

For example, one would like to know more about a painting possibly attributed to a Scandinavian artist—the work's singularity might tell an interesting story about the international interests of Cremonese confraternities or of their benefactors.

Grace Wright
Italian Studies
University of Toronto

Farnhill, Ken. *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c. 1470–1550*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press / Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2001. ix, 237 pp. ISBN 1-903153-05-0 \$90.

In an impressive contribution to the study of confraternities, Ken Farnhill's *Guilds and the Parish Community in Medieval East Anglia, c. 1470–1550* offers fresh perspectives on guilds in their local and parochial settings in England. In a regional study that spans the late medieval-early modern divide, Farnhill contends that guilds enjoyed a general popularity in late medieval English market towns and villages on the eve of the Henrician Reforms and that these fraternities existed independently from, yet in symbiotic relation to, the local parish. Arguing that guilds were not simply religious organizations, but were social, economic and political entities as well, he notes that it is precisely because of these broader interrelationships that the guilds were not in competition with, nor were subordinate to, the parish church, and were able to make significant contributions to the parish community at large. Farnhill concludes by arguing that while the politically-driven religious reforms of Henry VIII and Edward VI were largely responsible for the demise of guilds, various economic and social factors left them in a vulnerable position that made their survival doubtful in any case.

Written as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Cambridge, *Guilds and the Parish Community* is a thoroughly researched response to several lively academic controversies. In particular, Farnhill challenges Beat Kumin's thesis that fraternal organizations were subordinated to the office of the churchwarden in the parish administrative structure. He also engages the broader debates on the impact of the Reformation at the local level and the nature and *raison d'être* of guild formation. As Farnhill sees it, guilds were primarily religious and charitable organizations that responded to local social, political and economic needs, but the tendency of current Reformation historians to dismiss their multifaceted character in favor of their religious objectives “has threatened to swamp a proper sense of their function and flexibility” (171).

It is this sense of function and flexibility that Farnhill seeks to recreate as he delves into his East Anglian sources. *Guilds and the Parish Community* relies on sources similar to those of other regional guild studies: guild accounts, membership lists, bedd rolls, churchwarden accounts, wills, guild returns, chantry certificates, lay subsidy lists and manorial records. He purposefully concentrates his study on the market towns and villages of Norfolk and Suffolk, observing that the preponderance

of records in large urban centers like Lynn, Bury St. Edmund and Norwich tends to skew the analysis. One limitation of the sources, of which Farnhill is aware, is the lack of sources detailing the 'why' and 'how' of guild formation. This dearth of information requires a heavy dependence on other sources to reveal the motivations and practicalities of guild establishment.

Guilds and the Parish Community begins with a general contextual discussion of guilds and their historiography, as well as their membership, benefits, spread and popularity in late medieval East Anglia. In the first four chapters, Farnhill lays the groundwork for his thesis that although religious in objective and impulse, guilds must be also viewed in terms of their socio-economic and political roles within the parochial and local community – roles which ultimately kept the guild from being overshadowed by the parish. Men and women, old and young, lay and religious were well-represented in the membership lists. Guilds also tended to welcome clergy or senior tenants into membership, which ensured good parochial and political relations with other social networks. Following Gervase Rosser and others, Farnhill notes that the benefits of membership were not limited the spiritual (intercession, most notably), but also included the social and economic.

In the final four chapters of the book, the discussion moves from the general to the particular, focusing on guilds in two market towns, Wymondham and Swaffham, as well as in the two smaller villages of Bardwell and Cratfield. In his analysis of the records from Wymondham, Farnhill concludes that guilds were not strictly 'parochial' in that they often drew members from outside the parish boundaries. However, the fraternities did maintain close links with the parish church through the provision of religious artifacts and lights. The records from Swaffham, Bardwell and Cratfield offer more insight into how the guilds interacted with other entities and devotional activities within the parish, particularly with the churchwarden. Lines of authority and responsibility were equally confused with regard to the management of parish assets. Fraternities tended to operate independently and alongside other offices such as the churchwarden in the provision and management of devotional practice and parish lands. No one organizational model dominated East Anglian parishes in terms of guild-parish relations.

Guilds and the Parish Community is an insightful, well-researched work that has much to say about the study of fraternities in England. Farnhill's appreciation for the integration of the fraternity within its religious/parochial context, as well as in its social, economic and political context, discourages myopic analysis and encourages the understanding of guilds in their multifaceted reality.

Ann Wolfgram
Department of History
University of Toronto