

THE LETTER BOOK OF SIR ANTHONY OLDFIELD 1662-1667, P.R. Seddon,
Lincoln Record Society/The Boydell Press, 2004, xxxiv + 76pp, 0901503681

Anthony Oldfield was the son of a royalist member of the Newark garrison during the first civil war and in lieu of his father, who died in 1659, received a knighthood at the Restoration for loyal service. Oldfield owned Spalding and as a member of the county's social elite and son of a loyalist Sir Anthony became a deputy lieutenant in the county militia. Oldfield commanded a troop of horse, but active deputies were few for the intention was to embrace as many loyal men in the militia as possible and so not all of the deputies took to the field themselves. Oldfield's letter book is largely a record of the Lincolnshire militia in the mid 1660s, consisting of 86 copies of letters sent and received by Sir Anthony, although there are letters dealing with other matters, parish affairs and taxation. As such the book will be of interest to military historians of the Restoration period and students of local administration.

The editorial matter consists of descriptions of the manuscript text from which this edition is derived and which explains the way in which the printed version is reconstructed. There is a brief biography of Oldfield, followed by a longer and detailed history of Lincolnshire's Restoration militia. A far briefer section on taxation and local government is also included. These are well-written and organised, providing a sound context for the material in the letter book. There is a clear elucidation of the editorial practise and this is particularly welcome given that the letter book has been reordered chronologically; we are not seeing a reproduced letter book so much as a calendared and tidied up version of what Sir Anthony assembled. There are perils with this sort of editing, it takes the reader one more step away from

any sense of the real thing, and we lose sight of the way in which, in this case, Oldfield, assembled and ordered this part of his life: the letter book is lost from view. The advantages are that the letter book makes more sense to the general reader and historian: it can be read through in the order that the letters were conceived, written and received, rather than the way in which they were later copied and assembled. The sequence makes sense to the reader.

Because of this editorial practice the reader can enter into the developing world of Restoration Lincolnshire and its preoccupations with disorder in the first post revolution years. The very first letter, from the Lord Lieutenant to his deputies is concerned with weapons taken from 'Disaffected persons', whilst the second shows that the country was militarised and correspondingly taxed at a rate unheard of before the civil wars and that this taxation was collected by the military as in the days of the war and republic. We can ask what was restored in the 1660s? It was certainly not a sense of pre-war normality. On the other hand some things from the pre war years did return to haunt the authorities – the enclosure of Wildmore Fen was one of the first. In August 1663 riots broke out and were reported to the Earl of Lindsey by the Privy Council. The rioters had challenged the sheriff and the surveyor general. There were other things too. In March 1665 a Chandler in Market Deeping sued two constables who had distrained him for default of taxation. This had, just as it did in the 1630s, deterred other officials from carrying out unpopular duties; but it also pitched one branch of local government, in this case the town's borough court, against another; the lieutenancy.

This is a very useful book; through it the mechanics of restoration can be studied. Whilst the concentration is principally militia papers the wider consequences of the need for a militia on a scale not seen before the war can be explored. It is clear from these papers that the post 1660 world was not a restoration in any true sense. The intercession of Charles Stewart did not restore the country to a pre war state; it continued the redevelopment begun in the 1640s: the dramatic past two decades could not be swept away. Whilst interregnum might be a suitable term to describe the gap in reigns between 1649 and 1660, Restoration is not appropriate as a term for the post 1660 years: Reconstruction might be better employed, because as this important book shows Sir Anthony Oldfield was a participant in a brave new world, not a comfortable old one.

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