueline Cooper, *The well-ordered town: a story of Saffron Walden, Essex 1792–1862* (Saffron Walden, 2000), p. 183.

86 Clark, *British clubs*, p. 5.

87 Stephen Yeo, 'Making membership meaningful: the case of older co-operative and mutual enterprises in Britain', in N. Deakin, (ed.) *Membership and mutuality. Proceedings of a seminar series organised at the LSE Centre for Civil Society Report No.3* (2002), p. 8–9.

88 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic* (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 651–656. See, for example, Pat O'Malley, 'Risk and responsibility', in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, (eds.) *Foucault and political reason. Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government* (London, 1996).

89 Geoffrey Clark, 'Life insurance in the society and culture of London, 1700–1775', *Urban History* 24:1 (1997), pp. 17–36.

90 T. Alborn, 'A calculating profession: Victorian actuaries among the statisticians', *Science in context* 7:3 (1994), p. 433; Lawrence Eagles, 'Friendly societies' in Derek Renn (ed,) *Life, death and money. Actuaries and the creation of financial security* (Oxford 1998), p. 46; Alain Desrosières, *The politics of large numbers: a history statistical reasoning* (Harvard, 1998), pp. 172, 259–266, 328.

91 Moffrey, *The rise and progress.*

actuarial tables which led organised labour to speak 'the scientific and increasingly international language of 'risk'', notes how this led to the transformation of members 'prior experiential culture'.[92]

The shift in focus away from skilled men's associational culture has led to a greater emphasis on patronage. Many of those in positions of authority saw friendly societies as a means of regulating the poor. This was made clear by the commissioning of an official estimate in 1874 that ratepayers were saved not less than £2 million by friendly societies and by the nature of the legislative framework for the friendly societies. This was more like that designed for local authorities rather than the regulations that covered banks and insurance companies.[93]

Other aspects of patronage have been considered in recent accounts. John Benson argues that Gosden's account of the rise of friendly societies at the expense of colliery owners' compulsory accident insurance schemes paid insufficient attention to the benefits provided to miners.[94] Many employers made significant contributions the funds. These included subsidising the administrative expenses and paying annual contributions or fines and stoppages into the clubs. These schemes may have encouraged owners to develop safer pits and the insurance facilities provided were similar to those available from friendly societies and trade unions.

From the late eighteenth century agricultural improvement societies encouraged the establishment of village friendly societies for men. By the mid-nineteenth century it was common for local gentry to draft the rules of such societies and to attend their feasts with the local clergy serving as officers.[95] Studies from all over the country indicate the importance of working class members' financial and managerial reliance upon patrons.[96] The Friendly Society of Ironfounders later a trade union, had many patrons and the Oddfellows and the Foresters of-

92 Doran, 'Risky business', pp. 133, 147.

93 J. R. Edwards and R. Chandler, 'Contextualising the process of accounting regulation: a study of nineteenth-century British friendly societies', *Abacus. A journal of accounting, finance and business studies* 37:2 (2001), pp. 188–216. See also J. R. Edwards, R. A. Chandler and M. Anderson, 'The 'Public Auditor': an experiment in effective accountability, *Accounting and Business Research* (Summer 1999).

94 John Benson, 'Coalowners, coalminers and compulsion: pit clubs in England, 1860-80' *Business History* 44:1 (2002).

95 Malcolm Bee, 'A friendly society case study: the Compton Pilgrims Benefit Society', *Southern History* 11 (1989), p. 75.

96 Clark *British clubs,* p. 359; on Shropshire see Nicholas Mansfield*, English farmworkers and local patriotism, 1900-1930* (Aldershot, 2001), p. 47; on South Shields see N. McCord, 'The poor law ', 95; on Durham see Brown 'Friendly societies', p. 7. On Berkshire see Bee, 'A friendly society'. On Yorkshire see David Neave, *East Riding friendly societies*, *East Yorkshire Local History Series 41* (1998), pp. 10, 12. See also C. Hallas, *In sickness and in health. Askrigg Equitable, Benevolent, and Friendly Society 1809–2000*, (York, 2000), pp. 3, 5.14. On Essex see E. H. Dare, 'A social initiative in Loughton, Essex: the Loughton Mutual Labor-Aid Society, 1891–1899', *Local Historian*, 24:4 (1994), pp. 229–242. On Gloucestershire see Fisher and Viner, 'Go Thou', pp. 64–79. On Oxfordshire see A. Howkins, 'The taming of Whitsun: the changing face of a nineteenth-century rural holiday', in E. Yeo and S. Yeo (eds.), *Popular culture and class conflict 1590–1914: explorations in the history of labour and leisure* (Sussex, 1981), p. 197. For other examples see Audrey Fisk, 'Diversity within the friendly society movement 1834–1911: the value of community studies', *Family and Community History* 3:1 (2000), p. 23.

ten selected honorary members from among the local gentry.[97] In the latter half of the nineteenth century some of the 'democratically managed insurance clubs' began to move away from middle-class supervision. By the 1870s of the two million registered friendly society members in England and Wales only 43,417 were in societies controlled by honorary members.[98] Furthermore, Neave points out that by the late 19th century local élites courted the societies in order to attract votes. In Ashrigg, Yorkshire, the local friendly society has enjoyed the financial support of the local publican, on whose premises the society has met since its foundation in 1809. Honorary members, who made donations but did not draw benefits, also supported it.[99] Ebington Friendly Society, Gloucestershire, which existed between 1856 and 1920 was dominated by landowners and worked in conjunction with charities.[100] An overseer provided outdoor relief in Saffron Walden, Essex and also on at least six occasions between 1829 and 1833 provided money 'towards club' to help poor labourers.[101] There were also a number of gentry-financed schemes to alleviate poverty to which the poor contributed.

Patrons of female friendly societies sometimes encouraged specific codes of morality or saw the societies as a means of publicising their own largess. In Somerset there were examples of females friendly societies with patrons in Nether Stowey and Stoke-under-Ham and Ashbourne.[102] In Shropshire, the Countess of Powis supported the Bishop's Castle and Lydbury North Female Friendly Society, which existed between 1840 and 1900.[103] In Derbyshire, Henry Okeover founded female societies in his villages in Ilam, Okeover, Mappleton and Rosliston.[104] In Norwich, the Friendly Society for the Benefit of Poor Women was dominated by the wealthy as was the Friendly Female Society at York, while in Honiton the procession of the lace-makers' society was headed by its fashionable patronesses.[105] A study of Coventry showed that in 1856 five of Warwickshire's eight recorded female societies were located there and that Christian men largely ran them. They all met in church schoolrooms.[106]

Some religious bodies encouraged the development of benevolent or semi-benevolent societies. These included the 'Friendly Society of the Three Choirs' (Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester) and the Liverpool Chevra Toura Friendly Societies [translation: Jewish Friends of the Old Testament]. While there were nonconformist female friendly societies, for example

97 Records of the Friendly Society of Ironfounders are held in the Modern Record Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.41/FSIF/4/4. A. Howkins, *Reshaping rural England, a social history 1850–1925* (London, 1991), p. 80.
98 Cordery, 'Friendly societies and the discourse', pp. 35, 36, 43, 45.
99 Hallas, *In sickness.*
100 Fisher and Viner, 'Go thou', pp. 64–79.
101 Cooper, *The well-ordered*, p. 183.
102 Lord, 'Weighed in the balance', 105–106; Fuller, *West Country,* pp. 154–155.
103 Ivy Evans, 'Bishop's Castle and Lydbury North Female Friendly Society', *South West Shropshire Historical and Archaeological Society Journal,* 1 (1989), pp. 19–20.
104 Lord, 'Weighed in the balance', p. 105.
105 Clark, *British clubs, p.* 358.
106 P. T. Weller, 'Self help and provident friendly societies in Coventry in the nineteenth century' M.Phil. Warwick (1990), pp. 40, 105.

there were 11 of these in nineteenth-century Nottinghamshire, was Anglican vicars who after promoted village friendly societies. Studies indicate Anglican support for friendly societies in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Berkshire, Surrey, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and elsewhere while the Oddfellows and the Foresters 'openly courted the Anglican church'.[107] Anglicans even adopted the term friendly society to describe their organisation for unmarried women of a 'virtuous character'. Although it did not provide the benefits associated with conventional friendly societies, the Girls' Friendly Society with its elected council, quasi-autonomous branches and its motto 'Bear ye one another's burden', echoed many of them.[108] The relatively novel 'new paternalism' within Anglicanism with its emphasis on 'the gift' stressed that which was already well-established: that mutuality was meant to cross social barriers and that, merged with philanthropy, it could encourage deference and social stability.[109] Local studies indicate the diversity of the links between the established church and some friendly societies.[110] In Weobley Herzfordshire, the major local friendly society was Anglican dominated and in Compton, Berkshire, a Liberal Methodist minister founded the local friendly society.[111] In the Cotswold village of Chedworth in the mid-nineteenth century, there was a dispute when Anglicans sought to marginalise morris dancing while the local Friendly Club encouraged it.[112]

There was also political patronage. Neave has pointed out that 'frequently office-holding in a friendly society preceded or accompanied active involvement in a trade union'.[113] However, local research indicates close involvement between the Liberals and some friendly societies, notably the Rechabites. In Southill, Buckinghamshire, in the 1890s the Liberal MP and brewing magnate Samuel Whitbread provided considerable financial support for two friendly societies, one on his estate and one for women in the village of Southill which was adjacent to the estate. The Conservatives' Primrose League had its own Benefit Society, some Tories ran their own local friendly societies and the Cirencester Division Working Men's

107 Bee 'Providence with patronage', p. 106; David Neave 'Anglican clergy and the Affiliated Order friendly societies' in E. Royle (ed.), *Regional studies in the history of religion in Britain since the later middle ages* (Hull, 1984), pp. 184–189; Evelyn Lord, 'The friendly society movement and the respectability of the rural working class' *Rural History* 8:2 (1997), pp. 170–171; J. Obelkevich, *Religion and rural society: South Lindsey 1825–1875* (Oxford, 1976), 88; P. Bell, (ed.), Diary entry of the Rev G D Newbolt of Souldrop 1856–1895 in *Some Bedfordshire diaries, The publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Records Society Vol XL* (Streatley, 1959), pp. 206–221; A. Armstrong, *Farmworkers, a social and economic history, 1770–1980* (London, 1988) p. 108.

108 Brian Harrison, 'For church, Queen and family: the Girls' Friendly Society 1874–1920', *Past and Present* 61 (1973), pp. 106–138.

109 Howkins, *Reshaping* pp. 74–77, 159–160.

110 Neave, 'Anglican clergy'.

111 Bee, 'A friendly society'; A. James, 'Religion – the extent of its influence on the community of Weobley, Herefordshire during the decade 1850–1860' on Lucy Faulkner and Ruth Finnegan, (eds.) *Project reports in family and community history, CD-ROM* (CDR0008) (1996).

112 P. Burgess, 'Changes in cultural traditions in a Cotswold village during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', on Faulkner and Finnegan (eds), Project.

113 David Neave, Friendly societies in Great Britain', in van der Linden *et al* (eds), *Social Security Mutualism*, p. 60.

Conservative Association Benefit Society was founded in 1889 by a Conservative Agent who went on to become an MP.[114]

Between and within societies there were class-based hierarchies. In Preston membership of the Odd Fellows signalled an aspiration to higher status.[115] Gosden found that business-owners constituted a majority of over 100 principal leaders of the Manchester Unity, Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Ancient Order of Foresters in the nineteenth century.[116] A study of friendly societies of Cambridge concluded that 'although the majority of ordinary friendly society members were from the working class, the leadership of the movement was dominated by members from the lower middle class'.[117] The Foresters provided charity for members, but, as with charities run by the middle class and the Poor Law, there was a high degree of intrusion and checking. Precise details of the household incomes of the appellant were published. In 1904, when the executive of the Foresters made a donation to Joseph Horne of Bedfordshire, a member of the Foresters for 33 years, it was only after it published that his children and the society provided his income, 13s per week. As Howkins' argued, although 'friendly societies were never simply agencies of paternalism, most of them took on that aspect at different times'.[118]

Migrants, whether from the countryside to the town or from one country to another, often do not have easy access to relationships based on blood or marriage. They need to create fictive kin based on rituals or close friendship ties that replicate many of the rights and obligations associated with family ties. Peter Clark has stressed the importance of both internal and international migration to the development of associational culture. Gorsky also emphasises the importance of nineteenth century migration. If there was such a person as an average friendly society member, he was probably 'a migrant who had been absorbed successfully into an urban labour market but had to purchase insurance as a substitute for the customary prerequisites and poor relief which had supplemented the rural wage'.[119] Work on Irish friendly societies indicates both that while they may have often been unskilled, casual and transitory labourers the Irish did not simply slow the growth of friendly societies, as has been suggested was the case in Liverpool.[120] The Irish National Foresters, open to men of any religion or class who were 'Irish by birth or descent', had over 9,000 members by 1911.[121] While the William

114 Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the people 1880–1935* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 155–156; Mary Bliss and Mary Day, *Cirencester Benefit Society 1890–1990* (Cirencester, 1990), pp. 41–43.

115 S. D'Cruze and J. Turnbull, 'Fellowship and family: Odd Fellows' Lodges in Preston and Lancaster, c1830–1890' *Urban History* 22:1 (1995), pp. 25–47.

116 Gosden, *The friendly societies*, pp. 88–93 224–228.

117 E. Edwards, 'The friendly societies and the ethic of respectability. Nineteenth century Cambridge' PhD Cambridge College of Art and Technology (1987), p. 499.

118 Howkins, *Reshaping*, 81.

119 Martin Gorsky, 'The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early nineteenth century', *Economic History Review* 51:3 (1998), p. 503.

120 Walton, *Lancashire*, pp. 148–150.

121 Earlier studies of Irish friendly societies include J. Campbell, 'Friendly societies in Ireland, 1800–1980' in M. van der Linden *et al* (eds), *Social Security Mutualism*; A. D.Buckley and T. K. Anderson, *Brotherhoods in Ireland* (Cultra, 1988); A. D. Buckley, '"On the club" Friendly societies in Ireland', *Irish Eco-*

the Fourth Society of Deptford, London, excluded all Irish people, the Patna Loyal Orange Permanent Friendly Society stated that 'no person shall be admitted who is not a member of the Orange Lodge'. O'Leary argues that Irish friendly societies in Wales promoted local and national patriotism.[122] The banners displayed at a parade in 1867 included one proclaiming 'God Save the Queen: Success to the Port and Trade of Cardiff', and others honouring the memory of Daniel O'Connor, who favoured Catholic emancipation in Ireland as 'a Friend of Religious Liberty'.[123] Other immigrants had their own societies. The Order of the Golden Fleece (Bradford) was formed by German workers and there were societies founded by Huguenots living in London.[124] Kalman and Liedke have studied Jewish friendly societies in Manchester and London, where many Jews live.[125] Joseph has initiated coverage of the Jewish friendly societies of Birmingham.[126] In the case of the Philanthropic Order of True Ivorites' the main objective of which was 'to preserve the Welsh language in its purity', it appears as if it was the threat of immigrants which contributed to its formation.[127]

Conclusion

In order to understand friendly societies it is not sufficient to focus on the associational culture of skilled men in the Victorian period. It is clear that societies have longer roots and a greater diversity of membership. Involvement was not confined to the labour aristocracy, some members were poorer, others much wealthier. Recent work has also indicated that there has never been a national norm towards which regions, localities and different classes or occupational groups have tended. Localities experiencing and reacting to economic change can best be understood if examined individually, without teleological assumptions. Asa Briggs' view that 'a study of Chartism must begin with a proper appreciation of regional and local diversity' can usefully be echoed here.[128] New overviews have not always focused on recent de-

nomic and Social History 14 (1987), pp. 39–58. Northern Ireland came under British control during the 17th century and, along with the rest of Ireland, was formally joined to Great Britain in 1800. When the republic of Ireland gained independence in 1922, Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom.

122 Earlier studies of Welsh friendly societies include Jones, 'Self-help'; Dot Jones, 'Did friendly societies matter? A study of friendly society membership in Glamorgan, 1794–1910', *Welsh History Review* 12:3 (1985), pp. 324–349; G. Williams, 'Friendly societies in Glamorgan, 1793–1832', *Bulletin of Celtic Studies* 18 (1959), pp. 274–283. Wales and England were unified politically, administratively, and legally by the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1542, although Wales had been under effective English rule since the 13th century.

123 P. O'Leary, *Immigration and integration. The Irish in Wales, 1798–1922* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 187, 189.

124 R. Kalman, 'Friendly societies in East London founded by immigrants', M.A. Birkbeck College London (1990).

125 R. Kalman, 'The Jewish Friendly societies of London 1793–1993', *Jewish Historical Studies. Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 33 (1995), pp. 141–161; R. Liedke, 'Self-help in Manchester Jewry' *Manchester Regional History Review* 6 (1992), pp. 62–71.

126 Z. Josephs, 'The friendly societies' in Z. Josephs (ed.), *Birmingham Jewry Volume II Aspects 1740–1930* (Birmingham, 1984).

127 Jones, 'Did friendly', p. 345.

128 A. Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1962), p. 2.

velopments. Hopkins and Morris wrote wider studies, their focus was not friendly societies. Neave had other limitations imposed upon him; notably that he was a contributor to a comparative international collection.[129] The effect of this has been to allow Peter Gosden's work to remain after the only source on the subject cited in textbooks.[130] While his work may still be the first text to consult, it should certainly not be the only one, given the development of the field since 1990.

The 1990s witnessed a new assertiveness about the value of local studies and much of the work on friendly societies continued to be focused on regions or specific societies. Rollinson argued that 'to understand the origins of modern society we need a new kind of history, one that begins in the localities but does not end there'.[131] Marshall made the point that local history represents a way of avoiding fragmentation into professional specialisation or 'empty generalisation' and others have made analogous cases.[132] Further resonance is provided for John Marshall's argument, that labour history can be an obstacle to gaining an understanding of context, by Simon Cordery, who notes that labour historians need to recognise the importance of mutuality to the development of trade unionism.[133] The notion of a national economy is not always useful.[134] Localities, and individual friendly societies, do not all move in the same direction over time and are not invariably in tune with any national norms. Savage calls structural insecurity a distinctive feature of working-class life and has argued that the form that people's efforts to reduce their insecurity took was related to local circumstances.[135] There has to be recognition of the diversity of survival strategies people adopted and that these can be inter-class as well as intra-class. As Gorsky argues, there was no one cause of the growth of friendly societies. 'Neither the advance of manufacturing and mining, nor the pace

129 Neave, 'Friendly societies'; E. Hopkins, *Working-class self-help in nineteenth-century England*, (London, 1995); Morris, 'Clubs, societies'. There is also a four-page illustrated overview, Martin Gorsky, 'Self help and mutual aid: friendly societies in nineteenth century century Britain', *Refresh. Recent findings of research in economic and social history*' 28 (1999).

130 Friendly societies have been marginalised in a number of texts for students. See for example, John Rule, *The labouring classes in early industrial England, 1750–1850*, (1986); J. Belchem, *Industrialisation and the working class: the English experience, 1750–1900* (1990). Gosden's neglect of unregistered societies and the period from 1875 has been partly rectified by Johnson, *Saving,* but Gosden's work is still the most cited.

131 D. Rollinson, *The local origins of modern society: Gloucestershire 1500–1800* (London, 1992), p. 15.

132 J.D. Marshall, *The tyranny of the discrete. A discussion of the problems of local history in England* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 29; C. Phythian-Adams, 'Local history and national history: the quest for the people of England' *Rural History* 2:1 (1991), pp. 1–23; C. Phythian-Adams, 'Local history and societal history' *Local Population Studies* 51 (1993), pp. 30–45; Z. Bauman, *Intimations of postmodernity* (London, 1992), pp. 190–191 196, 294

133 Cordery, 'Friendly Societies and the British', p. 47–48.

134 Charles Feinstein 'Pessimism perpetuated: real wages and the standard of living in Britain during and after the industrial revolution, *Journal of Economic History* 58:3 (1998). For contribution on the relationship between wages and friendly society membership see Evelyn Lord, 'Derbyshire Friendly societies and the paradox of thrift' *Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 16:2 (1996), pp. 11–17.

135 M. Savage, 'Class and Labour History' in Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Class and other identities. Gender, religion and ethnicity in the writing of European Labour History* (New York and Oxford, 2002), p. 61.

of urbanisation, nor the dependency ratio, nor surplus earnings, nor new occupational health risks can alone provide the key. [Rather] the distribution of early nineteenth-century friendly societies depended principally on the nature of the local economy'.[136] Even within the affiliated orders there was considerable scope for local variation. For members there was a symbiotic relationship between the desire for security, including the need for social networks, and the desire for democracy. The boundaries between these needs were different across time and space, led to numerous tensions and need to be recognised in research. Members' capacities and options were different. A friendly society or a lodge run by the skilled men of Woolwich Arsenal was a very different creature to the friendly society run for Bedfordshire's rural women and to combine them is to create a mythical beast.

In the years since 1990, friendly societies have come to be seen less in terms of the development of class consciousness and more in terms of individual members' social mobility and of their role as resources for other agencies, notably the state. Class has been recontextualised as one element among many which define the self, and has been redefined in relation to gender, age, ethnicity, clannishness and other dimensions. The focus has also been on how societies generated new possibilities for social interaction and social solidarity and countered the effects of isolation by supporting identity formation and preservation. Many friendly societies offered members a sense of control over personal circumstances which dependency on the state or charity did not. In addition, they limited potential problems for communities and, by encouraging creative activity, supported the development of skill formation and the generation of resources within those communities.

There is no new consensus about the impact of friendly societies upon the creation of state welfare or the health of working people. There is disagreement about the impact of their internal arrangements, including the extent of solidarity, fraternity and democracy within the movement. While it is still disputed how many people have ever been members and what impact the societies have had on the development of welfare provision, it is evident that millions have been members and that mutual aid has been and continues to be of social and political influence. The value of theoretically informed, analytical micro-histories, which reflect people's lived experiences as well as drawing upon larger structural developments are clear. They provide a multi-disciplinary antidote to the generalisations offered by much aggregated macro-level research and introverted specialisation. They break down boundaries between the public and the private, economic and non-economic behaviour, production and consumption. Micro-histories continue to be an appropriate form for the analysis of friendly societies.

136 Gorsky, 'The growth', pp. 499, 507.