VI Seventeenth Century

(i) British and Irish History

Martyn Bennett

General Only just sneaking into this year’s review is a biography of the 17th earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere (1550–1604): the crisis and consequences of wardship (Ashgate, £45) by Daphne Pearson. A bug bear of the mid seventeenth century until opposition politicians got control of the Court of Wards, wardship was seen as a means of extracting money from the estates of minors by the crown. Pearson argues, through the case of de Vere, that there is indeed some justification in the later calls for its abolition. Wardship was the root of lifelong financial decline for the earl and his tiny income at his death is firmly blamed on his succeeding to his title whilst a minor. The biography does deal with more than just the wardship years, exploring for the first time the full length Edward de Vere’s life, which is well-worth reading.

Amy Louise Erickson poses a very interesting question at the opening of ‘Coverture and capitalism’ (Hist. Workshop J., 59): what is the contribution of women’s economic role to the economy in pre-industrial England? She argues persuasively that it is important and moreover is crucial to the early development of capitalism. Indeed, coverture, the principle that married women’s property and income is under male control after marriage resulted in the development of sophisticated means of protecting women’s personal inheritance and thus had a knock on effect in the development of financial institutions. Moreover, the freedom accorded to unmarried women to use their income at will had the potential contribution of 50% to overall levels of investment. This is an excellent essay which will excite debate and discussion. Two reissues deserve to be mentioned here, both from Routledge: John Wroughton’s second edition of The Routledge Companion to the Stuart Age (hbk £55, pbk £16.99) and David Cressy and Ann Ferrell’s Religion and society in early modern England (hbk £60, pbk £19.99) and also as an e-book at £19.99, which is also in its second edition. Both have both proved useful to a wide range of readers in the past, and their thorough revisions and additions enable them to keep pace with this most vibrant area of work.

A very different general piece should act as an introduction to a large number of research projects in part or as a whole. Elaine MacKay’s ‘English diarists: gender, geography and occupation, 1500–1700’ (Hist., 90) looks at the nature of diaries and diarists. As with so many studies involving diaries at some point this makes a useful background article. To date 372 diaries in England have been tracked in national and local record offices. Using this as a base figure the diaries are analysed in terms of gender, occupation and location: questions of motive and content are discussed. Thus providing gems of information for anyone working on a diary, McKay is fully aware that this is an ongoing project: even so its value is unquestioned.

Before moving on Martyn Bennett has published Society, religion and culture in seventeenth century Nottinghamshire (Edwin Mellen £69.99), a collection of essays by scholars originally based at Nottingham Trent University, but now distributed across the northern hemisphere. Their combined talents add depth and breadth not only to our understanding of Nottinghamshire, but of the century as a whole in Britain. The essays cover gender and crime, witchcraft, religion literary culture, community economics and politics.

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An early contender for this section of the review is Brenda Buchanan, Justin Champion, David Canadine and David Cressey’s *Gunpowder plots: a celebration of 400 yYears of Bonfire Night* (Allen Lane, £14.99). This collection of essays examines the way that the 5 November has been celebrated in various places over time and the resonance that the night still bears. As well as examining the national panic that followed the attempt on the lives of the king and MPs, there is also a history of fireworks – the essential part of bonfire night. Of course the anniversary of the plot spawned several works on television, including the memorable reconstruction of the explosion carried in one documentary, as well as in print. Jim Sharpe’s *Remember, remember the fifth of November* (Profile Books £15.99) is another example of the broad brush approach. Like the authors of *Gunpowder plots*, Sharpe not only explores the nature of the plot and its dramatic discovery but also the way that the events are commemorated and remembered over the intervening four hundred years. James Travers of the National Archives produced *Gunpowder: the players behind the plot* (National Archives, £19.99), perhaps the most interesting of the studies, focussing on the key figures in the documents that revealed their roles in the plot, which Travers explores from the last weeks before the discovery of the plan through the court cases in the succeeding months.

The structures of the Jacobean church are explored in an interesting book by Charles Prior. In *Defining the Jacobean church: the politics of controversy, 1603–1625* (CUP, £50) Prior argues that the divisions within the church were actually multifarious. Most arguments lie within the nexus of predestination versus free will and thus concentrate upon salvation. In Prior’s view that whole nature of the church was being debated and discussed and moreover that this was seen in a civil and historical context. The very role of church in society too was under discussion and the relationship with civil governors and governance was and would remain contentious. The seeds of later debate were there, even if in the end the solutions were not going to be found. One feature of the Laudian church was the lack of clarity regarding the position of confirmation. James F. Turrell suggests that here as in other areas Laud was not as ‘Laudian’ as some of his juniors, in ‘“Until such time as he be confirmed”: the Laudians and confirmation in the seventeenth century church’ (*Seventeenth Century*, XX). Confirmation was largely downgraded during the Reformation; baptism and catechising were seen as the most important element of acceptance into the church, and despite reference to confirmation in the 1604 canons, there was little concerted attempt to restore its importance as a precursor to receipt of communion. Laud was apparently lukewarm on the issue and there was no sustained redevelopment of confirmation’s status in the 1630s. The civil wars naturally had a further negative impact and nothing further was done to rehabilitate confirmation in the 1660s. This essay therefore casts useful light on the limitations of ‘Laudian’ reform and on Laud’s own attitudes to church practice.

In *The blessed revolution: English politics and the coming of war, 1621–1624* by Thomas Cogswell (CUP, £31.99) the naissance of the civil wars and revolution are embedded in the 1620s, by looking at the conflict between court and crown over James’s pacific stance regarding Spain. Parliament succeeded in changing the direction of foreign policy, an obvious starting point for the influence it felt it should have a decade and a half later when James’s successor was powerless to deflect the attempt to enshrine executive powers in Parliament. This is a contentious argument in many ways but can be seen to bridge gaps between the revisionist approach to the run-up to war and those who claim to detect longer term of deeper rooted crises.

In a similar vein, Richard Cust has returned to the fertile ground upon which he worked in the 80s and 90s with ‘Was there an alternative to the personal rule? Charles I, the Privy Council and the Parliament of 1629’ *Hist.,* 90. The answer is, of course, I suppose, yes. Cust argues that the king could still have changed tack as late as the early thirties, he was still taking advice, no one necessarily saw him as confirmed in one or another means of government: only with the growing confidence as a adult
father did he more clearly harden his attitude. Even so Cust argues forcibly that the period 1628–29 was crucial in the development of the king’s attitude towards parliament and government. Like Cogswell, Cust maintains that the 1620s remain crucial to understanding the coming catastrophe.

**Political, Cultural and Religious History 1640–1660** Without a doubt the most exciting book in this section is Mark Stoyle’s *Soldiers and strangers: an ethnic history of the English Civil War*, Yale U.P., £25. This book presents the war as a modern conflict of religions and ethnicities, in which borders play a small role. Stoyle has always regarded the ethnic aspects of the conflicts as crucial to our understanding and has broadened our perspectives on these currents and undercurrents within England and Wales to a greater extent than perhaps anyone else. The book looks at the war in two main stages, the first at the influx of outsiders usually appended to the royalist cause. The second looks very much at England being reborn and pushing the surge of invaders from its borders. The book advances Stoyle’s belief in the centrality of ethnicity and carries some weight in so doing.

Jason Peacey looks at the development of propaganda in the revolution. Instead of looking at the text in ‘The hunting of the Leveller: the sophistication of Parliamentary Propaganda 1647–53’ (*Hist. Research*, 78) Peacey looks at the frequency and timing of publications in relation to attempts to silence and imprison John Lilburne. In the early stages of the Leveller campaigns there was nothing in the way of a concerted parliamentary response to them or to Lilburne. However, from the second edition of *England’s New Chains Discovered* onwards things changed. As Lilburne was arrested copies of Parliament’s reasons in the form of a declaration were published and circulated. Beyond this a more sophisticated approach failed when John Milton failed to produce a rebuttal of Lilburne’s politics and as a result Lilburne escaped a charge of treason. By May-June 1649 however, attempts to counter Lilburne’s publications were meeting with more success, Milton was taken off the case and his job given to John Canne. Even so, as with the king’s trial earlier that year, Lilburne’s appearance in court counteracted all parliament’s propaganda and engendered sympathy for the defendant. Greater success had to wait until the tightening of restrictions on the press. Peacey makes no sustained comment on the quality of the pamphlets aimed at undermining one of the revolution’s most prolific writers, but the inference is plain. It was to be mechanics of the publication effort and control of publishing that shut Lilburne down, and the increased sophistication of those mechanics reveals the development of conservative political system in parallel with the radical machine.

Of different political mettle is Thomas Lord Fairfax. Luke Dixon in ‘The politics of Sir Thomas Fairfax reassessed’ (*History.*, 90) suggests convincingly that Fairfax was not politically neutral or powerless in the revolutionary months of 1648–9, nor was he a conservative block to revolutionary progress. Rather he argues Fairfax’s sympathy with the politics and more so the plight of his soldiers helped keep the army together, thus enabling its political success in the revolution. Blame, should there be such a thing, for Fairfax’s position in 1648 should lie with the king’s intransigence that had, as it had with Cromwell, finally turned Fairfax from the belief in a negotiated settlement with Charles to accepting that more radical steps needed to be taken. An interesting argument and insight into Fairfax’s role in the revolution.

‘Was Marvell a Republican?’ asks Warren Chernaik in *Seventeenth Century*, XX. Chernaik investigates the political messages in a series of Marvell’s works for the 1650s. He finds mixed messages in the texts which suggest either confusion in Marvell’s mind or perhaps portray the development of ideas as time passes. There is clearly an internal debate going on in Marvell’s mind. Two poems written closely together, *An Horation Ode . . .* and *Tom May’s death* are good examples of this and the eulogy for the young Lord Hastings is clearly royalist in intent: although Lord Hastings is not an easy figure to pin down: he was too young to have participated in the wars,
his father the Earl of Huntingdon was a parliamentarian turned lukewarm royalist and
his mother was a hard-line parliamentarian and so a confused picture in the poem
could be result of a fight over the soul of the dead much hoped-for heir as much as
uncertainty in the Marvell's mind. Chernaiik answers his question with a firm no – not yet.

Marvell features in another article, this time on the distinctly un-puritan celebrations
of the marriage of Lord Protector Oliver's daughters, Frances and Mary. Both made
strong political alliances in 1657 which, had time permitted, firmly bound the new
regime into the families and structures lingering from the old. In ‘‘Soe Honny from
the Lyon came’': the wedding masques for the Protector’s daughters’ (Seventeenth Century,
XX), Edward Holberton looks at the work of Edmund Waller and Marvell. In ‘On the
Marriage of Mrs Frances Cromwell with Mr Rich Grandchild to the Earl of Warwick’,
Waller celebrates, he concludes, the rise of the new moderate aristocrats, who will
ensure the survival of the new regime, whilst to Marvell, perhaps still Chernaiik's
unconvinced republican, in ‘Two Songs at the marriage of the Lord Fauconberg and
the Lady Mary Cromwell' the newness of the regime is still a contentious issue to be
resolved. Useful commentaries on both masques provide a light on the way the regime
was (still) settling in within the heart of the nation and its political classes.

Political Cultural and Religious History 1660–1715 William Gibson and Robert
Ingram's Religious identities in Britain, 1660–1831 (Ashgate, £45) is a collection of
essays aiming to cover the post revolutionary period in British religious development.
It therefore takes as its themes, the conflict between high and low Anglicanism, the
Jacobites. It is an important collection of studies and deserves a wide readership.
Naturally, according to William E. Burns, astrology and Roman Catholicism appeared
hand in hand in the late seventeenth century. The popular astrologists and compilers of
almanacs fought a religious war over James II. In 'Astrology and Politics in seven-
teenth century England: King James II and the Almanac Men' (Seventeenth Century,
XX), Burns examines the way James II was presented in almanacs as God's chosen
instrument and thus the reinstallation of the Roman Catholic faith was demonstrated to
have God’s approval. Monarchist astrologer John Gadbury, and others demonstrated
that the king's escape from myriad dangers during the civil wars and republic could
only have been salvation by providential fortune. Just as his grandfather's salvation
from diabolic plots could be seen as proving that his Protestant credentials had
approval by God, so James II was shown to have providentialist blessing, justifying his
religious bent. Naturally there was an opposite viewpoint with authors such as the
exiled John Partridge offering a contrary perspective. This is a fascinating insight into
the popular press and its political position during the late century.

What some might consider a higher art form, presented other problems for the
seventeenth-century observer. Arguably the best paintings in Europe were from the
Roman Catholic parts of the continent and the effect on the observer of gazing upon it
was problematic. How was a Protestant to view Catholic art? In her enjoyable article
'The culture of judgement: art and anti-Catholicism in England c. 1660–1760', (Hist.
Research, 78) Clare Haynes suggested that the observer had to be cautious. Appreciation of
the quality of the work was one thing and the observer had carefully to avoid being
absorbed in the idolatrous nature and the religious messages within such works. As a
result descriptions of great artworks tended to be quite flat and narrative in structure,
unlike this fascinating and useful read.

Whilst Hobbesian scholars may have been quiet in this year, Locke's devotees
ensured that his work remained on the agenda. Hannah Dawson's very interesting
essay 'Locke on Language in (Civil) Society' (History. of Political Thought, XXV1)
argued that Locke was in serious danger of undermining his views on civil society
through his linguistic theories. His suspicion that men broke codes of language would
have an impact on the meaning of political compacts: for if people misused the
language with which they made social compacts than the compacts were undermined.
Jacqueline Rose, on the other hand, looked at the young Locke’s argument in favour of an intolerant state church. In ‘John Locke, “matters indifferent”, and the restoration of the Church of England’ (Hist. J., 48) Rose argues that Locke saw that a restoration church should unite the political and spiritual. Far from the tolerance he later showed, Locke was a royalist Anglican in 1660: arguing the church should be defended for its political value of inculcating obedience to the state to support the restored monarchy.

**Economic and Social History**  *Printing and parenting in early modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Ashgate, £45) is a collection of essay which looks at the way a changing written culture had an effect on the changing nature or thereby changed nature of parenthood during the period. It is at first a strange mixture, a history of printed text and familial developments; but then the culture of writing obviously impinges on all changes in society: education, war and financial structures, so it is no surprise that family life is changed too – a worthy and interesting collection of work. Catie Gill has produced a very fine study of the literature of the Quakers. Her book, *Women in the seventeenth century Quaker community* (Ashgate, £45) is derived from her Loughborough University PhD thesis and is well worth reading. It adds greatly to our understanding of the dynamics of Quakerism and to gendered perception of this fascinating and, at the time, dangerous radical group. Obviously whilst acknowledging the quite unique circumstances of women writers in the Quaker movement, which has an impact on the availability of sources, this book contributes to the wider study of women’s roles in the revolution and afterwards: long awaited and welcome. E. Wilby’s *Cunning folk and familiar spirits: shamanistic visionary traditions in early modern British witchcraft and magic* (Sussex Academic P., £15.95) looks at the evidence for visionary ritual and belief, rather than accepting that narratives of fairy beliefs were created in the search for diabolic pacts. This is an interesting attempt to interweave shamanism and folklore into witchcraft and certainly a useful dimension to witchcraft studies. *Literature and culture in early modern London* by Lawrence Manley (CUP, £35) starts in the late fifteenth century and looks at the way London changed from a mediaeval city to a thriving cultural centre at the heart of the book trade in Britain. In so doing it argues that this was at the heart of the developing capitalist structures of the capital and nation. On the other hand, Phil Withrington’s *The politics of Commonwealth: citizens and freemen in early modern England* (CUP, £50) looks at the rights and duties of the urban Englishman and women. Here rather than the book being at the centre of cultural change, it is the city which drives religion, economy and politics. Marrying these two books is well worth the effort.

Thomasin LaMay’s *Musical voices of early modern women* (Ashgate, £50) is a collection of essays that adds a further dimension to our understanding of the early modern woman. It is a road far less travelled than many others that have concentrated on women’s lives and all the more exciting for that – an imaginative collection: well constructed and fascinating.