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EDITORIAL

This issue of the *CHS Magazine* has a distinctly commemorative feel to it, with articles on Shakespeare in the 400th anniversary of his death, and on the Great Fire of London, which broke out 350 years ago. In addition, we have David Wykes' paper on the late 17th and early 18th century Surrey dissenter, Lawrence Lee. All these are welcome, as are the usual items—the secretary's notes, the correspondence, the news and views section, and the book reviews.

We hope that you like what is here contained. Please send in your comments and any articles, or suggestions for articles, which you have. We shall do our best to encourage and assist your efforts at historical enquiry and investigation.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Mansfield College, Oxford—film to mark John Marsh's Retirement in 1970

David Seymour, an alumnus of Mansfield College, has recently brought to my attention the college website which includes a link to a fascinating film made by Peter Armstrong, then a DPhil student, to mark the retirement of John Marsh, after 17 years as college principal.[1] I had not seen it before but that was my loss for this is a gem! It is a deeply impressive film, opening with pastoral shots of Oxford and moving to early morning street scenes, before coming to the college itself. At least partly on the strength of this film, Armstrong went on to work at the BBC, eventually becoming head of religious broadcasting.

Here is Marsh in gentle conversation with his predecessor, Nathaniel Micklem, mulling nostalgically over the past. "England was remarkably quiet in 1911", states Micklem, recalling when he came up to the college while sucking on his pipe. Micklem comments that Marsh had worked very hard to secure the status of a permanent private hall within the university for Mansfield which must "nearly have killed him". In addition we have Marsh chatting to his own successor, George Caird, over dinner about his hopes for the future. Marsh spent some 32 years in or about the college, as student, chaplain and principal.

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1 See http://www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk/about/news/article/article/a-film-made-to-mark-the-principalship-of-john-marsh.html

Some of us will recall 1970 and wonder if we really looked like the students in this film. [Yes, we did!] The camera takes us into the sermon class where John Marsh, a rather youthful Charles Brock, and the students themselves comment, arguably somewhat pompously, about the efforts of one female ordinand. To my eye, some of the students look vaguely familiar.

I was left with mixed feelings after seeing this film, in a week when the Congregational Library committee had been discussing how to treat films and images of Congregational and United Reformed Church annual assemblies. [The technology provides a challenge.] How valuable it is for the historian and others to see these giants of yesteryear but, one must ask, were the decisions they made the right ones? Were they the only alternatives? Training for the ministry at Mansfield is now but a distant memory for some few, and perhaps will soon be forgotten altogether. It meant so much once to the Congregational denomination and to other nonconformists in this country. Furthermore it sent out positive signals to the whole Christian world. Marsh and Caird speak in the film of Mansfield becoming, within the university, a truly "ecumenical college". Is that what it has become? What would they think now?

Mansfield's neighbour, Harris Manchester College, like Mansfield a full college of the university, accepts students in a range of disciplines but still trains ministers, principally for the Unitarian churches. Regent's Park College, also in Oxford and a permanent private hall of the university, specialises in humanities and social sciences but continues to train ministers for Baptist churches.

I have fond memories of John Marsh's telling my then fiancée and myself, over tea at the City Temple, of his hair-raising experiences in Berlin in the late 1930s. He had not introduced himself and we were enthralled by this very moving story from an informed but, to us then, unknown stranger. In Berlin he had been trying to meet members of the Confessing Church, armed with an introduction from Nathaniel Micklem, while being pursued by Hitler's secret police. Eventually he did elude his Nazi pursuers and made contact with leading members of the Confessing Church which contacts were renewed, as much as was possible, after the war.

If you haven't seen this film, then please do so. If you have and wish to make a comment, please send me an email.

Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*

Recently I had the good fortune to attend The Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* at The Barbican Theatre in London. It was an energetic, spirited production, well-acted throughout, as one might expect from such a prestigious troupe. We might also have anticipated that the playwright Jonson, a fun-loving Catholic man about town (who went through

a reconciliation of sorts with the Church of England in 1610), would show little sympathy for the 'Anabaptists from Amsterdam', probably English refugees, two of whom appear as characters in the comedy. They are as gullible and as much the deserved victims of ribaldry as are the other characters. However in this production which is mostly set in contemporary costume (the dress of London in 1610) the two Anabaptists, Ananias the deacon and his pastor, Tribulation, who want their goods to be transmuted into gold, are given clothes to wear that resemble the habits of medieval friars.

This really does reveal a lack of research on the part of the RSC. A visit to the National Gallery or the National Portrait Gallery would have shown how serious English puritans or Dutch Protestants of the period dressed (even a quick glance at the internet would have sufficed)—that is soberly and neatly in simple black and white, with no great display of colours or flamboyance. This satire on human vanity and hypocrisy would be no less amusing if this fairly important detail was correct. It does Jonson no favours to blur religious differences in this way.

More worryingly does this lamentable oversight reflect a level of ignorance about religious beliefs and attitudes in this country as a whole? If so, societies like ours, and our churches, have a considerable educational task on our hands. We should not resign ourselves to this illiteracy; it distorts historical truth to nobody's benefit.

History in Preaching Questionnaire

Some readers may have expected that this issue would include the results of the recent questionnaire on whether preachers in 2016 include references to history in their sermons. We have had a good set of responses from preachers in the URC, Methodist Church, Baptist Union and the Congregational Federation. In addition replies have come from Canada, the USA and Germany. However replies from the Union of Welsh Independents have been promised, among others, and it seemed necessary to hold over discussion until the next issue of the *CHS Magazine.*

You may be interested to know that the editor is considering asking questions about church membership which, some allege, is out-dated. Is the commitment which comes with church membership unsuited to the 21st century? Do young people, in particular, find belief in Christ more amenable than making a solemn commitment to one individual fellowship of Christian believers? If such a commitment is now resisted, or shunned, how will churches in future find their local leaders? What implications for the local church are involved?

Other suggestions for sounding out our members and their churches are welcome.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The **Congregational Lecture** 2016 will be at 5pm on 17 November at Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London, WC1H OAR. The lecture, an account of conflicting attitudes to the First World War among Congregationalists, is entitled "Pew and Platform" and will be given by Prof Clyde Binfield, one of our own CHS members.

The Congregational lecturer for 2017 will be Fleur Houston on Women in Ministry. In 2018 David Cornick has agreed to talk on Erik Routley.

The 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation has prompted the committee of the **Friends of Dr Williams's Library** to invite Prof Diarmaid MacCulloch of St Cross College, Oxford, to deliver the Friends' lecture in 2017. This will occur at Dr Williams's Library on 19 October, 2017. His preferred subject appears to be 'Thomas Cromwell's Religion Revisited'.

Constance Coltman

A film to commemorate the ordination in 1917 of the pioneer woman minister, Constance Coltman, will be shown at the Congregational Federation assembly in June 2017 in Cardiff.

Kirsty Thorpe will give the annual lecture of the URC History Society on a theme related to Mrs Coltman at its conference in 2017. The plan is for it to be delivered on Wednesday, 5 July (probably about 3.00pm) at Manchester University's Fallowfield site in Ashburne Hall/Behrens House. Members of the CHS who wish to be kept informed may e-mail Margaret Thompson (mt212@cam.ac.uk).

The Constance Coltman Centenary Planning Group, which includes Congregational and URC members, have yet to finalise plans for their mid- September 2017 commemorations. At this stage they suggest that those interested keep the afternoon of Sunday, 17 September 2017, free for a thanksgiving service in London. Other associated events are dependent on funding. We hope to have more details in our Spring issue.

1567 Plumbers Hall

In 2017, amid the commemorations of the Reformation's beginning in 1517 and Constance Coltman's ordination, we might be forgiven for overlooking the 450th anniversary of the discovery of the Elizabethan Separatists' church

in Plumbers Hall, in the City of London. Yet these Separatists deserve to be remembered.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Alan,

I read *The Congregational History Society Magazine*, Spring 2016, as soon as it arrived, especially the book reviews. Two caught my eye, Richard Davis (my own particular interest) & Soldiers in World War One. Are there any references to Captain May, who rose through the ranks, and many years later became the general secretary of SASRA [Soldiers and Airmen Scripture Readers Association]? I knew him in 1954–55.

However, there was one piece that struck me, that by Richard Cleaves on Erasmus and his Greek New Testament. While I greatly admire Erasmus for his collating the text of the Greek NT, and the obvious excellent uses to which it was put in many translations into the vernacular languages of the world, I cannot accept the conclusion the secretary draws.

I quote …

'many will celebrate 2017 as the 500th anniversary of the birthday of the Reformation. They may have missed the boat. It was the publication of the Greek NT by Erasmus in 1516 that sealed the flow towards reform throughout the whole of the Western Church as much in what came to be described as the Roman Catholic Church as in what became the Protestant churches.'

Luther's predecessors, Wyclif & Hus, did not fail because they used the Vulgate (Latin Bible), & neither did Luther succeed because he had the Greek NT for a year, many more events were happening in those days.

It should be noted that while Erasmus' '*Enchiridion* abounded in raillery against the medieval church', he himself did not stand by Luther. 'He recoiled from an attack on the authority of the Pope and the disparagement of good works' (Bainton *Erasmus of Christendom* 1972, p298). Erasmus said, 'I would be happy to be a martyr for Christ, but I cannot be a martyr for Luther' (Bainton 206, 216). For whatever reason, Erasmus never left the Church of Rome and later wrote against Luther's theology on Freewill and Predestination.

I read Roland Bainton's *Erasmus of Christendom*, a very sympathetic biography, but among hundreds of references to Erasmus and Luther I did not find one reference to any suggestion that the 1516 Greek NT had any bearing on the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

I should expect the vast majority of Protestant church historians to cite the 95 Theses nailed to the church door of Wittenberg—in response to the proximate cause of Tetzel and the sale of Indulgences—as the first salvo of the

Reformation. I can't help thinking that Dr Cleaves' emphasis is a reconstruction of history by a retrospective assertion of the significance of the Greek NT that 'sealed the flow to reform'.

Yours,

David Sercombe.

Richard Cleaves replies:

Thank you, David, for your thoughtful response to my piece on the 500th anniversary of the publication of Erasmus's Greek New Testament. However, to paraphrase the one whose contribution to the start of the Reformation we will rightly be celebrating in 2017, I stand my ground. Many streams of influence resulted in the Reformation, among which was the Renaissance determination to return to the 'fount' from which ideas flowed: *ad fontes* is no doubt a gross over-simplification but it is not a bad characterisation of much that was happening in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Coupled with this was the technological advance of the printing press, making editions of 'the classics' available in the libraries and universities of Europe in their original languages in large quantities as never before.

Erasmus was not the first to produce a Greek New Testament for printing. The Complutensian Polyglot was completed by 1516 but its publication was delayed until 1520, pending the granting of papal permission. Erasmus's printed New Testament was very different. That difference, I maintain, gives it the significance which it has not been credited with in this anniversary year. In the book you quote, Bainton describes its publication as 'a landmark in the history of Biblical scholarship … of immense significance' (164–165). Its immense significance lay, Bainton suggests, first in the publication of the Greek text itself. Thereby Erasmus called in question the absolute authority of the Vulgate. 'To all who cried, "Jerome is good enough for me," he replied, "You cry out that it is a crime to correct the gospels. This is a speech worthier of a coachman than of a theologian. You think it is all very well if a clumsy scribe makes a mistake in transcription and then you deem it a crime to put it right. The only way to determine the true text is to examine the early codices."' (Bainton 168) This really is the stuff of which reformations, if not revolutions, are made. It is the application of the *ad fontes* principle to the Bible itself. I should argue that this principle flows through the reformation and into our Congregational thinking. Is it a coincidence that John Robinson studied at Cambridge, Erasmus's *alma mater*?

Erasmus did not just produce a printed Greek text. He also provided his own translation. This is the second point of significance, as Bainton states, citing Erasmus's translation of Matthew 4:7 as an instance that 'created a furore'. 'The Vulgate has *poenitentiam agite*, which was taken to mean "do penance." Erasmus

in 1516 translated it *poeniteat vos*, "be penitent" and thereafter *resipiscite*, "change your mind" thereby removing any possible philological connection with the sacrament of penance.' (Bainton 173) It goes without saying that 'Luther made good use of this version' (Bainton's words: not mine). As those streams of reformation continue to flow, we have much to learn from Erasmus's later translation. We have de-valued the word 'repent' turning it into a way of saying sorry for the wrong we have done. Erasmus spotted the depth of meaning in the original Greek which involves changing your mind. The invitation suggested by Erasmus's translation rings true today when we hear Jesus challenging us not so much to say 'sorry' but rather to have a whole new way of thinking.

Another example of Erasmus's translation cited by Bainton is that of *logos* in John 1:1. Whereas the Vulgate used the word *verbum*, Erasmus chose to use the word *sermo*, justifying his decision by reference to the Church Fathers. Bainton suggests for Erasmus 'Christ was the *sermo*. We are to preach the sermons.' (174) It's not just the many examples and their connection with later thought that is significant in the inclusion of his own translation. It is the very fact of providing that translation that is so significant. He was stressing not only the importance of translation but also the need for translation. His vision was 'to see the sacred word in the hands of the farmer, the tailor, the traveller and the Turk.' This printed text and its translation was referred to by Luther as soon as a copy arrived in the new university of Wittenberg while he was lecturing on Romans. It is this printed text and translation that he referred to in his translation of the New Testament into German. It is this printed text and translation that William Tyndale used in making his translation of the New Testament into English. They no doubt differed with Erasmus in theology: that I do not dispute. They were, however, immensely indebted to the publication of his Greek New Testament. When Tyndale dreamed of the ploughboy reading the Scripture in his own language he was indebted to Erasmus.

There is a third significance identified by Bainton. With the Greek text and Erasmus's own translation he also provided his annotations on the text. This was indeed a major work that contributed to the study of Scripture. Bainton couples with this Erasmus' other major New Testament work, the Paraphrases of the New Testament. They were also produced in Latin: but his hope was quickly realised that they would be made available too in the vernacular. Translations quickly appeared in French, German, Bohemian and English. The translation into English was prompted by Katherine Parr, Henry VIII's widow, and under Edward VI a copy was placed in each parish church in England. Erasmus's vision was even greater for the Paraphrases as he dreamed they would put the Sacred word into the hands of 'The farmer, the tailor, the mason, prostitutes, pimps, and Turks' (Bainton 171).

Erasmus was not satisfied with the work he had done to produce the

1516 edition and so he followed it up with subsequent editions in 1519, 1522, 1527 and 1535, adding in later editions the text of the Vulgate as well. These continued to be used as the Reformation unfolded and indeed effectively became the basis of what came to be known as the *Textus Receptus*.

In 1517 we shall quite rightly be celebrating the 500th anniversary of a reformation which had at its heart the slogan *Sola Scriptura*. The landmark publication of the Greek text alongside a modern translation and annotations provided the raw materials which subsequent appeals to Scripture drew on.

The influence of Erasmus cannot be over-estimated. Bainton ends his chapter on Erasmus's Greek New Testament, wonderfully entitled, 'The Eloquence of God: Basel: The Bible', with a speculation about one of the might-have-beens of history that fascinate even the most thorough-going of historians and biographers. He notes the acclaim given Erasmus for the publication of the Greek New Testament. Once Froben had published the first edition Erasmus returned from Basel to the Netherlands in May 1516 to discover two letters awaiting his arrival from Pope Leo inviting him to Rome. Bainton takes up the story, 'If only these had reached me while I was at Basel,' he replied, 'no danger could have deterred me from hastening to your blessed feet'. As it was, he now felt obligated not to desert his prince. 'One cannot but wonder,' speculates Bainton, 'what the blessed feet of his Holiness might have done or left undone had Erasmus been at his side instead of Prierias and Eck after Martin Luther on the 31st of October, 1517, posted his Theses on the door of the Castle church at Wittenberg' (Bainton 184).

Food for thought, indeed, as next year we move to the next anniversary of the beginnings of the Reformation.

NOTES FROM THE CHS SECRETARY

For many years it was locked. Now it's open.

Travelling north from Bristol on the M5 shortly before reaching the Michaelwood service station you cannot fail to see a large monument on top of the Cotswold escarpment to your right. This year marks its 150th anniversary and once again it is open to the public: the views from the top towards the Severn estuary and south Wales are breath-taking.

The *Illustrated London News* of 17th November 1866 carried a piece describing the significance of the monument.

> The monument now erected consists of a tower, 26ft 6in square at the base, and 111ft. high. It is entered on the east side and contains a staircase leading

> to a gallery, which is to be adorned with pieces of sculpture, illustrating the chief events in the life of Tyndale and the history of the English Reformation. The tower is surmounted by a large cross of enamel mosaic, the work of Dr A Salviati, which is at a great height, and being of gold enamel principally, can be seen at a very great distance on account of the reflection of the light. The architect of the monument is Mr S S Teulon, of Charing Cross. The ceremony of opening the tower was performed by the Earl of Ducie, Lord Lieutenant of the county, on Tuesday week, in the presence of a large assembly. The Rev J S Austin, on behalf of the committee, handed the key to his Lordship, who spoke a few minutes and then unlocked the door, The Rev Canon Eden, Vicar of Wymondham, delivered an address, in the course of which he recited some appropriate verses, Latin and English, composed by him expressly for the occasion. The Rev A G Cornwall, honorary secretary to the committee, the Rev Dr Morton Brown, Mr Curtis Hayward, and other gentlemen took part in the proceedings. The total cost of the monument has been £1550, and there is a debt of £300, which the committee are now anxious to clear off. The Rev A G Cornwall, Wotton-under-Edge, receiving the subscriptions.

At its foot lies the village of North Nibley. In 1993 the village marked the 500th anniversary of its most famous son, William Tyndale, with a pageant telling his life story set in the farmhouse associated with his birth and with a walk from the parish church, via the Congregational church, through the woods and up to the monument. At the time it wasn't open to the public but that day it was. I had just arrived in Cheltenham (part of the South West Midlands Area of the Federation) and counted it a privilege to be invited to speak on the steps of our church.

Since that time there's been sadness and joy in the Congregational church. The sadness came a couple of years ago when numbers had dwindled and it was no longer possible to keep going. When a large number of people came along from the village and surrounding area to the last service, several of them felt the chapel was too important to allow it to close. So began a journey that has culminated in the complete refurbishment of the building and the launch of a new way of being church that is beginning to get off the ground. With messy church, café church and premises able to welcome other activities the witness of this Congregational church continues.

And the church has made a small but very significant contribution to the celebrations around the 150th anniversary of the Tyndale Monument.

The old wooden doors and dark, forbidding little porch are gone. In their place are clear glazed double doors leading into a porch that's bright and airy with more clear-glazed doors into the chapel. The inside doors are locked when the building is not in use. But the outside doors remain open giving access to

the small, secure porch. There, in pride of place, is an exhibition case with a facsimile of the first edition of the Tyndale New Testament open for all to see. Above is a beautifully presented account of William Tyndale and the immense contribution he made to the Christian faith in the English-speaking world and to the English language itself.

It wasn't just the monument that for many years was locked but now is open, it's the doors of the chapel as well!

Around the time of the anniversary of the opening of the Monument the village came together for a concert in the parish church. Along with readings from local poets, U A Fanthorpe and Brian Nisbit, the concert saw the first performance of a new work by the director of the North Nibley Community Choir, Helen Fink. The work is called simply 'the Word of God'. According to the North Nibley website (http://www.northnibley.org.uk/html/monument.html) "The words of the piece are taken from the ceremony of the inauguration of the Monument in 1866 written by the Rev Robert Eden. It tells the story of William Tyndale's translation of the Bible, the final words read '… the light shines in England. The shut bible opens'."

How fitting! What can be said of the monument and the chapel can also be said of the Bible which William Tyndale put into the hands of the ploughboy:

For many years it was locked. Now it's open.

Richard Cleaves

PS To walk up to the monument the Congregational Church is the best starting point. Have a look at the Tyndale New Testament in the porch first. The path through the woods to the monument starts near the church. You can finish with a pub meal at the Black Horse Inn!

SHAKESPEARE AND PURITANISM

The 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) provides an opportunity to investigate his attitude to religion in general, and his antagonism to puritanism in particular. Many years ago Geoffrey Nuttall wrote that the puritans had been "maligned by those who represent them as disdaining the innocent pleasures of music, sports, and the stage". He defended their participation in sport and music but conceded that puritans did "abhor" the stage, as made evident during the Civil war and Commonwealth when they closed the theatres.[1] This antipathy which became law in 1642 might be explained, at least in part, by the bitterness and ridicule which had been heaped upon them in the comedies of the late Elizabethan and early Stuart age. In that period London was overwhelmingly a puritan city and its leading figures identified the theatre with sedition, the loss of chastity, and sexual licence. Theatres tended to be located outside the City proper in the liberties where they were beyond the jurisdiction of the City fathers. These areas were associated with prostitution and gambling, while the theatres themselves attracted thieves and pickpockets, the dissolute and dangerous.[2] Puritans, keen on further reformation of church and society, could not overlook the fact that playwrights customarily depicted adultery as a cause for laughter in which the seducer might be lionised while the humiliated husband became a figure of fun.[3] Shakespeare took obvious pleasure in teasing such puritanical figures as Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (written c1603–4) and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (written c1601–2).[4]

Moral seriousness was a characteristic of puritanism, leading its supporters to disapprove of the licentiousness, associated with the theatres. Indeed many radical Protestants wanted to see adultery punished as a capital crime for both men and women. Although this wish was eventually fulfilled in the Civil War period, it was never enforced.[5] Even the profession of acting was suspect to puritans because actors pretended to be other than they were. To some of Shakespeare's contemporaries that pretence was deceit and better acting involved the more convincing deceit. As the melancholy clown Touchstone states in *As You Like It* (written 1599), "The truest poetry is the most feigning", the demonstration of

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1 G F Nuttall *The Puritan Spirit* (1957) 16–17.

2 A Ryrie *The Sorcerer's Tale* (Oxford 2008) 90; J Shapiro *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (2016) 252–3.

3 Nuttall *Puritan Spirit* 16–17.

4 J Bate *Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and World of William Shakespeare* (2009) 23.

5 Ryrie *Sorcerer's Tale* 88–89.

which on stage only increased the puritan distaste for an artistic medium which thrived on pretence. The term hypocrite derives from a Greek word for actor, where hypokrisis means acting in the theatre or simply pretence. Hypocrisy then involves affecting qualities so as to pretend to an undeserved virtue. In the New Testament hypocrisy is a term of abuse and, given the interest of Shakespeare's contemporaries in Biblical translations, with the Authorised Version of King James appearing in 1611, the playhouse was a decidedly dubious institution.

Puritanism was then generally hostile towards the theatre, regarding its productions as sinful. However it is all too easy to allow condemnation of puritan attitudes to fall into caricature. Malvolio may offer a recognisable parody of a puritan but the whole movement should not be judged by his posturing, nor by the foolish young man Sir Andrew Aguecheek's aside, "I had as lief be a Brownist as a politician" (*Twelfth Night* Act 3, scene 2), suggesting that he would rather be a Protestant heretic than a man who framed and advocated public policy. To his simple mind both options were intolerable!

Shakespeare and Religion—Catholicism

In an investigation of Shakespeare's attitude to godly Protestantism, it is appropriate to examine how Protestant he himself was. Several critics have claimed that he had Roman Catholic sympathies. His own father had once avowed Catholicism and four of the six schoolmasters at Shakespeare's grammar school, the King's New School in Stratford on Avon, were Catholics. Simon Hunt, who may have taught Shakespeare, later became a Jesuit priest. Hunt's successor, Thomas Jenkins, had studied under the Catholic martyr, Edmund Campion, at St John's College, Oxford, and John Cottom, Jenkins's successor at the school in 1579, was the older brother of a Jesuit priest. All this suggests that Shakespeare was well aware of Catholic sensitivities.[6]

Given his surname, Jenkins' family may have originally been Welsh as was the schoolmaster, Hugh Evans, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (written c1597–1602). Evans' pupil in that play is a bright but mischievous boy also named William who has a Latin lesson in which he must learn by rote, as Shakespeare must have done in Stratford.

Historians now recognise that the ideals of the Reformation did not quickly nor completely replace veneration for the old Catholic traditions, especially outside London. Roman Catholic beliefs and practices were still valued in the area where Shakespeare grew up. Eamon Duffy has described Catholicism as a set of beliefs and practices that remained fundamental to English religion long after Elizabeth I's accession to the throne in 1558. He finds the phrase "bare ruin'd choirs" from Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 a moving comment on the spirit of

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6 *ODNB*; Bate *Soul of the Age* 79–80; Shapiro *1606* p 91

Elizabethan religion, Clearly Duffy sees fit to include the poet as one of those who found post-Reformation religion unsatisfactory. Nevertheless he does not contend that Shakespeare was himself a Catholic, although he cites Sonnet 73 as evidence that Shakespeare was opposed to the English Reformation.[7]

In 1693 the antiquary John Aubrey, wrote that Shakespeare had been a schoolmaster in the country during the so-called "lost years" (1585–92). From this, some have concluded that his employer then was Alexander Hoghton, a Catholic landowner in Lancashire who left money in his will to a certain "William Shakeshafte", making reference to theatrical costumes and trappings. Shakespeare's grandfather had once used the name Shakeshafte which was a common surname in that region of Lancashire. The novelist and literary biographer, Peter Ackroyd, has remarked that annotations in Hoghton's copy of Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, a vital source for Shakespeare's history plays, might support the theory that this annotator and Shakespeare were the same man. Yet this remains unproven.[8]

Shakespeare, aged 18 years, married Anne Hathaway who was three months pregnant in 1582. The ceremony may have occurred in Temple Grafton a few miles from Stratford, where the officiant would probably have been John Frith. Four years later in 1586 Frith was exposed as a Catholic priest. If Shakespeare had married in Temple Grafton, rather than Stratford, was the wedding conducted according to Catholic rites?[9]

The historian A L Rowse, who made a special study of Shakespeare's sonnets and wrote on his intellectual milieu, identified anti-Catholic sentiments in the poet's Sonnet 124, interpreting "the fools of time" in the last lines of this sonnet—

> To this I witness call the fools of time,
> which die for goodness who have lived for crime.

Rowse took this as a reference to the several Jesuit martyrs who were executed for treason in the years 1594–5.[10] Others accept that Shakespeare intended "the fools of time" to represent the martyred Jesuits, but claim that the poet, by alluding to the Jesuit Robert Southwell's tract *An epistle of comfort to the reuerend priestes, & to the honorable, worshipful, & other of the laye sort restrayned in durance for the Catholicke faith,* with its apparent glorification of Catholic martyrdom, sympathised with them. Indeed the poet stated that, however treacherously they have lived, they did "die for goodness". Possibly Shakespeare

7 E Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars—Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-*c.1580 (1992) passim, *Saints, Sacrilege and Sedition: Religion and Conflict in the Tudor Reformations* (2012) 250–253; J Shapiro *1599: A year in the life of William Shakespeare* (2006) 165–6.

8 P Ackroyd *Shakespeare: The Biography* (2006) 77.

9 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*).

10 A L Rowse *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1964), *Shakespeare The Man* (1973), *Shakespeare's Globe: his Intellectual and Moral Outlook* (1981).

knew Southwell's work well. Robert Southwell was executed in 1595 but his influence has been traced in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Titus Andronicus*.[11]

Sir John Oldcastle

In 1611 the cartographer and historian, John Speed, claimed that Shakespeare's closet Catholicism had influenced his satire of the revered Protestant martyr Sir John Oldcastle (c1370–1417) whom he lampooned in his history plays (*Henry IV* part 1 written 1597 and part II c1596–99) originally under his real name. After complaints by Oldcastle's descendants, chief among them, Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham, this character's name was changed from Oldcastle to Falstaff. Yet the fat old knight remained a debased figure and even had a whole comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* devoted to his further misadventures. Oldcastle was a reformed sinner, notorious in his day for gluttony, pride and lechery, and his story was familiar to contemporaries from John Foxe's relation of it in his best-selling 'Book of Martyrs'. Foxe's journalistic version of history was both thrilling and nauseating, "drenched equally in pity and sensation". In reality Prince Henry may have abandoned his friend Oldcastle in prison, having failed to secure a recantation of his Lollard 'heresy'.[12]

Given that Oldcastle's Lollardy equated in Shakespeare's time with puritanism, the playwright's use of this character as a buffoon might imply that his own sympathies lay with the established order which was for Shakespeare the Church of England.[13] Yet grossly insulting Oldcastle only served to offend his descendants and to alienate the many who sympathised with his reformist views.[14]

Young Hamlet

In *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark* (written c 1599–1602) the young prince was a student at university in Wittenberg, while his father's spirit was in purgatory. These two facts sent out mixed signals. Any reference to purgatory might indicate that Shakespeare held to, at least in part, a pre-Reformation, Catholic theology but the associations of Martin Luther with Wittenberg, and its status as an intellectual centre of Protestantism, suggest the absolute opposite. The combination of these two facts, allied to his use in his plays of prayers for the dead, indulgences, and pilgrimages, signify that Shakespeare did not wish to be explicit about his religious views. That is Shakespeare's references to

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11 J Pearce *Through Shakespeare's Eyes: Seeing the Catholic Presence in the Plays* (San Francisco 2010), J Klause *Shakespeare, the Earl, and the Jesuit* (New Jersey 2008) passim.

12 R Blythe *Divine Landscapes* (1986) 55; Bate *Soul of the Age* 254.

13 J Foxe *The Acts and Monuments* (1563) chapter XIV.

14 Bate *Soul of the Age* 303.

traditional Catholic beliefs do not necessarily support the contention that he was himself a Catholic.

Shakespeare's drama clearly shows his familiarity with Catholic ritual and faith but the literary critic, Samuel Schoenbaum, concluded that the poet "cannot be put into a theological pigeon-hole". He maintained that "Probably Shakespeare remained a tolerant Anglican".[15] Others have pointed out that Shakespeare was deeply affected by hearing the Bible in English. His works contain many allusions to the scriptures, increasingly familiar to his audience from regular, legally compulsory attendance at Protestant worship in the parish churches.[16] Schoenbaum noted that the story of Cain and Abel is used 25 times by Shakespeare who "evidently continued to consult the Bible".[17] In truth the plays and sonnets betray both Protestant and Catholic influences.

Puritan Characterizations

Shakespeare ridiculed puritans in the figures of Falstaff, Malvolio, Angelo, and others. In *Measure for Measure*, not only is Angelo depicted as a hypocrite but his idea of virtue is exposed as a lack of self-knowledge. In this play the reform agenda of a town's government is shown as shallow and unrealistic.

Malvolio, the steward to Countess Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, is described thus—"sometimes he is a kind of puritan" (Act 2 Scene 3). and is "sick of self-love" (Act 1 Scene 5). His name derives from the Italian for "ill will" or the badly loved, malevolent and evil wishing. He is depicted as despising fun and games and becomes the butt of jokes and teasing, especially when he becomes the subject of a mischievous and elaborate trick so that he parades before his mistress smiling, wearing yellow stockings and cross garters. However, at that time Olivia is mourning her brother's death, and yellow is:

> a colour she abhors and cross garters a fashion she detests (Act 2 Scene 5).

As a result the proud Malvolio is brought low, by those fun-loving reprobates whom he considers beneath him, and is imprisoned as a supposed lunatic. This mocking appears a clear statement of Shakespeare's view of puritanism's moral posturing.

In *Measure for Measure* love and infidelity are investigated in a Vienna which is noted for its alehouses, brothels and sexual immorality. The Duke decides to observe matters at close quarters, dressed as a friar, and leaves his deputy, Angelo, in charge of the state. Angelo decides to initiate reform. A young man, Claudio, who has slept with his betrothed, Juliet, and made her pregnant is

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15 S Schoenbaum *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (revised edition 1987) 61.

16 *ODNB.*

17 Schoenbaum *Shakespeare: Compact Documentary Life* 58.

arrested and sentenced to death, under an old law which Angelo has revived. Angelo also threatens to demolish all the brothels. Meanwhile, the Duke returns to the city in disguise.

Lucio, Froth and others (regular clients at Mistress Overdone's brothel) agree that Lucio should visit Claudio's sister, Isabella, in her convent to persuade her to appeal to Angelo for clemency for her brother. Finding himself attracted to Isabella, Angelo offers to spare Claudio if Isabella will sleep with him, but she is preparing to become a nun and refuses. Isabella visits Claudio in prison and explains Angelo's proposition and her refusal. The Duke, disguised as a friar, overhears their conversation. Claudio pleads with Isabella to submit to Angelo, but again she refuses. The disguised Duke concocts a scheme with Isabella to save Claudio's life. It transpires that Angelo had mis-treated his former betrothed, Mariana, and Isabella and Mariana trick Angelo into sleeping with Mariana whom Angelo believes is Isabella (it is dark and both are silent). Thus Angelo is deceived into committing the same offence as Claudio.

Evidently *Measure for Measure* has a detailed plot involving pimps and prostitutes, a scene in a brothel, an out of marriage pregnancy, and extra-marital sex, as well as a misguided, moralistic, governing authority. The various threads of the plot are resolved satisfactorily when Mariana is married to Angelo who is immediately, on the Duke's orders, condemned to death. Yet both Isabella and Mariana beg for his life and the Duke pardons him. Claudio is released from prison and the play ends with the Duke apparently proposing marriage to Isabella. Yet he receives no answer.

Angelo's true character is revealed in that speech where he expresses his attraction for Isabella. Only then does he begin to understand how little control he has over his own emotions and how easily he may become a slave to his own base desires.

> **Angelo**: What's this? what's this? is this her fault or mine?
> The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most?
> Ha! Not she, nor doth she tempt; but it is I
> That, lying by the violet in the sun,
> Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
> Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be
> That modesty may more betray our sense
> Than woman's lightness?
>
> What, do I love her,
> That I desire to hear her speak again,
> And feast upon her eyes? what is't I dream on?
> O cunning enemy that, to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook: most dangerous

> Is that temptation that doth goad us on
> To sin in loving virtue. Never could the strumpet
> With all her double vigor, art and nature,
> Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
> Subdues me quite.

Measure for Measure

The title *Measure for Measure* itself is derived from Jesus' sermon on the mount and reveals Shakespeare's familiarity with the English Bible. In Matthew 7:1–2 Jesus instructed his followers in these terms.

> Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with that judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure you meet, it shall be measured unto you again.

This passage rings true repeatedly throughout the play, as does the legal interpretation of the title, *Measure for Measure* which also echoes the Old Testament verses, Exodus 21:23–25.

> If death follow, then thou shalt pay life for life. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Clearly Angelo does not take to heart the contrast between his severe penalty for Claudio's fornication, and its consequences, and his own equally reprehensible conduct in propositioning Isabella to assuage his lusts. That is Angelo has attempted to apply the teachings from Exodus but has not moved on from legalism to the Christian morality of Matthew 7. The play makes plain that men and women should not be hasty in their condemnation of others because all are less than perfect and, being under God's judgment, are wholly dependent on his mercy. *Measure for Measure* reveals Shakespeare's tackling head on the themes of religion, reform, morality and true virtue. As in other plays, identities are confused, law and justice are shown not to be equivalents, and forgiveness and mercy are necessary to those in authority and to individuals alike, and are freely employed. That is Shakespeare's Christianity is not that of a narrow party but one which understands human flaws and youthful excess, like Claudio's in particular. Yet it also tolerates the emotions and intelligence of aspirant nuns, like Isabella, whose sisterly love is the motive force for positive change throughout the whole drama. She is admired by both Angelo and the Duke and is thus held up to the audience as the model of true saintliness, rather than that of the strict, judgemental, two-faced puritans. In this play, above all, Shakespeare shows how Christianity might be applied in a town not so different from London to all its citizens.

Some themes explored in *Measure for Measure* are evident in other works.

The need for the law to show mercy is found most obviously in *The Merchant of Venice* (written c1596–99) and forgiveness is a central feature of perhaps his first play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (written c1589–93) and of one of his last plays *The Tempest* (written c1610–11). *Troilus and Cressida* contains several references to prostitution which bear more relevance to London than to ancient Troy where the play is set.

Popular Beliefs

Shakespeare was a country boy who, like many others before and after him, made his way to the City to seek his fortune. Although he reworked the tales of ancient Greece and Rome, he also related the folktales of old England.

In his plays Shakespeare made frequent reference to superstitions, spirits, ghosts and fairies—the latter most obviously in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with Oberon, Titania and Puck or Robin Goodfellow. In addition Ariel, servant to Prospero in *The Tempest,* is described as "an airy Spirit" and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 1 scene 4) refers to Queen Mab who is the bringer of dreams. At first Mab seems an innocent enough creature but Mercutio reveals her as a vindictive hag who punishes immoral women by causing their lips to blister, knotting their hair and creating ugly pustules. Similarly in *King Lear* Edgar speaks of the "foul fiend Flibbertigibbet" who causes all sorts of unpleasantness by blinding the unwary with cataracts ("the web and the pin, squints the eye") and endows new born babies with cleft palates ("makes the hare-lip"):

> This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins
> at curfew, and walks till the first cock; he gives
> the web and the pin, squints the eye, and makes the
> hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the
> poor creature of earth. (Act 3 scene 4)

Shakespeare would have been aware of the popular beliefs of country people from his youth in Warwickshire, although probably many such beliefs were still held in early modern London. To many of Shakespeare's contemporaries fairies were not "twee little Tinkerbells at the bottom of the garden". Rather they were "anarchic, amoral, and whimsical spirits, fair-weather friends and dangerous enemies". Shakespeare was not above using such beliefs in his dramas. He knew also that alchemy was a form of "natural magic" and that herbalists, like the friar in *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), practised natural magic, preparing poisons which just might kill or cure. The puritans, seeing themselves as reforming influences, moving away from the superstitions and idolatry of the past, decried such popular religiosity in the country, just as much as they denounced profanity and blasphemy in the town.

The 16th and 17th centuries witnessed an outpouring of feelings against witchcraft in England, on the continent of Europe and in New England. Yet the witches in *Macbeth* have a key role. They meet in foul weather and talk of trouble amid the thunder, lightning, fog and filthy air, making clear from the outset that this Scottish play is dark and forbidding, and the theme of evil is central to it. The audience learns from them that—

> Fair is foul and foul is fair.

Other References

Shakespeare's *King John (*1623*)* contains several examples of anti-Catholic feelings, seemingly betraying Protestant sympathies, such as the denouncement of the Pope as an "unworthy and ridiculous … Italian priest" with "usurped authority". (Act 3 scene 1) The weak King John is fighting the French but also is excommunicated by the Pope.

The porter appears only once in *Macbeth* (written 1606), that is at the opening of Act 2, scene 3, to open the gate. Paradoxically this scene provokes considerable laughter because the porter, surely a recognisable figure to Shakespeare's audience, is drunk and punctuates his speech with obscenities. He provides light relief at a crucial moment in the drama. In the previous scene Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, having killed Duncan, had heard a knocking at the entrance to the castle. The repeated knocking arouses the porter who has gone to bed late at night and has no wish to awake and open the gate. At the close of the previous scene, Lady Macbeth had led Macbeth away to wash the blood from their hands.

Imagining himself to be at the gate of Hell, the porter swears at the knocker. He states cheerfully, "Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key" (2.3.1–3). However, rather than turning the key and unlocking the gate, he digresses into mentioning some people whom he would welcome to hell. The figure of the porter may have been derived from the medieval mystery plays. Then the porter states,

> Knock, knock! Who's there, in th' other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven. O, come in, equivocator.

By convention the "equivocator" who arrives at the entrance to hell, in the Porter's speech in *Macbeth*, is accepted as a reference, but not a sympathetic one, to the Jesuit Henry Garnet, who had been executed in early 1606. Most commentators take it that the playwright may have included this allusion for the sake of topicality, believing that at least some in his audience would know of Garnet's writing on equivocation. The allusion was probably not made from

any great sympathy on Shakespeare's part for Garnet or for his Catholicism. The policy of equivocation had been formally approved as a tactic of the Jesuits, as a means of answering an interrogator. The term would have reminded a Jacobean audience of the recent plot of 1605, associated with Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators, in which Garnet had been loosely implicated and for which he was found guilty of high treason. Twenty years earlier, in 1583 Lord Burghley, the queen's chief minister, had published a tract on equivocation with which Shakespeare also may have been familiar.[18]

In 1606 the House of Commons censored profanity so that henceforth any actor who invoked the name of God, the Holy Ghost or the Trinity would be fined a swingeing £10 which might then constitute six months' income. Shakespeare's plays could no longer include common oaths so that phrases like 'by God', 'by the Lord', 'by my troth', swounds/zounds (God's wounds) etc were removed from the performances. Therefore the porter's words in *Macbeth* could no longer include "for God's sake". The humour of Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing* was lessened because he could no longer say to the playgoers at the Globe theatre

> Write down that they serve God; and write God first, for God defend but God should go before such villains" (Act 4 scene 2).

At the end of the play *Henry VIII* the future Queen Elizabeth arrives on stage as a babe in arms. This provides the occasion for the most blatant reference to contemporary religious issues in Shakespeare's writings. The character Archbishop Cranmer is allowed to predict that during her reign, "God shall be truly known". Yet this line is generally attributed not to Shakespeare but to John Fletcher, his collaborator, himself the son of a Sussex clergyman. Cranmer's blessing, though by Fletcher, may well have matched Shakespeare's sentiments.

Conclusion

To Shakespeare love was the centre of intellectual life and it was always at the heart of his comedies. However the puritans were parsimonious with that generous love, either in passion or in compassion. Rather they were kill-joys, opposed to the youthful and life-affirming. Shakespeare also had time in his plays for the unashamedly fat, like Sir John Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch. He asks, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" The modern critic Jonathan Bate replies that "Theatre will always prefer cakes and ale to virtue".[19]

If therefore Shakespeare had little sympathy for the puritans, the evidence

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18 Garnet's defence of the use of equivocation was published in *A Treatise of Equivocation* (c. 1598). Equivocation was condemned by many as outright lying, including Edward Coke, the Attorney General .

19 Bate *Soul of the Age* 352.

does not allow one to conclude unequivocally that he was a totally committed member of the Church of England nor that he was a closet Catholic. England had not entirely settled in its religion and would not be so until the 18th century. Shakespeare lived between the great upheavals of the Protestant Reformation and the Civil Wars which climaxed in Charles I's execution. His plays were only possible because of the Reformation yet this same transformation of church and society helped to create the puritans whom he despised.

Certainly Shakespeare's works reveal his using both Catholic and Protestant theological teachings, giving his works a mixed and muddled quality as regards religion. In this he was not very different from others who valued the old Catholic ways but recognised that these had much in common with superstition and idolatry, as they were labelled by the puritans. If then the English people were uncertain about their religious allegiance, the Elizabethan and Jacobean state made little allowance for toleration of diversity. Indeed it was the very nature of the Church of England that it retained much of the popish ceremonial but claimed to be truly Protestant. Such an unsatisfactory half-way house, caught between Rome and Geneva, was the reason why the puritans objected to that Church of England and demanded further reform. On the other hand some fierce Catholic hotheads felt that their allegiance to Rome justified extreme violence to overthrow the English church and state.

In Jonathan Bate's words, Shakespeare's "mind and world were poised between Catholicism and Protestantism, old feudal ways and new bourgeois ambitions, rational thinking and visceral instinct, faith and scepticism". One of his last plays, *The Tempest*, is concerned with the value of books, beginning with a man "for the liberal arts, without a parallel" but ending with the drowning of the books. That is the secular wisdom of Renaissance humanism is renounced in favour of the one true book, the Bible.[20]

For all their moralising the puritans produced great literature from such diverse figures as Milton the London statesman, Bunyan the country boy from Bedford, and Defoe the prolific and imaginative journalist about town, let alone from figures like George Fox, Isaac Watts and William Blake and others in whom the puritan spirit ran deep. The creative appeal for these was genuine and profound. Shakespeare's disdain does not allow us to dismiss the influence of puritanism as wholly negative. Rather we should embrace the best of life and of godly religion.

Michael Robertson

20 Bate *Soul of the Age* 18, 126–7.

THE HEAVENS WERE BRASS: THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

The coming of the year 1666 brought with it fearsome, apocalyptic forebodings, most obviously in that the number 666 was the sign of the Beast in the Book of Revelation, associated with the final battle between good and evil at Armageddon. Popular pamphlets that year looked forward to portents of the Second Coming, such as comets, eclipses and storms while astrologers played on these fears. In London the plague outbreak which had begun in the previous year still raged, having claimed perhaps 70,000 victims overall (one in five Londoners died), but by early 1666 showed signs of abating. To add to the domestic problems, in February 1666 King Charles II declared war on France which had recently announced its intention to ally itself to the Dutch Republic with which the English had been at war since January 1665.[1]

Of course, the plague had not merely struck London. Eastern England as a whole was seriously affected. Peterborough, Oundle, Newport Pagnell, Cambridge, Norwich, Dover, Sandwich, Canterbury and Maidstone all suffered, as did also other parts of the country, most notably the village of Eyam in Derbyshire. The Essex minister, Ralph Josselin, noted on 4 March, 1666, that "plague through mercy abates at London, 42 pl[ague] total 237, but a great increase at Colchester to 55. Yarmouth cleare. Lord heale our land, and open our trade, in mercy". [2] Gradually, it seemed, Josselin's prayer was being answered as the pestilence declined.

Yet, along with the plague, southern England had experienced a drought since November 1665 and the thin wooden buildings of London had come to resemble the driest tinder-box.

Nonconformist Behaviour

The observant Scotsman, Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715), later Bishop of Salisbury, commented on how nonconformist ministers had remained in London throughout the summer and autumn of 1665. They had occupied the parish pulpits vacated by their Church of England incumbents who had fled from the

1 J Uglow *A Gambling Man Charles II and the Restoration 1660–1670* (2009) 348; A Tinniswood *By Permission of Heaven: The Story of the Great Fire of London* (paperback edn 2004) 9.

2 A Macfarlane (ed) *The Diaries of Ralph Josselin* (1967) 525; Tinniswood *By Permission* 11.

plague. These intruding nonconformists had preached "openly … on the sins of the court, and on the ill usage that they themselves had met with".[3]

Thomas Vincent (1634–78), the Presbyterian minister ejected in 1662 from St Mary Magdalen, Milk Street, in the City, was among those silenced nonconformists who occupied the London pulpits during the plague. He became noted for his "courageous ministry" when, undeterred by the pestilence, he ministered to the sick and dying in their homes, "void of all fear of death" and thereby won respect from all sides. Richard Baxter had a high opinion of Vincent whom he described as having unwavering "Zeal and Diligence". Vincent's reflections on the plague and fire, *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667), proved a best seller, reaching sixteen editions in eight years. At his funeral he was described as having been "freely willing to venture his life for the salvation of souls".[4]

John Mortimer, the Presbyterian minister ejected from Sowton, Devon, in 1662, was in London during the plague year and, like Vincent, often preached in the City parishes. When he and his wife fled from the fire in 1666 into the country they were "put into the Pesthouse there, as if they were Persons that brought the Infection: But God preserv'd them, and they never had the Distemper".[5]

In contrast to these "highly principled Dissenters", most Anglican incumbents had deserted their parishes and, like the monarch and his courtiers, as well as the better-off citizens, had escaped from the City which had begun to resemble "a wasteland". We must allow that religious differences were not always to the fore among the fugitives because John Milton had taken his family north to Chalfont St Giles and the Presbyterian academy at Moorfields removed to Essex. By February 1666 King Charles had returned from Oxford to Whitehall.[6]

Fire and the City of London

London, like every other early modern European town, was vulnerable to fire which was a frequent hazard in a wooden city, with open hearths, ovens, candles, and other tools dependent on heat and flame. At the beginning of Charles II's reign, the City's street plan remained basically medieval, leaving it an overcrowded square mile of narrow alleys. Given that most houses in

3 G Burnet *The History of His Own Time* (1724) 224; A G Matthews *Calamy Revised* (1934) (hereafter *CR*) 502–3.

4 *ODNB*; D Neal *The History of the Puritans or Protestant Nonconformists* ed J Toulmin (1822) 451; R Baxter *Relquiae Baxterianae* (1696) III, 95; S Slater *Vincentius Redivivus:a funeral sermon* (1679) 41.

5 *CR* 356.

6 Tinniswood *By Permission* 8–10; *CR* 167–8.

London were constructed of timber and plaster, the citizens were accustomed to fire, with a particularly serious fire having broken out as recently as February 1633 when a servant left hot ashes under a staircase in one of the houses on London Bridge. That fire had consumed 80 buildings.[7] Although building with wood and thatch had been officially banned for centuries, some unscrupulous workmen still contrived to use these cheap materials. Stone was expensive and in effect the only major stone-built area lay at the City centre, where wealthy merchants' grand houses were surrounded by numerous poor dwellings which housed most of the population. These small, flimsily built hovels might also contain the workshops of smiths, glaziers, metal workers and others which rendered them all potential fire risks.

Many tenement buildings had projecting upper floors or "jetties" which almost touched and enabled fire to jump easily from one building to another. The risk in these narrow alleys was recognized by contemporaries. Charles II had issued a proclamation in 1661 against overhanging windows and jetties, although this was rarely enforced. In April 1665 he again warned the mayor and aldermen of London of the dangers of a large scale fire and empowered them to imprison stubborn, non-compliant builders and to tear down unsafe buildings.

Indeed each parish was expected to maintain some means of combating fire and several larger parishes in the City of London had their own hand pumped fire engines, mounted on a carriage. Smaller parishes might share such an engine with a neighbouring parish, although this not infrequently led to disputes about who should pay for the upkeep, leading to neglect. The parish watch was required on its regular night patrols to keep a look out for fires.

The proximity of the River Thames was an important fire-fighting asset. It provided water to combat fires and the possibility of escape by boat. However the riverside warehouses, fragile wooden tenements and hovels of the poor were situated among highly combustible materials like pitch, tar and hemp which were used by ship builders and chandlers and wharves full of goods like butter, oils, cheese, brandy, sugar, honey, tobacco, tope, wool, furs and skins from trade with the Mediterranean and the Baltic countries. Alongside these were the timber structures of the fish market and the old hall of the Hanseatic merchants.[8]

Fire-Fighting

In general, combating a fire once it had broken out depended on the destruction of buildings and the application of water. Parishes retained some tools like ladders, leather buckets, axes, and cumbersome and unwieldy "fire hooks"

7 Tinniswood *By Permission* 47.

8 J Uglow *Gambling Man* 358–60.

(which resembled pikes) to level buildings, although gunpowder might also be used in emergencies, in order to create fire breaks. On the evening of the third day, Charles II ordered the navy to create fire breaks by using gunpowder which was far more destructive and more efficient than the laborious fire hooks. The storm wind also eased and enabled fire fighters to bring it under control.

Outbreak of the Fire

The Great Fire broke out early on the morning of Sunday, 2 September 1666, in the king's baker's shop in Pudding Lane, near London Bridge. Sir Thomas Bludworth, the Lord Mayor of London, was called out at 3 am to inspect the fire at the house of Thomas Farryner , the baker. Pudding Lane was a narrow street, not 100 yards in length, running north-south from the butcher's market of Little Eastcheap to Thames Street, bordering the river. The nearby parish of St Margaret New Fish Street had been the location of a fish market in medieval London.[9]

One of the key witnesses to the fire's progress was the ejected minister, Thomas Vincent, who described the Lord Mayor's visit to Pudding Lane on the first morning.

> The Lord Maior of the City comes with his Officers; a confusion there is: councell is taken away: and *London,* so famous for wisdom and dexterity, can now find neither brains, nor hands to prevent its ruine.[10]

Clearly, as Vincent implied, Bludworth lacked the will to override the protests of landlords who opposed the destruction of their property and his response suggests that he resented being summoned to the blaze. He was reported as stating contemptuously, "Pish! A woman might piss it out", which turned out to be a mis-judgment of epic proportions.

The fire had begun an hour or more earlier, after Farryner had apparently checked his ovens before retiring to bed, but a smouldering spark had remained alight which ignited the building. The term 'pudding' was used to refer to animal entrails or bowels which were used in the production of fatty pies. These fatty remains only helped the fire to grow. Alerted by his servant, Farryner and his daughter, Hanna, had escaped across the roof to a neighbour's house, although his maid, frightened of jumping from the upstairs window, stayed behind to die. [11]

By 7am, with the aid of a strong east wind, 300 neighbouring buildings had been consumed and Samuel Pepys went to the Tower of London to view the

9 J Stow *The Survey of London* (1956) 189–190.

10 T Vincent *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667) 57.

11 Tinniswood *By Permission* 41–3.

extent of the destruction. Alarmed at the rampant and unchecked devastation, especially the collapse of the great tower of the church of St Laurence Pountney, he embarked by boat westwards to Whitehall in order to report directly to the king. The monarch instructed him to inform the Lord Mayor to create fire breaks, by dismantling houses. Yet the breaks proved insufficiently wide and the wind and fire too powerful.

Vincent left a memorable account of the fire's progress through London. He wrote—

> It was the 2 of *September* 1666 that the anger of the Lord was kindled. … It was in the depth and dead of the night, … that the Fire doth break forth … and like a mighty Gyant refresht with Wine … quickly gathers strength, when it had made havock of some houses; rusheth down the hill towards the *Bridge;* crosseth *Thames-street,* invadeth *Magnus-Church* at the *Bridge foot,* …

Over four days the fire spread rapidly leaving chaos in its wake. Londoners packed their precious belongings as best they could, though carts were blocking the narrow roads. The Thames was full of boats loaded with precious goods. Pepys noted that few carried household goods but one had a pair of light but expensive virginals.[12] He chose to bury his own wine and parmesan cheese in his garden on Seething Lane though this in the event was spared the flames. The fugitives headed for the Thames or for the open ground outside the city walls. The fire reached the glorious old St Paul's Cathedral on Tuesday, 4 September. Many had thought that the cathedral being stone-built would survive. However it was then being restored and wooden scaffolding was in place.

William Sancroft (1617–93), the future Archbishop of Canterbury, on his appointment as Dean of St Paul's in 1664, recognised that the fabric of the medieval cathedral needed serious attention, even though Inigo Jones in the 1630s had carried out some repairs during his classicization of the porch. The outbreak of the Civil Wars in 1642 had halted further work on the cathedral. By the 1660s repairs and renovations to St Paul's had acquired some urgency. However, given the massive stone walls, most citizens believed that storing their goods in the cathedral should protect them. Consequently printers, stationers and booksellers led the way in filling the cathedral and its yard with their goods. Household property followed. Yet ominously the wooden scaffolding was still in place.[13]

Once the fire had spread westwards along Cheapside, the scaffolding outside St Paul's caught fire and, within half an hour, melted the lead on the cathedral's roof until it fell down into the building and onto the goods below. Eventually

12 H Forsyth *Butcher, Baker, Candlestick maker* (2016) 208.

13 *ODNB*; Tinniswood *By Permission* 87–93.

the items stored in the extensive crypt were ablaze. The molten lead streamed down Ludgate Hill causing "the very pavements" to glow "with fiery rednesse, so as no horse nor man was able to tread on them", as John Evelyn wrote. Thomas Vincent described the cathedral's destruction.

> [St Paul's] within a while … strangely takes Fire at the top; now the lead melts and runs down, as if it had been snow before the Sun; and the great beames and massy stones, with a great noise fall on the Pavement.[14]

John Evelyn recorded that the heated stones "flew like Granados" (grenades). That same day, Pepys recorded that London's skyline looked as if "the whole heaven on fire".

By Thursday, 6 September the fire was mostly extinguished, coming to an end close to the Inns of Court, that is The Temple, though its embers lingered on for months. Pepys expressed what must have been the thoughts of many—"A sad sight to see how the River looks—no houses nor church near it to the Temple—where it stopped". [15]

The Scale of Destruction

The inferno wreaked havoc in the City proper, with archaeological excavations of debris like ceiling tiles indicating that temperatures may have reached in excess of 1,200 degrees Celsius. The flames burned from Tower Hill to Chancery Lane, causing to be demolished approximately 13,200 houses in 400 streets, including Cheapside. This left some 70–80,000 (perhaps even 100,000) citizens homeless, some of whom were still living in fields outside London eight years later. Of the City of London's former 109 parish churches, 86 were either severely damaged or totally destroyed. In addition, 44 halls of the City Livery Companies were obliterated and the ancient Baynard's Castle where Edward IV and Mary I had held their coronations was lost to the flames, as were also the Royal Exchange, in Cornhill, four bridges and the medieval St Paul's Cathedral. The loss of art treasures, books and documents is unquantifiable. Officially only six people died in the fire, though the true figure is unknown because the deaths of at least some of the poor may have been overlooked.

About 80% of the City was therefore destroyed, covering some 436 acres. The damage to property was estimated in 1666 at some £10 million which in 2016 would be about £15 billion.[16]

As a result of the fire, thousands of displaced people lived in camps, in tents,

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14 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 65; *Diary of John Evelyn* vol III ed E S de Beer (1955) 4 September 1666.

15 S E Rasmussen *London the Unique City* (1960) 95.

16 T Harris *Restoration. Charles II and his Kingdoms 1660–85* (2005) 79.

huts and hovels—in St George's, Moorfields, Finsbury Fields, Highgate and near Islington, as well as other places. Some who had lived in "stately and well furnished houses" were reduced to "extreamest misery and poverty". On 5 September Pepys visited Moorfields, just to the north of the city wall, which he found "full of people, and poor wretches carrying their goods there". Edward Waterhouse, also an eye witness, observed that

> The mercies of the fire were cruel to all that it came near; the flight from it gave opportunity for miscarriage of thousands of pounds worth of goods, and to many theft of goods lodged in open places, fields and others … a removal out of the danger of fire into a den of thieves.[17]

Of necessity, food was scarce and those tradesmen who survived the fire saw that quick profits were to be made by raising their prices to those who had little or almost nothing. Those landlords whose property had escaped the fire's reach increased their rents. The Venetian ambassador to the court of St James remarked on the "grasping habits" of such London landlords with their "severe and exorbitant rents".

In personal terms Richard Dyer, ejected from being a Student at Christ Church, Oxford in 1660, and subsequently keeping a school at St Katherine's by the Tower, was grieved at the loss of his sermons, preached at the university in a fire in that parish. He took this loss more deeply than the loss in the Great Fire in which he with his sister and brother lost over £1000 in rents.[18]

Charles Morton, ejected vicar of Blisland, Cornwall, sustained a loss in the Great Fire, having moved to London to manage his affairs. The Presbyterian John Mortimer lost all his books and sermon notes during the fire.[19] Joseph Church, ejected in 1662 from his living in St Catherine Coleman, was described as "A Worthy Man" whose "Good Substance" was consumed in the fire. Afterwards he found himself in straitened circumstances because he had several children "and very little to subsist on". Yet he had many offers to conform to the Church of England which he was unwilling to do.[20]

Blame

The disasters of plague and fire seemed too close in time to be merely coincidental and the immediate instinct of many was to look for scapegoats and to allay blame on the perceived enemies of the State. London was then a

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17 Forsyth *Butcher, Baker* 26, 37; E Waterhouse *A Short Narrative of the late Dreadful Fire in London* (1667) 30.

18 *CR* 175.

19 *CR* 356.

20 *CR* 115.

fiercely Protestant city whose citizens, twenty years before, had opposed the king's father in the Civil Wars and were now unhappy that Charles showed sympathy for the Roman Catholics. The king's mother, Henrietta Maria, chose to live in France with her nephew, Louis XIV.[21] Given that war with France and the Netherlands was then being fought, any Frenchmen in London were seen as suspect. Even Huguenots who had fled to London for safety from their own unsympathetic government were treated with hostility. Subsequently rumours spread that the Fifth Monarchy Men (extreme Protestant millenarians looking for the second coming of Christ) on the one hand or the Roman Catholics on the other hand were responsible.

Thomas Vincent recorded how quickly blame fell on foreigners, with the London militia or trained bands "up in Arms watching at every quarter for Outlandish men". This conduct he explained by "the general fears and jealousies, and rumours that Fire-Balls were thrown into houses by several" foreigners to "provoke the too furious flames".[22]

The Westminster schoolboy, William Taswell, saw a French painter's shop being looted and another Frenchman being attacked by a blacksmith with an iron bar in the street. A Dutch baker in Westminster was arrested and thrown into gaol. One Dutchman reported to his friends in The Hague

> The people believed that the dutch and French had set fire to the city. They said that the conflagration was begun by a dutch baker, who was bribed to do this work, and the French went about scattering fireballs in the houses. All foreigners alike were held to be guilty, no discrimination being shown, and many who were well-known to be of good character, and upon whom no suspicion could rest, were cast into prison … it will be a long time before the people of London forget their wild rage against foreigners.[23]

By Wednesday Vincent recalled that the Londoners became frightened by

> a rumour that the *French* were comming armed against them to cut their throats, and spoil them of what they had saved out of the Fire.

Consequently

> many Citizens having lost their houses, and almost all that they had, are fired with rage and fury: and they begin to stir up themselves like Lyons, or like Bears bereaved of their whelps, and now *Arm, Arm, Arm.*[24]

Such violent xenophobia led to fears that an army of 50,000 French and

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21 Tinniswood *By Permission* 27–8.

22 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 59.

23 W G Bell *?The Great Fire of London (1920)* 318–320, Forsyth *Butcher, Baker* 23–24.

24 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 68.

Dutch troops was ready to launch an invasion. An unstable French watchmaker, named Robert Hubert, confessed to starting a fire in Whitehall but later changed his story, claiming that really his fire began in Pudding Lane. He apparently confessed that the fire was part of a conspiracy begun in Paris and, as a result, he was hanged in October 1666, although his judges feared for his sanity and doubted his guilt.[25]

The fire soon became ammunition for those who wished to build a case against Charles II's heir, his brother James, Duke of York, who, following his French mother, had become a devout Roman Catholic. James' fiercest opponents based their arguments partly on historical events which included the Spanish Armada of 1588 and the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. To this they added the Great Fire of London of September 1666.

Thomas Vincent noted that the great fire began to

> smell of a Popish design so hatcht in the same place where the Gunpowder plot was contriv'd. … The world sufficiently knows how … those, who could intentionally blow up King and Parliament by Gunpowder, might (without any scruple of their kinds of conscience) actually burn an heretical City (as they count it) into ashes.[26]

Clearly Vincent had accepted that the fire was the result of Catholic terrorism. The situation was such that wild rumours, on very little evidence, were believed.

By the 1670s blame had officially been allotted to the Roman Catholics. In 1678, during the Exclusion Crisis, the London mob, enraged against the Catholics, blamed any fire that broke out on them. Richard Baxter noted that the citizens began to keep "private Watches in all streets … to save their houses from firing".[27] In 1681 the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Patience Ward, attached a plaque to the Monument which itself commemorated the fire. This explained that "the most dreadful burning of this Protestant City" had been "begun on by the Treachery and Malice of the Papists".[28]

Witnesses

Most ministers, Anglican and Dissenter alike, saw both the plague and the fire as divine punishment for the nation's sins, stretching from Sabbath-breaking,

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25 Harris *Restoration* 79; Tinniswood *By Permission* 58–9; W Taswell *Autobiography and Anecdotes* ed G P Elliott (1852) 11.

26 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 55–56.

27 Harris *Restoration* 150; Baxter *Reliquiae* III, 184–5

28 Harris *Restoration* 151.

swearing, drunkenness, fornication, adultery and pride to religious persecution. Charles II's own incorrigible licentiousness seemed to warrant such judgement.

William Sancroft preached before the king and his court on 10 October and, in reference to the fire, he called for national repentance. Rather than blame the disaster on hostile foreigners he advised his listeners to examine their "own opposition, direct and diametrical to God and his holy law". Charles II insisted that the sermon be published for the obvious good of his subjects.[29] The minister of St Lawrence Pountney, in the City, Robert Elborough, preaching on the Fire, alleged that "Times of oppression and cruelty" were occasions when God was likely to be more severe in his judgements: "It's an hard thing for us to be hard-hearted", he warned, "and God to be tender-hearted".[30]

After Vincent's ejection from his parish living in 1662, he assisted Thomas Doolittle at his academy in Bunhill Fields where in Doolittle's house they also gathered a church. The popular Doolittle, a Presbyterian minister and a protégé of Baxter's, was ejected in 1662 from the living of St Alphage, London Wall. Like Vincent, he taught that the fire was inflicted on the City by the Almighty. He saw it as a foretaste of the great judgment expected to accompany the second coming of Christ.

> This Fire which God did kindle in your City, the heat, and flames, and smoak thereof, was a little Emblem of the great and general Conflagration and burning of the World, when the *Lord Jesus* shall be revealed from Heaven in flaming Fire.[31]

In his account Vincent noted that the fire overwhelmed even the "pleasant and stately houses" and left them as "ruinous and desolate heaps". Although the fire was halted temporarily on London Bridge, it

> runs along with great noise and violence through *Thames-street.* Westward, where having such combustible matter in its teeth, and such a fierce Winde upon its back, it prevails with little resistance.[32]

Although Vincent and the London citizens prayed for rain, "the Heavens at that time were Brass, no showering Clouds to be seen: … *Fire, Fire, Fire* doth resound the streets". Consequently "the whole City is brought into jeopardy of desolation". As a former City minister, he especially noted that "some Churches were in flames" on that Sunday, so that "Instead of a holy *Rest* … there is a tumultuous hurrying about the streets towards the place that burned". This

29 *ODNB.*

30 R Elborough *London's Calamity by Fire* (1666) 10–11; Harris *Restoration* 79–80.

31 *CR* 167–8. T Doolittle *Rebukes for sin by God's burning anger: by the burning of London: by the burning of the world: by the burning of the wicked in hell-fire … by T.D.* (1667).

32 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 55, 61.

resulted in "a general remove" of inhabitants from the City, "and that in a greater hurry than before the Plague".[33]

Vincent observed that these refugees from the flames "lye all night in the open Ayr, with no other canopy over them, but that of the Heavens". Nevertheless the "fire is still making towards them, and threateneth the Suburbs". At the centre of the City lay the seat of civic government, the Guildhall, which was rendered "a fearfull spectacle" because this symbol of London's wealth, power and prestige had become "a bright shining coale as if it had been a Pallace of gold, or a great building of burnished Brass".[34]

God and the Fire

Thomas Vincent's younger brother, Nathaniel, also an ejected Presbyterian minister, came to London soon after the fire in 1666. There he preached to "large Multitudes". Sometimes he had thousands to hear him "as he was preaching in the Ruins".[35]

Some four years later after the fire, Thomas Brooks, the Congregational minister ejected from St Margaret's New Fish Street in 1660, published *London's Lamentations* (1670), a treatise which began life as a series of sermons, written some time previously.[36] Brooks, aware that the fire had started near his former church, clearly knew the neighbourhood, the people and their activities well.

Like many others, Thomas Vincent unquestioningly attributed the fire to God's judgment for London's sins. He wrote, "surely more of the extraordinary hand of God, than of any men, did appear in the burning of the City of London" and "London's sins were too great, and Gods anger against the City was too hot".[37] Like Vincent, Brooks also refers to the horsemen of the book of Revelation. "First God sends his *Red Horse* … a cruel bloody War; and then … his *Pale Horse* … a noisom sweeping Pestilence".[38]

He concluded mournfully that after the fire "The glory of *London* is now fled away like a Bird, the Trade of *London* is shattered and broken to pieces". Alongside these he found that London's "delights also are vanished, and pleasant things laid waste; now no chaunting to the sound of the Viol, and dancing to the sweet Musick of other Instruments; now no drinking Wine in Bowls". Yet also the seamy side of life was affected for "stretching upon the beds of lust" was also no longer in evidence. Indeed the ruined churches only had nettles

33 ibid 57, 58, 63

34 ibid 66–67.

35 *CR* 502.

36 T Brooks *London's Lamentations: Or, A serious Discourse concerning that late fiery Dispensation that turned our (once renowned) City into a ruinous Heap* (1670) dedication.

37 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 56, 60.

38 Brooks *London's Lamentations* 40

growing and owls screeching, although there also "thieves and cut-throats are lurking". As a result a "sad face there is now in the ruinous part of *London:* and terrible hath the voice of the Lord been".[39]

This "sad face" profoundly touched the lives of all Londoners and many died through the shock of loss, some through suicide and others through their extreme poverty and reduced circumstances. After the Great Fire the Presbyterian minister Edmund Calamy I (1600–66) who had been ejected from his living at St Mary Aldermanbury, Cheapside, rode through the ruined City in a coach and "seeing the desolate Condition of so flourishing a City, for which he had so great an Affection, his tender Spirit receiv'd such Impressions, as he could never wear off". The sight of London in ashes "broke his Heart". His grandson wrote, "he went home, and never came out of his Chamber more; but dy'd within a Month."[40]

Perhaps understandably some "poor souls were driven completely mad" and Bethlem Hospital experienced "a huge influx of patients after the fire", making the work of the matron, porter and other staff members very dangerous.

Relief

Sometimes those who had worked to rescue the goods of an employer or a City livery company, thereby endangering and losing their own property, sought compensation for their own losses sustained in the fire. They did not always meet with a sympathetic or grateful response. However the Lord Mayor was quick to begin a fund to relieve those who had lost their homes and been "great Sufferers" in the fire. As a result towns and villages sent money collected in the various parishes to the mayor.[41] Others initiated similar charitable giving.

Sir Henry Ashurst (1616?–80) was a wealthy City merchant, of a strongly Protestant Lancashire family, and a friend of the notable nonconformists Henry Newcome of Manchester, Philip and Matthew Henry and Richard Baxter who preached his funeral sermon. He was also a devout Presbyterian. After 1662 he had tried to organise provision for the ejected ministers and their widows who had only meagre resources and after 1666 similarly he attempted to help victims of the Great Fire. Ashurst was a supporter of John Eliot's missionary activities in the American colonies and had re-established the New England Company. This had been founded in 1649 by an act of Cromwell's parliament and received a Royal Charter from Charles II in 1662. The company promoted the gospel of Christ to the native Americans.

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39 Vincent *God's Terrible Voice* 69–70.

40 E Calamy *An account of the ministers, lecturers, masters, and fellows of colleges and schoolmasters* (1713) 7.

41 Forsyth *Butcher, Baker* 13–14, 58.

Ashurst was known as "the famousest person in the City, who purposely addicted himself to works of mercy". Baxter described him as 'the most exemplary person for eminent sobriety, self-denial, piety, and charity that London could glory of, as far as public observation, and fame, and his most intimate friends could testify'. Among his colleagues in the work for the relief of the fire victims was Thomas Gouge who had himself been ejected in 1662 from St Sepulchre's Holborn, and had lost a great deal in the fire. Gouge, like Ashurst, was a prominent London philanthropist. He was both treasurer and visitor of the relief fund which Ashurst raised after the fire.[42]

Conclusion

The rebuilt City which emerged in the succeeding years included the classically beautiful churches of Sir Christopher Wren and the new St Paul's. A number of City churches were not then rebuilt and some parishes were united. Amid the elegance of the new places of worship, we may wonder how many then gave thought to the buildings that were lost with all the hopes of those who had lived among them.

The Great Fire was undoubtedly a cataclysmic event which changed London for ever. The nonconformists of restoration London, along with everyone else caught up in the destruction, lost their homes, goods and livelihoods. Some like Calamy, with so many hopes dashed, could see no future for a permanent break had been made with their past. Their dreams died with the City. Others accepted the need to rebuild.

Nevertheless the universal opinion was that the devastation had been allowed to happen by God. London had been judged and found wanting.

Timothy Ellery

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42 *CR* 229–230; *ODNB*.

LAURENCE LEE'S MEMOIRS AND HIS ACCOUNT OF NONCONFORMITY IN GODALMING[1]

A few years ago I undertook some research into religious dissent in Surrey. The initial motivation was the publication sometime before of Reg Ward's *Parson and Parish in Eighteenth-Century Surrey* (1994). The volume is an edition of the replies of the incumbents or their curates to a series of questions from the bishop on the state of their parishes. They include questions about the number of dissenters and whether they met in the parish. They are therefore a useful survey of the strength of dissent locally at a time when there are few if any sources available for this purpose. The Surrey replies, made in 1725 to Bishop Willis, were rather too late for my interests, which are concerned with the twenty-five year period after the Glorious Revolution. Nonetheless I did some work on the volume.[2]

Then, prompted by the death of Geoffrey Nuttall and the example of his essay 'Dissenting Churches in Kent before 1700', published in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* in 1963, I decided to write a similar account for Surrey. Geoffrey's essay, written no doubt as a consequence of the tercentenary of the Great Ejection in 1962, uses largely printed sources, and indeed more specifically biographical sources, such as Edmund Calamy's account of the ejected ministers. It therefore focuses on ministers. There is something on the formation of churches, and on the preaching activities of nonconformist ministers, but little directly on those who supported them.[3] It therefore offers only a partial account. The role of the laity needs to be considered as well.

For my study on Surrey, I had the same major sources that Geoffrey Nuttall used: A G Matthews' superb *Calamy Revised* (quite the best work of reference I know; immensely painstaking with hardly an error), Lyon Turner's *Original Records* (which publishes transcripts of both the 1669 Conventicle Returns and 1672 licences under Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence), and the printed *Calendars of State Papers Domestic*.[4] I was fortunate (and it is one of the reasons

1 This paper was originally an address given at the Friends of the Congregational Library's summer event on 12 June 2010.

2 W R Ward *Parson and Parish in Eighteenth-Century Surrey. Replies to Bishops' Visitations* Surrey Record Society, 35 (1994).

3 G F Nuttall 'Dissenting Churches in Kent before 1700' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* XIV (1963) 175–89.

4 *CR*; G Lyon Turner (ed) *Original Records of early Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence* 3 vols (1911–14); *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Charles II*, eds M A E Green, F H B Daniell, F

I chose Surrey) to have the printed Quarter Session records for the county, published in the 1930s and 1950s.[5] The Surrey Quarter Session records enabled me to identify the lay support for dissent during the 1660s for the article I published in *Southern History* in 2011, where I argued that the support and encouragement of the laity in giving financial and practical support to ministers, providing places for meetings, and gathering to hear sermons, was crucial to the development of dissent in the early years after 1662.[6]

Lawrence Lee (1668–1735)—his manuscript volume

I also checked the *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, the county's history journal. There were only a few articles of relevance, but one I noted was Hilary Jenkinson's 'A late Surrey chronicler', published in 1914.[7] This proved to be a study of Laurence Lee's manuscript autobiography, with some notes on deaths from smallpox in the town in the early eighteenth century and few other matters. The importance of Lee's autobiography is the account he provides of the experiences of a lay dissenter in the early 1670s. There are very few if any other accounts of this kind. The volume also included the 'heads' of around 36 sermons preached between 1690 and 1691. Jenkinson did not publish the whole volume, or even a transcript of the majority of it. He admitted that he was not interested in the sermons or the religious passages. It was, therefore, difficult to know how much more there was of interest. The volume is not unknown to historians of dissent. The main nonconformist references were reprinted a couple of years later from Jenkinson's essay in the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* by J H Norris, as 'Early Nonconformity at Godalming'.[8]

The importance of the Lee volume was clear, and I wondered if it had survived. I even thought of writing to the Surrey Record Office to see if they

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Bickley 28 vols (1860–1947).

5 *Surrey Quarter Sessions Records: The Order-Book for 1659–1661, and the Sessions Rolls for Easter and Midsummer 1661* eds H Jenkinson and D L Powell (1934); *The Order-Book for 1661–1663, and the Sessions Rolls from Michaelmas 1661 to Epiphany 1663* eds Jenkinson and Powell (1935); *The Order-Books and the Sessions Rolls, Easter 1663-Epiphany 1666* eds Jenkinson and Powell, Surrey Record Society, 13–14, 16 (1938); *County of Surrey: Surrey Quarter Sessions Record: Order Book and Session Rolls, 1666–1668* ed D L Powell (Kingston-on-Thames 1951).

6 D L Wykes 'Early Religious Dissent in Surrey after the Restoration', *Southern History*, 33 (2011) 54–77.

7 H Jenkinson, 'A late Surrey chronicler (Surrey and the Revolution, 1688)', *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, XXVII (1914) 1–20.

8 J H Norris, 'Early Nonconformity at Godalming', *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, VII (1916) 71–75.

knew. Then in 2008, as Director of Dr Williams's Library I was offered a number of manuscripts for purchase, including Lee's Memoirs of Godalming, which proved to be the manuscript in question. I purchased the volume for the Congregational Library.[9] When I was asked to make a presentation to the Friends of the Library, it seemed a good opportunity to examine Jenkinson's article against Lee's account. What was left out? Is there more material of value than was published?

The first point to make is that Jenkinson included nearly all the interesting biographical material, though there are some additional passages which merit inclusion. We should not be surprised. Jenkinson was a very good editor. He was also a major figure in the archive world. Any archivist will be familiar with his work, for he established the framework for modern archival practice.[10] If this is the case, should I have bought the manuscript volume? The answer is yes on at least two counts. Firstly, context is everything. Being able to read the text as a whole, and see where the quotations were taken from, makes it possible to form judgements as to the nature of the volume. What was Lee trying to do? Is his account mainly from memory, or from notes, or taken from a diary? Did he rely on published sources to flesh out his account? The second point, on the importance of having the original is that a major part of the volume was not included or considered by Jenkinson. He makes clear he was not interested in the sermons.

Jenkinson calls Lee a chronicler. Certainly the volume has the features of a public chronicle. There are major descriptive passages about James II and the Glorious Revolution, which includes some first-hand material, particularly on the alarms following William of Orange's successful invasion. The major part of the volume is a record of the heads of sermons, over 260 pages of the manuscript out of a total of 320. All the sermons are by Lee's own minister, Samuel Hall, and cover a short period of about eleven months between August 1690 and June 1691. Lee had taken the original sermons (or at least the 'heads' of the arguments) down in shorthand. He later copied them out in long-hand over a much lengthier period, between 15 Jan 1709/10 and 26 March 1714.

The sermons were clearly not to Jenkinson's taste. Lee tells his readers that before he completed his transcribing, 'I laide those Sermons aside which I had taken from him [Hall] in short writeing but could not find them afterwards'. Jenkinson's gloss was 'We need not regret the loss of the sermons too heavily'.[11]

9 'A Memorandum Began Writeing by Lawrence Lee of Godalming December ye 25th 1708' Congregational Library, MS II. d. 62 (hereafter Lee). It was partly published in Jenkinson 'Surrey chronicler' 1–20. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust for permission to cite and quote from the Lee manuscript.

10 For Jenkinson (1882–1961) see *ODNB*.

11 Lee 237; Jenkinson 'Surrey chronicler' 15.

Here Jenkinson is wrong, at least if he was trying to suggest the sermons were of no value. There is now a considerable interest amongst both historians and literary scholars in manuscript sermons. The Lee volume is particularly valuable as the sermons were delivered during the period, immediately after toleration was granted, and for an audience for which we have very few examples. They were preached to a dissenting meeting in a market town—probably the most representative type of dissenting congregation in terms of numbers.

Surrey and Dissent

Religious dissent dates from the Restoration religious settlement and the re-establishment of the Church of England and episcopacy following the return of Charles II in 1660. Nearly a thousand ministers (perhaps a sixth of the country's total) gave up their livings in England and Wales, and in all there is evidence for more than 2,000 clergymen and teachers who were displaced or ejected between 1660 and 1662. In Surrey nearly 40 ministers failed to conform.[12] Because conformity to the doctrine and worship of the Church of England came to be seen as a test of political loyalty and religious dissent to be associated with subversion, the authorities sought to suppress all forms of religious nonconformity. There is no doubt that in the early 1660s they were deeply concerned at the number of ejected ministers who were preaching, the size of their meetings, the refusal of so many parishioners to conform, and the potential threat to the Church and State. Surrey is not particularly noted for religious dissent, though dissent has clearly been important in the northern parishes and the parishes along the Thames because of the proximity of London. The other major area of nonconformity in Surrey centred on the market towns of Croydon, Dorking, Epsom and Kingston upon Thames, and particularly the clothing towns of Farnham, Godalming and Guildford. In the rest of the county, particularly the rural parishes in the central area and those to the south-east adjoining Kent, religious dissent was weak or entirely absent before the late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century evangelical revival.[13]

Dissent in Godalming in the early 1670s

Dissent was strong in Godalming because of the patronage of John Platt, who had been rector of West Horsley for over 20 years before his ejection in 1662. After he was ejected he retired to Godalming. He had purchased the manor of Westbrook in the parish in 1656, and married the daughter of the prominent

12 Although based on *CR*, these figures involve a reworking of the evidence and differ from Matthews' totals, see Wykes 'Early Religious Dissent in Surrey'.

13 This paragraph draws on my 'Early Religious Dissent in Surrey'.

puritan Sir Humphrey Lynde of Cobham. Another daughter of Lynde married Richard Bures, also an ejected minister, who was arrested in 1669 for preaching in Godalming.[14] Regular meetings were held in Godalming from shortly after 1662, supported first by Platt and then by a number of nonconformist ministers. A weekly conventicle was reported in 1669, at which Platt was named as the preacher. It was very substantial, numbering between 700 and 800 people. Platt died in November 1669, but the meetings continued to be supported by his son and maintained by other nonconformist ministers. The Quakers and Baptists also had meetings.[15]

The importance of Lee's memoirs is the highly personal account he gives of nonconformist preaching in Godalming from the early 1670s. The memoirs were written in December 1708, though the first item in the volume is the funeral sermon of his younger brother John, who died in 1701.[16] Lee was born in October 1668, and the account of dissent in the early 1670s is based on his earliest memories.[17] This is plausible for what was still largely an aural world: where people relied upon their memory rather than on written accounts. Jenkinson writes dismissively that Lee 'merely chronicles what seem, comparatively, little more than inconveniencies incidental to expressed Dissent in a country parish'.[18] This fails to appreciate the importance of Lee's account (because Jenkinson knew nothing about dissent in this period and had little knowledge of the rarity of this type of memoir) and it underplays the difficulties dissenters faced in worshipping before toleration was granted.

Lee's memory extended back to his childhood in the early 1670s. He recalled that his parents supported nonconformist ministers and commonly attended their sermons, as did Lee from an early age.[19] He remembered hearing John Manship, the ejected minister from Guildford, preaching in a private house belonging to George Bridger in the early 1670s, and he also heard 'Minesters preach in ye room whare I went to school'. Since Bridger's house was licensed under Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence in May 1672, Manship's sermon was probably given during this brief interlude from persecution, before the Indulgence was withdrawn, under a year later in March 1672/3.[20] This helps date Lee's earliest memories. He also heard a sermon at Sir John Platt's house

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14 H E Malden (ed) *A History of the County of Surrey (Victoria County History)* III (1911) 36; *CR.* 86, 391.

15 Turner *Original Records* I, p 146.

16 Lee 1–21.

17 Lee 26.

18 Jenkinson 'Surrey chronicler' 2.

19 Lee 26.

20 Turner *Original Records* II, p1015; Lee 26–7.

who, like his father, was clearly also a patron of dissent, but the minister who preached was not one known to Lee.[21]

Lee also recorded the names of the ministers that 'used most commonly to preach at our Town about y^{t} time' (the early 1670s): 'Mr Buriss' or Richard Bures, mentioned earlier, 'Mr Noah Webb; Mr Stephen Webb & Mr ffarwell' or John Farroll and 'Mr Pearce', who was probably Thomas Pace and who is known to have been preaching in the town. Stephen Webb's presence, however, is not otherwise recorded. He represents the new generation of nonconformist minister. Too young to have been ejected with his elder brother Noah, he only matriculated at Oxford in May 1659, yet he chose nonetheless to throw in his lot with the nonconformists. He was reported as preaching at a conventicle in Ramsbury, Wiltshire, in 1669. By the time of Charles II's Indulgence in 1672 he appears to have been preaching at Farnborough, Hampshire, and in Surrey at Godalming, and possibly at Frimley, the parish adjoining Farnborough.[22]

Lee noted some of the places where meetings were held. Buildings had to be large enough to accommodate a meeting which could amount to over a hundred people as well as one that, when the threat of persecution was growing, afforded a degree of concealment, or through the support of a gentry patron, some measure of protection. Many ejected ministers were maintained as chaplains by gentry families sympathetic to dissent. These ministers often preached to more than the family and even at other meetings nearby. Dissent could not have survived without such patronage, or the support of wealthy tradesmen in towns or yeomen in the countryside. Besides the school room where he was taught, George Bridger's house licensed in 1672, and Westbrook House where Sir John Platt lived, Lee also reported meetings in the hall at 'Tailors ffarme', which Lee's father rented from 1673.[23] During the times ministers came to preach 'they came commonly to lodge with Stephen Coombes'.[24] Lee's father married a daughter of Coombes as his second wife following the death of Lee's mother, illustrating the network of close links within the godly.

Persecution in Godalming

Lee recorded the trouble dissenters experienced following the withdrawal of Charles II's Indulgence, 'dureing which time there was great persecution to those persons that went to meetings'. The vicar of Godalming, Dr Samuel

21 Lee 27.

22 Turner *Original Records* II, p 1016, 1036, 1039.

23 Lee 28. Jenkinson mistranscribes this passage.

24 'Memorandum', in Jenkinson, 'Surrey chronicler' 7.

Speed, 'a very great persecutor', with Mr Hull, a local justice of the peace who was 'a very troublesome person', made particular efforts to suppress nonconformity in the parish. Lee's father was excommunicated at Speed's instigation, and John Toft, the Constable, 'took from my ffather a great deal of his goods for his not coming to ye parrish church but so far as I remember they could gett none to buy it soe yt he had all restored'. Lee's father was also in difficulties for having had his son, born in February 1673/4, baptised by a nonconformist minister, for which he was sued by the vicar '& came in much trouble'.[25] Lee witnessed Dr Speed, 'with ye warden of ye Town, Constables, Tythingmen &c' disturb a meeting on Michaelmas Day 1673, when a number of nonconformist ministers were present:

> they brake open ye doors and seized Mr Burns & two other Minesters & had them prisoners to ye Markett house chamber or Town Hall whare they left the Constable to keep them Jno Toft being then constable a great many of their hearers went with them & my selfe went with my mother whare they called a psalme & sung; Jno Toft as I after heard fearing he should come in trouble as being himselfe at a conventicle went away & left them when he was gon they also went away without any further trouble.[26]

John Farroll, who had been taken some time before when preaching at Mr Platts' house, was sent to prison for about half a year.[27]

With the 'troubles Still increasing in our Town those Minesters ware forced to preach more privately'. Attempts were therefore made to conceal meetings in isolated places in the countryside. Lee provides a lively personal account of the inconvenience dissenters were prepared to undergo to ensure an undisturbed meeting.

> I remember once yt they were apprehensive ye Minester would be taken at Tailors ffarme upon which they privatly went to Shakelford to ye Widow Billinghursts house whither I went with my Mother we went down ye stream & up ye meadow called Overgon mead & by hurtmore place to ye house whare Mr Noah Webb preached after this they preached at Guildford whare I went with my ffather & mother to hear them without any disturbance for a conciderable time.[28]

The difficulties dissenters faced generally eased during the late 1670s as a result of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, but it is clear that following the failure of the attempt by the Whigs to exclude James Duke of York from

25 Lee 29–30.
26 Lee 29.
27 Lee 29.
28 Lee 7, 8.

the succession, persecution not only resumed but intensified. This was the greatest period of persecution experienced by dissenters as Charles II and his Tory allies made every effort to destroy the Whig's political power, not least by persecuting their dissenting allies and breaking up the latter's meetings by force. Lee remembered that

> aboute this time [1682] they ware so severe against Dissenters y^{t} those Ministers could not preach publiquely at Guildford so y^{t} we useth to go more privatly to Sr Nicolas Stoughtons of Stoughton place about two miles beyond Guildford but that held not very long they ware so severe that we could not assemble there neither nor at any other place that I knew of so that I comonly used to go to our parrish church.[29]

By forcing Lee and other dissenters to go to church, the authorities achieved one of their major objectives, imposing outward conformity, and Lee's account provides confirmation of the success of the Crown's policy.

James II's reign

Lee's narrative account of James II's reign involves some of the most detailed accounts in the volume, and they demonstrate the impact of the King's policies upon ordinary people. The fear of Catholicism is clear. Lee expresses the dismay of Protestants over the failure of the Monmouth rebellion: 'all our hopes of being delivered from Popery by ye Duke of Monmouth as an instrument ware disappointed'. He also records the growing unease in the country at the King's policies which increasingly favoured Catholics, and the anxiety caused by the king endeavouring 'to bring in popery as fast as possible'.[30] It was the King's decision to create a standing army in peace-time which caused particular alarm because of the association with absolutism and arbitrary government. Moreover there was little love for the soldiers who were quartered in private houses in the town. They were often violent 'thretning to kill us if they had not imediatly what they asked for often drawing their swords for y^{t} purpose'. Lee's father had sixteen quartered with him.[31]

The persecution of dissenters and the suppression of their meetings ended when James II in a sudden reversal of his brother's policy offered an indulgence to dissenters in an effort to gain their support for taking off the Test Acts. Though suspicious of James's motives, dissenters did accept his indulgence to worship again in public, and in many parts of the country the results

29 Lee 42.

30 Lee 46.

31 Lee 48.

were dramatic.[32] Ministers were able to preach without restraint. Lee, in an important passage that Jenkinson omitted, continued

> I remember I heard Mr Buris preach at Mr Horsenails house at Guildford ye words of his text being for ye days will come when ye shall desire to see one of ye days of ye Son of man & shall not see them from which words he made a very excellent sermon which to me was very affecting.

This was the first sermon that Lee attempted to take down in short-hand.[33]

Although dissenters could worship again in public they remained uneasy about the political situation. Following the landing of William of Orange at Torbay on 5 November 1688, Lee describes in detail the scares caused by the Catholic Irish soldiers James II had recruited. Near Fiddleworth, close to Petworth in Sussex, 'we mett a boy . . . he tould us y^t the Irish had burnt Kingston down to ye ground & ware killing man woman & childe upon ye Road between London & Portsmouth'. A little further on they met a man on horseback 'rideing a very great pace who tould us some surprizing newse'. At Fiddleworth they discovered 'they ware getting there guns in order & then we thought it might be trew'. They tried to find a bed for the night, 'but I suppose ye noyse of ye Irish killing people had caused them to put out there lights'. The road into Godalming was blocked by the felling of trees 'to hinder ye Irish from coming into ye Town', but Lee found when he reached the town 'fears about ye Irish ware vanished & there was nothing of reality in what was reported'.[34]

Following the Glorious Revolution and the passing of the Toleration Act in May 1689, the meeting at Godalming was set up. Lee in an interesting account describes the role of the Managers of the Common Fund in financing the meeting and helping with the recruitment of a minister.

> About this time [1690] there useth to preach at ye Presbyterian meeting in this Town Mr Chester & Mr Farwell one ye Lords day & ye other ye next. Mr Chester being acquainted with Dr Annesley who had a great interest in procuring money for poor places in the ye country to maintain Dissenting ministers and also in sending ministers where they were wanting, by our applying ourselves to him he sent down a young minister named Mr Samuel Hall who had been chaplain to Lord Hollis.[35]

Both Farroll and John Chester were ejected ministers and were to die within a few years. It is clear they resided at Guildford and only supplied Godalming.

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32 D L Wykes 'The early years of religious dissent in Cheshire following James II's Declaration of Indulgence in April 1687' *Northern History* 52:2, pp 224–26.

33 Lee 45–46.

34 Lee 58, 61, 63.

35 Lee 65–6.

Samuel Hall was the first minister. He belonged to the next generation. Born in about 1662, he was the son of an ejected minister, and he elected to join with the dissenters rather than conform. He had been educated at Doolittle's academy in London, serving as a private chaplain during the 1680s. Hall did not remain long at Godalming, and one reason may have been the financial state of the meeting. The Common Fund Survey noted that at Godalming 'some meane persons haue Sett up a meeting, and the Charge lying upon a few is too heavy'.[36] The rest of the volume consists largely of Hall's sermons.

Conclusion

Although most of Lee's account has been published before, it remains comparatively unknown. Yet his recollection of the meetings held by nonconformists in the early 1670s, which the weight of persecution eventually forced them to give up, is probably unique, at least for someone who was not a minister. Jenkinson suggested that the account up to 1681'is a fair copy from something in the nature of a diary', but the later narrative he believed was probably written with the aid of published histories and accounts.[37] Such speculation seems to diminish the value of Lee's narrative unfairly. The account of events in James II's reign is largely told from Lee's own experiences, and indicates that dissenters were well-informed and politically aware. Lee's memoirs also provide a history of the Godalming congregation. Before Hall's appointment in 1690 there was no fixed meeting and dissenters in the town had to rely on visiting preachers. Later accounts suggest that the dissenters were too weak to maintain a meeting on their own and that they had to rely upon the meeting at Guildford for supplies.

David L Wykes

36 *CR* 113, 191, 242; A Gordon (ed) *Freedom After Ejection* (Manchester 1917) 109–10, 277.

37 Jenkinson, 'Surrey chronicler' 2.

REVIEWS

***All Things Made New: Writings on the Reformation.* By Diarmaid MacCulloch. Allen Lane 2016. Pp xiv + 450. Hardback £25. ISBN 978–0–241–25400–4.**

This collection of essays concentrates on the Reformation in England which, as the author states, has become a huge growth industry in the last thirty years or so. He sees this growth as largely consisting of academics addressing fellow academics so that, in this volume, he attempts to reflect on this scholarship and interpret it for a wider audience. MacCulloch himself, though undoubtedly an historian of erudition, has become a familiar face on our television screens where his authority, intelligence and fluency are used to convincing effect.

This work offers the reader book reviews, alongside studies of particular topics (one having first been published in Spanish). In his judicious selection, MacCulloch has made necessary but slight changes, smoothing out immediate contemporary references. He arranges his material here into three parts. The first deals with Reformations across Europe, touching on 'Christianity: the bigger picture', 'Angels and the Reformation', the Virgin Mary and the Reformers, Calvin, the Council of Trent, and the Italian Inquisition. Part II is the longest section, dealing with the English Reformation. It has papers on Henry VIII's piety, Cranmer, the prayer book, Queens Mary and Elizabeth, William Byrd, the Tudor Bible, the Authorised Version, and that New England icon *The Bay Psalm Book.* Part III offers six reflective essays, looking back on the English Reformation. These include studies of the latitude of the Church of England, Thomas Cranmer's biographers (of whom MacCulloch is the most renowned), Richard Hooker's reputation, and the nature of Anglicanism.

This last section also includes the cautionary tale of Robert Ware of Dublin (1639–97) who had an acute historical imagination but was also a liar and a forger. His deceptions had a malign effect on the politics and historiography of his own time but have had a continuing influence ever since. Ware invented stories about the coronation of Edward VI, with Archbishop Cranmer urging the young king to set about further church reform with vigour, and of Queen Elizabeth in the 1560s, berating Dean Alexander Nowell in St Paul's Cathedral for undermining her religious settlement with his gift to her of a richly illuminated prayer book. Neither event happened but rather were literary fictions from Ware's mind. He interpolated his own written comments into his father's manuscripts and these interpolations have deceived historians.

MacCulloch believes that history has a moral purpose, correcting societies from "collectively going insane as a result of telling themselves badly skewed stories about the past". He also describes Europe for most of the 16th century as "something like the aftermath of a particularly disastrous car-crash" which gives food for thought with regards to the Reformation's 500th anniversary next year. He, like others, is impressed with the cultural and religious unity of western Europe in the late medieval period. Yet he sees the exclusive dominance of the Church at that time as "a freak in human experience" and its break-up as a return to the normality of human history. Justifying his book's title, he points out that Roman Catholicism was transformed at the time that Protestantism came into being. That is the Roman Catholic Church suffered an enormous shock when confronted by Luther and his fellow Reformers and, as a result, a great effort of renewal was called for in order for it to survive.

MacCulloch stresses that Anglicanism only came into being with the Restoration of 1660. Thereafter it lived with "a vigorous external Protestant critique" which almost no other Protestant church in Europe has had to contend with. English Protestantism is therefore rich in being "a babble of cussed voices, exuberant Free Church percussion enlivening the majestic orchestra that is Anglican spirituality".

I commend this book to our readers. At £25 for a serious hardback, it is a snip.

Alan Argent

***The Amazing Mary Higgs*. By Carol M Talbot. OWC Publications, Oldham 2011. Available from the author's web site, http://www.caroltalbot.co.uk/book.html or by post from Talbot Books, 59 Heywood Ave, Austerlands, Oldham OL4 4AZ. Pp iv + 202. Paperback £6.99 + 2.50 p&p. ISBN 9780956541017.**

Mary Higgs was the wife of Revd Thomas Higgs, the 16th minister *(1891–1907)* of Greenacres Congregational Church, Oldham. Her life began in 1854 in the beautiful wooded Wiltshire countryside. This was a far cry from the poor living and working conditions of the smoke filled industrial towns and mill-chimney dominated landscape of West Yorkshire and Lancashire. However, this was where she was to become famed for her tireless work to improve the lives of many.

This fictionalised account of Higgs' life takes you on her incredible journey from privileged student and teacher to family breadwinner, from minister's wife to social reformer. Mary's life became dedicated to addressing poverty, bringing beauty into the bleak environment, and to saving many from a life of crime and prostitution. In order to gain accurate knowledge and have a stronger case

to bring to the Government Board Departmental Committee, she became a tramp so that she could experience first-hand the appalling conditions that those looking for work had to endure. She risked her life so that those around would be able to better theirs and she continued to do so until her death in 1937 at the age of 83. Her death was just days after King George VI presented her with the Order of the British Empire, *'For Public Services in Oldham'*.

Mary Higgs was an ordinary woman with a passion for people. She was responsible for translating the New Testament into plain English so that the working class with limited education could still read and understand the Word of God. She saw a need and instead of talking about it, she got up and did something about it. She is an inspiration and one that so few today know about. This book is a brilliant testament to her life's work.

Siân Lampard, Greenacres Congregational Church, Oldham

***The Angels' Voice: A Magazine for Young Men in Brixton, London 1910–1913*. Edited with an introduction by Alan Argent. London Record Society Publications, Volume LI. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2016. Pp xi + 328. Hardback £35 (special offer for readers—see enclosed flyer). ISBN 978–0–900952–57–9.**

The Angels' Voice was the magazine of the Young Men's Bible Class of Trinity Congregational Church, Brixton, in south London, from 1910 to 1913. The class drew together some 20 to 25 young men aged between their teens and their early thirties for informal discussion from 3 to 4 p.m. on Sunday afternoons. The magazine (the reason for the title is unexplained) circulated in typescript round the members, often, to the editor's despair, not being passed on promptly. The editor was James Godden, secretary of the class, well educated at the City of London School and well employed as a clerk at the Port of London Sanitary Authority. He was only seventeen at the 1911 census. His youthful high spirits pervade the pages, often leading to rather forced humour. Thus the members of Trinity Ladies Hockey Team, which used the initials TLHC, were incessantly referred to as 'The Long Haired Chums'. The editor of this published version, Alan Argent, discovered the series of magazines in the vestry of the church, which he serves as minister, and recognised their worth as a social document. He explains in a valuable introduction how this body of clerks and shopkeepers represented the values of their generation, soon to suffer in the war. The material is carefully contextualised, with, for example, a discussion of the incidence of typhoid to provide background for the extended notice of the death of a Bible class member from the disease. There is also a helpful biographical appendix listing subscribers and some of their

contemporaries recorded on the church's war memorial so that the reader can obtain a sense of their identities.

What, then, were the members of this group like? They were overwhelmingly Liberal in politics, though a vociferous member was a sharp socialist critic of the Liberal government's policies. One contributor was sternly opposed to female suffrage; opinion was divided about the desirability of conscription; the members were less fervent temperance campaigners than might have been expected, though all the production team members were teetotal. Smoking was popular, though its excessive display was frowned on. There were holiday trips to the continent and even a flight in an early aeroplane. Football, however, was the favourite pastime, with Bible class representatives playing local teams—including several drawn from Anglican congregations, which suggests the church/chapel divide was less acute than in many other parts of the country. Theological topics do arise in the pages of the magazine, and this is where there could have been more editorial comment than has been included. The class decided that there was too much about social issues in the syllabus they used, and so, unlike their female contemporaries, dropped it. The social gospel was therefore not in favour. There was, in fact, a distinctly Evangelical tone to the group. There were open-air evangelistic meetings and a monthly prayer meeting; a contributor wrote about conversion and the minister spoke as president about being 'born again'. The leader celebrated the doctrine of justification by faith and members gave financial support to a missionary of the China Inland Mission, a highly Evangelical body. Yet on one occasion Cyril Bedwell, a popular member and Sunday school teacher, declared that 'God is Nature, and Nature is God'. Bedwell, whose marriage was later witnessed by Bernard Snell, one of the most advanced theological liberals in the denomination, was identifying Christianity with pantheism. Both leader and editor pounced on him to restore orthodoxy, but clearly diverse theological views were abroad. Trinity, Brixton, like the Nonconformity it exemplifies, was not of one mind. This volume, like few other sources, enables us to catch a glimpse of that reality in the life of a particular church.

David Bebbington, University of Stirling

***Ecumenism in Retreat: How the United Reformed Church Failed to Break the Mould*. By Martin Camroux. Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon, 2016. Pp xii + 238. Paperback £21. ISBN 978–1–4982–3400–9. Hardback £31. ISBN 978–1–4982–3402–3. Paperback available for £17 including postage from 4 Sorrel Close, Colchester, CO4 5UL.**

Martin Camroux retired in 2013 after what would be judged a successful

ministry, more than half of which had been spent in English Local Ecumenical partnerships. In his last church (shared with the Methodists), when he arrived in 1999, there were 245 members, 57 of whom identified as URC; when he retired, there were 219 members, 110 of whom identified as URC. The questions this book seeks to answer arise in part from that experience, and in part from an analysis of the whole process which brought Congregationalists in England and Wales and Presbyterians in England together in 1972, later to be joined by the majority of Churches of Christ in Great Britain in 1981 and the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000. He has examined the major documentary sources for the original process and interviewed a large number of those who were involved in it at the time (including myself), and more generally in the life of the Church since. The result is a fresh look at the history of ecumenical relations in England and Wales since 1972; and anyone engaged in the study of that history will need to read it. But such a person should not read only that.

My principal anxiety is that the author has erected a straw man to knock down, though he has provoked me to reflect on why I think that is so. When I joined the Congregational-Presbyterian Joint Committee in 1966 as one of three Churches of Christ observers, it did not occur to me that there was any possibility that this union by itself could break any 'mould'. I saw it as one further stage in the part the two Churches had played in the creation of unity in South India since the beginning of the twentieth century, and more particularly as a further stage in a growing relationship between the two Churches since the end of the second round of talks after the Second World War, which led to a covenant between them. In other words, I took the prospectus of the Conversations at face-value. I was impressed as the meetings proceeded by the determination of both parties not to fail, even though some very tricky (usually non-theological) issues seemed likely to trip them up. I was also impressed by the seriousness with which the comments received from several thousand local churches were analysed and considered. What no one in the Conversations could have predicted with certainty was the failure of the Anglican-Methodist Conversations in the General Synod meetings of 1972 to gain the necessary majorities in the Church of England.

The consequences of those votes, which shocked Michael Ramsey, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, made his words at the Westminster Abbey service to celebrate the union in October 1972 difficult to choose. Camroux indicates that John Huxtable, the incoming Moderator of the new Church, met the Archbishop the week before the service to discuss what he might say, but without any suggestion of specific input. Nevertheless, Ramsey, more than anyone else, suggested that the United Reformed Church needed to set an example. It sounded impressive at the time, but it was obviously unrealistic,

even to an enthusiastic observer like myself. Nevertheless it set in train first the 'Talks about Talks', then the Churches' Unity Commission, and finally the Churches' Council for Covenanting. Chapter 3, which covers some of these issues, is one of the weakest chapters of the book. Camroux, though already a minister at the time, seems unable to understand the atmosphere, and reads back the ideas of a later period, which had accepted that there would be no further movement. I felt at the time of the URC union with Churches of Christ that I would see no further union in my lifetime; but no one with any realism expects that their most cherished goals will be achieved in their lifetime. Nor, since the Early Church abandoned apocalyptic at the end of the first century, has such an expectation been characteristic of the Church more widely, apart from some groups, particularly in North America.

Having always been a supporter of the use of oral history, I realised in reading this book that the order in which individuals are interviewed is significant. Obviously, one person's comments can stimulate further questions, so that not everyone is asked the same. I was interviewed early in the process, and though I do not think at any point my comments were misrepresented, I did not always remember the context in which I made certain remarks quoted (which I stand by). References to books do not have that problem.

The 'failures' outlined here do not apply only to organic union. The discussion in chapter 8 of the replacement of the British Council of Churches by the new national groupings of churches, with an overall organisation for Britain and Ireland could be analysed in the same way. The involvement of the Roman Catholic Church (the principal goal) was achieved; but the dissolution of the semi-autonomous boards of the old BCC, where ecumenists frustrated elsewhere could pursue their goals with those of like mind, was not clearly foreseen. A positive view of Christian diversity does not require that churches should not be in communion with each other or recognise one another's ministries. Those facts are the consequences of clear decisions taken by authoritative persons or bodies at particular points in time, whether the sixteenth, seventeenth, nineteenth centuries; or even in the 1920s or 1940s. They also remain reversible, as the Second Vatican Council (if not all subsequent popes) recognised.

What churches today have found it most difficult to abandon is their expensive bureaucracies, largely created in the nineteenth century as a result of such worthy causes as Sunday Schools and overseas missions. Nor is it particularly surprising that in a church composed overwhelmingly of Congregationalists the pattern of decline in Congregationalism already apparent in the earlier twentieth century, largely the result of changes in the economy, should have continued in the URC in the final quarter. By the mid-twentieth century the diversity of Congregationalism made it difficult to know what it stood for or how it

could survive. One of my principal motivations in advocating the union was as a bulwark against woolly liberal Protestantism. In that I was clearly mistaken. But it does expose the error of regarding ecumenism as liberal; it is conservative through and through, and only appears radical to those who hope for an alternative to liberal theological trends (provided someone is prepared to step forward and explain what they mean by 'liberal' first).

David M Thompson

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