

# Patrons and clients: their role in sixteenth century parliamentary politicking and legislation

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Patrons and clients might be described as the civilianised descendants of feudal lords and vassals. The bonds of land-grant and military obligation had disappeared. Instead the Tudor patron was a great (or at least a greater) man who threw his protective mantle over lesser mortals, who loomed large in his county, and whose patronage, prestige and Court contacts might secure patronage and advance the fortunes of those who looked to him as their protector. In return he expected them—his clients—to exhibit deference and loyalty, support him in his quarrels and to enhance his 'presence'—in other words to follow, escort and accompany him, physically and visibly. Mutual moral obligation, social responsibility and deference, and material advantage were all important elements in such relationships.

The patron client mechanism<sup>1</sup> was the focal point and nexus of the faction. Perhaps faction is an inappropriate term, because it suggests a grouping with a prime political motivation. Certainly it is not the equivalent of a party, because parties are separated by different policies and principles, but it does describe a political organism, even if its only political dynamics were office, power and profit. Doubtless this is the consequence of reading back history from post-Restoration politics. However, this retrospective approach is misleading and unhistorical, especially for the sixteenth century. First and foremost a Tudor faction was a social connexion: an affiliation of men brought together by kinship (of blood or marriage); friendship; social, economic and occupational links; common county identity or social status and perhaps (not necessarily) religion. The unifying force was the common bond of loyalty to the patron. They were members of the patron's extended 'cousinhood', his relatives, servants, estate officials, tenants, allies, friends and neighbours. The faction, defined in this way, was characteristic of the hierarchical and deferential nature of Tudor society, in which it was not debasing or humiliating to seek

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