

Early Modern British History, Here and There, Now and Again¹

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Concern over the present state of British history in North American colleges and universities, and more specifically British history of the “Tudor and Stuart” or “Early Modern” era, becomes steadily more intense. Conference panels are devoted to it, on-line conversations frequently indulge in it, and it's hard to find an extended conversation amongst colleagues which doesn't eventually take it up. Much of this may be prompted by the near disappearance of entry-level employment in the field, but this is of course the symptom of far deeper realities. When asked to contribute to a recent colloquium on the state of Early Modern British history in general,² I chose to present a North American perspective on the subject. I hoped to affirm that there is such a perspective, and to distinguish it from what I saw as a British perspective. Though the world of ideas may indeed be universal, the worlds of teaching, studying, and academic employment are not. They are peculiar to specific national traditions, educational systems, and cultures.

This is most emphatically the case with British history. Notwithstanding what may remain of the so-called “special relationship” between North America and Britain, and between their respective cultural, intellectual, and political traditions, we in North America naturally study and teach British history as the history of a foreign country, one of many and ever more numerous foreign countries whose histories we now consider. This is a very different case from when the British study and teach their own history. Now that the debate on the crisis at hand becomes even more spirited, it seems appropriate to explore this “locational” perspective in a more public forum, and to see what implications might usefully be drawn from it. In doing so I recognize the difficulties of

¹In addition to Robin Winks, who invited me to address the Yale History Department which he chairs, and those numerous members of that Department who kindly shared their thoughts with me thereafter, I would like to thank Linda Peck, Norman Jones, Joseph Ward, and Dale Hoak, for their encouragement in gathering these thoughts; David Dean, Vanessa Harding, Tim Harris, Elizabeth Ewan, Retha Warnicke and Richard Greaves for their close reading of the penultimate draft, and Michael Moore, editor of *Albion*, for agreeing to publish this unconventional submission. I hasten to add that none of these fine scholars should be held responsible for anything which follows.

²“Early Modern British History, Here, There and Everywhere,” delivered 16 April, 1998, as part of the Yale University series “Whither Early Modern British History?” Other speakers in the series, held between March and October, 1998, were Kevin Sharpe, Keith Wrightson, John Morrill, and Cynthia Herrup.

generalizing about almost any aspect of the subject. Exceptions will be found, subjective impressions will not be universally shared, and rare is the proposed solution which would garner unanimous support. Though I do wish to explore at least some of the context for the issue, it is certainly not my intention to cast blame, to overlook positive directions, or to forget the positive contributions of particular individuals. Yet, we do seem to have chased this squirrel around the tree trunk long enough: however contentious it may prove, I hope what follows might clarify the nature of the chase and set it off in some more positive and specific directions.

I would like to begin with the question of whether Early Modern British history, embracing what is conventionally called Tudor and Stuart history, is a field in crisis or not and then to consider what sort of a crisis it might or might not be. Then I would like to consider the subject matter of the field: its changing state and the ways in which some approaches to it may have contributed to the crisis. Finally, I would like to suggest what some of the implications of this question may be for those individuals and institutions in a position to assert practical leadership in the field.

I

For some history departments in North America the viability of Early Modern British history, indeed of British history itself, has become an open question, and here we come to one of the striking differences between the British and the North American approach to this field. Though one often hears that Early Modern Britain (and perhaps all British history) has waned in its appeal (and that "Tudor England" in particular is virtually moribund) I have not heard from most of my British colleagues and friends that the Tudor and Stuart or Early Modern British field, or even British history in general, is in "crisis" in Britain, nor does it appear to be so.

Book publishers show no exceptional concern about U.K. sales in this field or about the availability of high quality manuscripts to publish. Even as larger publishing houses consolidate at an alarming rate, new and smaller ones continue to appear, and the publication flow is as great or greater than ever. Conferences and post-graduate seminars abound. The Institute of Historical Research in London mounts more seminar series every year, half a dozen in some phase of Early Modern Britain in 1997–98 alone with some of them reaching forty or more participants at each session. Some very high quality and imaginative research continues to be done. The resulting output, especially in journals such as *Past and Present*, *Historical Journal*, *Continuity and Change*, and in the lists of the more scholarly publishing houses, seems of extremely high calibre, and the number of learned journals in the field grows steadily.

These labors are no doubt to be expected when the general British reading public, large and well informed by North American standards, retains an active interest in the field, and where undergraduate interest remains strong and secure.

The quality newspapers regularly review works of serious historical scholarship, and indeed the whole and vibrant "heritage industry" feeds and is fed by this public interest to an exceptional extent.

From our North American perspective, and perhaps prompted by this wide and general interest, the field certainly seems to remain in relatively good shape in British universities. Undergraduate registration remains healthy and courses seem well subscribed. Thanks to a secondary school curriculum that strikes North Americans as still fairly strong in history in general, many British undergraduates already know a fair bit of British history when they get to university. Although employment prospects are far from ideal, our British colleagues may reasonably expect new appointments steadily to enter the ranks.

British university history departments still, naturally enough, emphasize British history to the much greater exclusion of other histories. Though this seems now to be changing, British university history curriculum, along with British society itself, seems to have responded more cautiously to the implications (and pressures) of multi-culturalism than is the case in either Canada or the United States. They do not face the same pressures to teach other, especially non-Western histories, as we do in North America. For all these reasons and probably more besides, historians of Britain working in that country at the present time would have far less reason to think about a crisis in their field. Some of them have expressed surprise that we use such extreme terms ourselves.

The situation on this side of the Ocean, in Canada as well as the United States, stands in some contrast to these patterns. They do, indeed, affirm that a crisis is at hand. Undergraduates enter university with little enough history of any sort. Many American states and some Canadian provinces no longer even require American or Canadian history at the secondary level, while European history is becoming a rarity and British history a non-entity. Thus undergraduate enrolment in all areas of history has lagged behind many other fields. In addition, as our university curricula do respond to the pressures of multi-culturalism, and as a good many new fields have opened up for original research, university history departments offer a lot more curricular choices than they used to. Where British history may once have been one of six or eight subject areas in a modest-sized department, it may now be one of twice as many areas if it remains in the calendar at all. Student intake is not only lethargic to begin with, but becomes diluted among many more choices than were formerly on hand.

Then, too, the "special relationship" between America and Britain that flourished especially in the early and middle decades of this century has now seriously eroded, as has Britain's presence in world affairs. A similar distancing has opened up even in Canada where, in nine of the ten provinces, the special relationship had of course been much stronger from the start. The allure that British history held for undergraduates of my own and earlier cohorts, who were anxious to explore the founding ideologies of America or Canada, has now, in

this pragmatic and post-modernist age, paled considerably. Such issues as the origins of the American and Canadian constitutional and legal traditions, or parliamentary democracy, or (in the U.S.A.) the separation of church and state, or the Anglican (or Methodist, etc.) Protestant tradition, or the context for Shakespearean literature, once and until very recently ensured a steady and stable clientele for courses in Tudor and Stuart or Early Modern Britain. But many of those concerns have fallen before the massive curricular iconoclasm of our time, and we may not as readily take those clienteles for granted today. For this and other reasons, undergraduates here seem to be abandoning traditional fields like British history and, within that field, especially what has traditionally been known as the Tudor and Stuart era.

In consequence of these and other factors (certainly including a sensitivity to enrolment patterns as well), many North American universities have chosen to tailor departmental offerings to the whims of the public fancy and of the student demand. When British history courses do not fill the room, departments are compelled to place their priorities elsewhere. This has a cumulative effect. The "word on the street," among publishers, for example, seems to be that while textbook sales in the field continue steady in Britain, they are sometimes down in the North American market. Editors of some scholarly journals published here sometimes find it difficult to attract as much high quality work as they would like in the Tudor and early Stuart period. Conference organizers find it harder to mount Tudor panels especially and, while Stuart panels do better, they are still outweighed by those in more modern periods.

But perhaps the most compelling evidence of all comes from an informal count of teaching fields as listed in the annual American Historical Association's *Directory of History Departments and Organizations in the United States and Canada*. This shows that—notwithstanding the much larger number of departments listed in the later edition—there were *far less than half* the number of specialists in the field in 1996 as were listed in 1976.³ More troubling still, the job listings in the American Historical Association's *Perspectives* show no sign of reversing this trend. Almost no new entry level posts in Early Modern or Tudor and Stuart Britain have appeared in the past several years.

This has meant that a great many university-level History programs that once did so now offer no British history of any period. And, although roughly half of all students enrolled in introductory history courses in the United States today take them at the junior college level,⁴ our field remains a virtual stranger to that

³It is difficult to be too precise about these figures, as there is some lack of uniformity in the manner in which different departments list their fields, and the *Directory* lists the fields of faculty competence rather than the titles of actual courses. But—notwithstanding the fact that the 1996 volume of the *Directory* lists almost twice as many departments as the 1976 volume—the number of faculty identifying British history as one of their fields of competence has declined sharply.

⁴David Trask, "The AHA and Historians at Community Colleges," *Perspectives* 34, 5 (May/June, 1996).

curriculum. Perhaps more alarming is that some very solid university graduate programs on our continent, with excellent resources for studying and teaching the field, no longer as of this writing have Early Modernists or Tudor and Stuart historians in place.⁵ Some others have replaced very senior people with very junior people instead rather than, as was often the case in past-times, with scholars of comparably senior rank.⁶ In some cases these gaps are of long-standing; in others they result from failure to replace recent retirees. One fears that such a list may soon expand considerably in view of imminent retirements amongst some of our most distinguished colleagues.

There are obviously plenty of fine scholars in the field. Many are still relatively junior in rank and experience. Others are senior in rank and experience, but have been unable to move up through what was once an effective *cursus honorum* and into the senior and best supported universities. Many who might once have followed that route now still teach at smaller institutions whose instruction does not proceed beyond the B.A. or M.A. level, or whose resources do not permit much professional initiative. When so many of our most accomplished scholars have no access to graduate level teaching and to the superior resources which often accompany such instruction, their potential for leadership has been compromised. It is more difficult for them to set agendas for scholarly research, to direct our organizations and conferences, to encourage younger faculty, to initiate major research projects, and to speak for the field in the public domain. If we fail to replenish the senior ranks in the field, or fail to sustain the field even with junior appointments at the better endowed and senior institutions, these functions will not be performed as they should be. Both this field and the whole profession will be impoverished by the void.

Whether or not we should expect as much in this quintessentially pragmatic age, or whether or not we approve of those changing loyalties or curricular developments, are not the questions before us. But we must recognize what has been going on here in North America for the past two decades or so to understand that this is a different picture than applies in Britain, and of course to consider how this influences the ways in which we conceptualize, teach, and represent the field.

There can be no question that something must indeed be done, and soon. Whatever the whims and fancies of the undergraduate clientele may be, this should still be an essential field in either American and Canadian undergraduate

⁵These include, as of this writing and as indicated in the *AHA Directory of History Departments and Organizations*, 24th ed. (1998), such institutions as Northwestern, Rochester, Missouri, New York University, Victoria (British Columbia), and Minnesota.

⁶This is not to deny, of course, that such junior appointments often prove very fine scholars. But junior scholars will take time to reach the point where they can assert the leadership of their predecessors.

curricula. It still speaks to the roots of North American society on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border, even if those roots are much more numerous and varied than one used to think. It still allows us, if we present it appropriately, to investigate myriad questions that remain vital to our understanding of the past. Some of those questions are old but still important; others are altogether new and still unfolding.

Of equal significance to any of these factors, British history is still one of the very best training grounds we can have in the task of conveying the discipline of history itself to our students. Today's undergraduates may be more culturally and ethnically diverse than ever, they may demand a more pluralistic history curriculum to suit their interests, and at least the better funded amongst our universities are often able to offer them a plethora of choices outside of British history. But it is still the case that more North American undergraduates by far read English than any other language, and there is still more to read and more for us to assign in British history than in any other history save our own. Not only is this true for secondary literature, but (thanks especially to the wonders of modern technology) for primary sources as well.

II

Thus far I have emphasized the occupational side of the problem: the apparently failing popularity of the field with undergraduates, and the redirection of teaching posts to other areas, the consequent sense that the field is disappearing before our eyes, and on our watch. But there is something to be said as well for the way in which we approach the field as a body of knowledge, and for the effect this may have on its attraction to others. This is a question not of enrollments and job openings, but of the subject matter itself, and the ways in which we present it in our research and teaching.

Here, too, distinctions might be made between British and North American perspectives. Not only does the occupational side of the current dilemma make it more critically urgent to address these problems "here" rather than "there" but—ironically—North Americans seem better positioned to take a distinctive approach to the subject itself: one more appropriate to the North American context, and one which promises to snatch opportunity out of the current adversity.

This opportunity comes, it seems to me, because even those North Americans trained in British graduate programs, as well as the rest of us, have less reason to be caught up to the same extent in the highly specialized, and sometimes insular, approaches to the field as it has developed in Britain. Such specific approaches, often virtually blossoming into distinctive sub-fields of their own, have been developed in Britain far more extensively, and have sometimes remained further from the mainstream, than has been the case elsewhere. Only in Britain, with its greater and quite natural ability to privilege British history above all others, has there existed the critical mass of scholars required for this to have happened.

Thus we have today amongst our British colleagues who work on the history of Britain between, let's say, 1500 and 1700, well organized sub-fields in Agrarian, Urban and Metropolitan, Local, Economic, Business, Legal, Religious and Ecclesiastical, Social (including Women's and Gender), Dramatic, Musical, Artistic and Architectural, Maritime, Military, Literary, Recusant, Genealogical, Parliamentary, Medical and Scientific history, as well, of course, as the more conventional issues. Almost all of these interest groups have their own conferences, seminars, and journals. For the most part and at least figuratively speaking, there is certainly a tendency for members of each group to adjourn to their own pub at the end of the day.⁷

To a surprising extent, certainly unparalleled by any stretch of the imagination in North America, the tendency toward specialization is perpetuated in the very structure of many British Universities. The universities of Birmingham, Exeter, and Hull amongst others, have both Departments (or Schools) of History as such and separate Departments of Economic and Social History, (both of them, incidentally, dominated by specialists on Britain). Edinburgh has four separate Departments: one of History as such, and one each in Ecclesiastical History, Economic and Social History and Scottish History. Glasgow has Economic and Social History together, but separate Departments of Medieval History, Modern History, and Scottish History, plus the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine. Some of the newer institutions do this as well. And the University of Leicester has departments of History, Economic and Social History, English Local History, and a large and active Centre for Urban History.⁸ Though such institutional divisions do not necessarily preclude integration, they cannot have done much to facilitate it.

Alongside such specialized approaches, indeed, perhaps (though we tend not to think of it as a specialized approach at all) foremost amongst them, has been the familiar idea that history is but past politics. First expressed in so many words by Sir John Seeley, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge more than a century ago, this view had a particular apotheosis in recent times during what one is almost tempted to call the reign of Geoffrey Elton, Seeley's eventual successor as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. Of course Elton did not stand alone in insisting on the primacy of political history. That view ran centrally through a line of

⁷As Patrick Collinson recently put it, "there has been surprisingly little conversation between Reformation historians and urban historians. They belong, as it were, to different clubs and do not conduct their business in the same seminars and conferences." In Patrick Collinson and John Craig, ed., *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500-1640* (Basingstoke and London, 1998), pp. 3-4.

⁸These designations are identified in Joyce M. Horn, ed., *Teachers of History in the Universities of the United Kingdom* (Institute of Historical Research, London, 1996).

scholarship which included Pollard in the first quarter of the century, and Neale and Notestein in the middle years. It remains especially vivid today in the work of the Revisionists who downplay most non-political factors in accounting for the outbreak of the Civil War.

But in his mastery of the sources for Tudor political history, in his direction of an astounding number of doctoral theses, in his astonishing volume of publication, and in his forceful leadership in the profession, Elton influenced the nature and direction of the field to an extent perhaps unequalled in this century. He also emphatically rejected the validity of many other approaches, especially those of a social, economic or cultural bent, or those which might have placed the British experience in a European context.⁹ In so doing his influence discouraged the assimilation of some of those approaches to a more integrated master narrative.

The good news about this plethora of specialties, which may also be seen as an enviable plurality, is that it almost certainly allowed those individual fields (including political history of the Eltonian type) to flourish on their own to a degree that would not have been feasible under other circumstances (or, for that matter, under circumstances which prevail in North America). But it has also posed the weighty challenge, especially for those who teach the field to undergraduates, of creating coherence out of diversity. Because the traditional main stem of political narrative has been allowed to grow for such a long time with so little regard for all else around it, it has become narrow, rigid, deeply rooted, and not particularly well suited to meet that challenge.

I cannot help but think that the predicament in which the field finds itself in American colleges and universities today has a lot to do with the enduring grip of these traditions. Here is where the occupational side of the current dilemma bangs up against our presentation of the subject itself. It seems entirely likely that many undergraduates and graduate students today choose to study other histories, not only because of the diminished importance of the British heritage, or of the ideological concerns addressed in that heritage, or even because there are now so many curricular alternatives to choose from. They do so, too, because they miss the diversity of approach which lies more readily to hand in other historical subjects. They have come to expect such alternatives to be more broadly conceived and more successfully integrated with other aspects of the university and secondary curriculum. They often find them more accessible to the novice than the thickets of intricate detail which typify the standard serving of "Tudors and Stuarts." Some of our best-selling undergraduate texts, especially on the Tudor period, reinforce their misgivings.

⁹It is indeed fascinating to note that Elton's days at Cambridge coincided with those of, for example, the Cambridge Population group, and that he was immediately succeeded by the likes of Patrick Collinson and Keith Wrightson.

At least in my view, one need not pander to the great god of relevance, or to the whims of student interest, to ask whether there is not a way which preserves the essence of those traditional emphases while inviting the stimulating insights of newer and/or specialized approaches. Such integration is certainly a challenging task, but it seems a feasible prospect. Numerous North American scholars, and teachers, have already taken it up; the current dilemma should encourage more to do so.

Perhaps ironically, those very characteristics that distinguish the contexts for British history as taught "here," as opposed to "there," should facilitate the task for those working in the North American milieu. After all, we may find it harder to travel to the archives abroad, but we should find it easier to teach collaboratively and broadly at home. Not only have our history departments been less institutionally fragmented than many in Britain, but we now often teach in departments or programs where history has already been combined with cognate disciplines: History and Classics, or History and Geography, or—more inclusively yet—in "Renaissance Studies" or (especially in smaller programs) "Humanities" or "Social Sciences." Because even the largest of our history departments can rarely support more than two British historians, (and because those two may very likely share responsibility for introductory courses in, e.g., European or World history as well) there is less room for narrow specialization. We should be more driven to conceptualize and teach the field in broader and more interdisciplinary ways. By the same token, we should also find it easier to place the British experience in a geographically comparative context. Finally, because the development of thematic rather than national histories seems more advanced here than there, we should also find it easier to represent our field in thematic courses which transcend the boundaries of national history itself.

This is not by any means to suggest that we become more superficial in what we do or that we cease, in our research and writing, to investigate our subject in a highly specialized way. It is not to urge us to write text books rather than monographs. Students certainly should not be kept from specialized research if their abilities warrant such instruction and if departmental curriculum extends that possibility. But we must take note of the widening gap between what is appropriate to communicate to our research colleagues and what is appropriate to teach our undergraduates. We sometimes seem so caught up in the complexities of particular issues to the exclusion of other concerns that we do indeed lose sight of the forest for the trees when we enter the classroom. We must recapture in our teaching of the mainstream an integrated overview of the subject—a more global coherence—and we must do so precisely because we must defend the subject at a more fundamental level than our British colleagues have to do. These themes bear some further exploration, and it may do to offer some specific examples of what a more integrated curriculum might look like.

III

To begin with, let it be understood that the integration of specialized histories with the mainstream should not entail the complete abandonment of either one. Particularly those still privileged to direct student research at the senior thesis or graduate level, and of course in our own research as well, it is entirely legitimate and fruitful to pursue one or more of these specialties. They are important in and of themselves, they allow us to entertain collaboration with our non-historian colleagues, and they inform our sense of the mainstream even more than we sometimes realize.

Most of those specialties offer compelling opportunities for imaginative, comparative, and integrated approaches to the field. Here the canons and conventions of mainstream, narrative and political history, and the boundaries of 1485 and 1714, hold no writ. (Here, too, the label "Tudor and Stuart," which refers to dynasties and the stuff of high politics, may more readily yield to the "Early Modern" label, which conveys no such connotations.) These subjects probably offer the best opportunities for collaborative work, for work that allows us to add what we know about our own subject to the interests and needs of others, students and faculty, historians and non-historians alike. This is where the future lies most widely open for subjects like social structure, poverty and crime, political and material culture, authority and gender, and urban or agrarian history. Here, too, is where we may best contribute to traditional "transnational" fields like "The Renaissance" or "The Reformation," which form part of the canon of Western history, though they themselves are also in transition. If the familiar subjects represent the required figures of the skating competition, these are the freestyle events, and they belong just as much in the program as the others.

But most of the time, of course, we direct our teaching to at least some formulation of the central political narrative as we must and should do. Because this is indeed the heartland of the field, this is where it will move ahead or not. If we cannot revitalize the presentation of the central issues, and thus keep pace with the methods and approaches being adopted elsewhere, it will continue to languish. Here it seems essential to integrate the parallel and the innovative approaches with the traditional issues as appropriately and creatively as we can.

Thanks to the innovative contributions of many of the specialized sub-fields, this seems an especially fine time to undertake that integration, not just for "the Tudors," or "the Stuarts," but for the whole of Early Modern British history of which those constructs are favored parts. Even if one considers, for the sake of argument, only that traditional and presumably moribund field of "Tudor England" as a case in point—and ignoring, e.g., the persuasive inroads made on its chronological boundaries by such people as Eamon Duffy and Marjorie McIntosh¹⁰—several new directions come readily to mind. (Not only did Geoffrey

¹⁰Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 1992) and Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, 1998).

Elton not “kill Tudor history,” as is often alleged, but Tudor history—especially if reconceptualized within the “Early Modern Britain” label—is far from dead!) Though this is not the appropriate place to describe them all—the British dimension,¹¹ the post-modernist analysis of power, implications of gender, and so forth—it may suffice to choose just one of the new directions to exemplify how our fundamental perspectives have begun to change in the very recent past.

One such example lies in the development of the local perspective as a key to understanding some of the central issues of the period. (I choose it simply because I am more familiar with it, and not because of a lack of analogous perspectives which would serve as well.) Seminal works published between about 1972 and 1985 succeeded in formulating this approach in a number of respects. Whether motivated by Alan Everitt's earlier observation of a “county community,”¹² or John Morrill calling our attention to the “revolt of the provinces”¹³ or David Underdown's consideration of local popular culture,¹⁴ or the Records or Early English Drama project rewriting the history of mimetic activity county by county,¹⁵ or Peter Clark and Paul Slack and their colleagues calling our attention to the urban community,¹⁶ this perspective gave us the basis for the subsequent and fundamental reconsideration of a number of mainstream issues. Amongst the beneficiaries of this approach are those who work on, e.g., such subjects as the meaning and longevity of popular Catholicism,¹⁷ the nature and significance of popular festive and ritual activities,¹⁸ the meaning, incidence

¹¹This should be an especially easy reach for North Americans, who have so much less invested in the primacy of English history over that of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and who are rarely caught up in the contemporary resurgence of national identity in those component parts.

¹²Alan M. Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (1966).

¹³J. S. Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces, Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War, 1630–1650* (London, 1976; 2nd ed. 1999).

¹⁴David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion, Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985).

¹⁵Founded in Toronto in 1975, *Records of Early English Drama* has now published, as of this writing, 18 volumes in all, essentially rewriting our understanding of mimetic activity, not only in London, but county by county and major town by major town, the realm over, to the year 1640.

¹⁶Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* (Toronto, 1972), and *English Towns in Transition* (London, 1976), the former with important contributions by Charles Phythian-Adams, David Palliser, A. M. Johnson, Michael J. Power, Penelope Corfield and D. W. Jones, as well as the editors.

¹⁷Especially Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1989), Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*; Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformations, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993).

¹⁸Especially in David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven, Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1992); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*,

and content of moral reform movements,¹⁹ the social and urban context for Puritanism,²⁰ or the meaning and operation of political culture particular to time and place.²¹

It cannot be irrelevant to our concerns, for example, that the history of mimetic activity in England—including popular ritual, ceremony and celebrations as well as the more familiar and conventional theater of the age—has been comprehensively investigated and fundamentally rewritten since the 1970s by the many scholars associated with Records of Early English Drama,²² or that their work has successfully been integrated by more conventional historians of, e.g., Puritanism²³ or popular culture²⁴. Neither can it be irrelevant that earlier work on the nature of popular behavior and community control have inspired Marjorie McIntosh to undertake her breathtaking analysis of the local experience in virtually every corner of the realm, or that a similar locally-informed perspective has allowed Eamon Duffy to undertake his sweeping study of popular religion in the period up to and beyond the Henrician Reformation. Nor can it be entirely overlooked that historians of art and architecture have made signal strides to investigate local patterns of style and construction to show how portraiture, sculpture and building served as forms of political discourse,²⁵ or further to

the Ritual Year, 1400–1700 (Oxford, 1994) and *Stations of the Sun, A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996); and David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells, National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989) and *Birth, Marriage and Death; Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997).

¹⁹Prominently, for example, in McIntosh's *Controlling Misbehaviour in England, 1370–1600*.

²⁰Prominently in the work of Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World, a Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth Century London* (Stanford, 1985); David Underdown, especially in *Fire From Heaven*, and Patrick Collinson, especially in *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1988) and *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982) and what seem like scores of essays, and in the work of those who have been inspired by these three scholars.

²¹Exemplified in the essays to be found in Dale Hoak, *Tudor Political Culture* (Cambridge, 1995) and also perhaps in Robert Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns, Politics and Political Culture, 1540–1640* (Oxford, 1998).

²²The project has involved the work on particular volumes of nearly forty scholars in universities scattered throughout Britain, Canada and the United States. In addition to individual *R.E.E.D.* volumes, see especially the *Records of Early English Drama Newsletter* published to 1997, and the journal *Early Theatre*, which has succeeded it (1998–), and monographs such as Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Plays in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1993); and Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men* (Cambridge, 1998), which it has heavily influenced.

²³Especially in the many essays of Patrick Collinson and both essays and monographs of his students.

²⁴E.g., David Underdown, David Cressy, Ronald Hutton.

²⁵Representative works on this theme may be taken to include Margaret Aston, *The King's Bedpost, Reformation and Iconography in a Tudor Group Portrait* (Cambridge, 1993); Maurice Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House, Architecture and Politics, 1490–1550* (London, 1987); Robert Tittler,

explore England's cultural relations with the rest of Europe.²⁶ And it must be of some importance that seminal work on the role of gender as a prime element in the exercise of authority, much of it derived from local studies, has come forth at the same time.²⁷ Other new approaches, many of them patently and appropriately ignoring the putative divide between "Medieval" (e.g., 1485 or 1500 ff.) and "Early Modern," or between Late Medieval and Tudor/Stuart, abound in almost every direction. They are literally too numerous to mention.

The best of these advances are more than "contributions to our knowledge" in the conventional sense; they do more than "fill in the gaps" in what we know. They have brought fundamentally new approaches to traditional issues, and they have suggested a few new issues that must now be added to a revised canon. They certainly allow us to conceptualize our mainstream offerings in a different way: one that constructively blurs traditional chronological boundaries, and one that confidently reaches out toward other disciplines and other academic departments. Because similarly iconoclastic approaches have been taking place in cognate fields at the same time, it is increasingly the case that when we leave our history offices and begin the walk over to our colleagues' departments, we may well meet them half-way across the campus, walking towards us and seeking the same conversation.

There can be no doubt that, as part of the heartland, there is still room for a "Tudor and Stuart" course in the syllabus. But if that course wishes to recapture its lustre and reflect the breadth and excitement of current scholarship it will have to change with the times. With reference to the sixteenth century in particular, e.g., "The Tudor Revolution in Government" and "the popular rise of Protestantism in the reign of Henry VIII," each in all their intricacies, may have to go, as will the insularity of dealing exclusively with England. Yet many of the old subject headings have every right to remain there, newly informed by the richness of current research: the achievement of Henry VII, the Break from Rome, the Marian Martyrs, the emerging role of Parliament, developments in the Common Law, the foundations of Anglican worship, the place of the Spanish Armada, the Elizabethan Renaissance and so forth.

Many new issues could find a place alongside them in that syllabus. They might well include, e.g., the importance of local patronage networks and the

Architecture and Power, the Town Hall and the English Urban Community, c. 1500–1640 (Oxford, 1991); and a host of works by Sir Roy Strong.

²⁶See especially the eighteen essays (some by art historians, some by historians per se) in the pioneering collection edited by Lucy Gent, *Albion's Classicism; the Visual Arts in Britain, 1550–1660* (New Haven and London, 1995).

²⁷Especially in e.g., Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society, Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (1988); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven and London, 1995). This point observes the distinction between the subject of gender and that of women's or men's history, which would of course have made for a much longer list.

nature of local communities in establishing the kingship of Henry VII; the anthropology of popular religion both before and after the Break with Rome; the implications of population increase, inflation and disease for government policy; the significance of gender for the monarchies of Mary and Elizabeth and for the question of authority in general; the operation of collective memory in political legitimation; the semiotics of power and authority as employed by the Tudor monarchs, landed classes and civic bodies, and of the material culture that conveyed such imagery; the significance of New World contacts for the emergence of English ethnicity; and (to borrow a trifle from the early Stuart period) the deep descriptions of such puritans as John White of Dorchester and Nehemiah Wallington of London.

Reconceptualized in this manner, we who teach (at all levels and in all sorts of institutions) ought to be able to resuscitate traditional course offerings, allow them to keep pace with their stable-mates in the university curriculum, and work toward inter-disciplinary collaborations across traditional departmental boundaries. We need not abandon the family farm, and we ought not to do so. Let us continue to teach the field, and let us continue to teach at least some of those subjects upon which tradition has conveyed canonical status. Our license to preach conferred those responsibilities upon us. Our colleagues and students, both in our history departments and outside them, still count on us to fulfil that obligation. We owe it to the historical profession and to our students to keep vital a field that, by its particular linguistic and documentary accessibility, provides an ideal training ground for the discipline of history itself. And so we must inhabit this heartland before we do anything else.

But this need not preclude some fiddling with the canon or treating canonical issues in innovative ways. It should not deter us from planting some different crops in familiar rows. And it also must not keep us from presenting Early Modern (or Tudor and Stuart) Britain as an ideal show-case for such compelling issues as gender, or urban society, or political culture, or collective memory, or Renaissance kingship, or European confrontations with non-Europeans, whether such issues lie within the history department's listings or elsewhere in the university calendar. In many cases we have more reason to do so, and might find it easier to accomplish, than is the case with our British colleagues.

IV

This brings me to my last point. We may as individuals make these changes in what we bring to our classrooms, but as an occupational and scholarly group, we need leadership. Gone is the day, at least in most North American institutions, when the Professor of Tudor and Stuart or Early Modern British history could sit and write books all summer and then walk into the classroom in September and expect all the seats to be filled. Gone is the day, too, where that same professor could publish a few books and wait confidently for graduate students to seek him or her out as their mentor. And gone is the day when those earning

their Ph.D.s in this field could be reasonably sure of a teaching post at least somewhere amongst the hundreds of colleges and universities that offered the field, or even of remaining in touch with research in that field by so doing.

These things may still happen in some areas of history at the present time, especially those that more easily reach out to the personal experience of the contemporary student body: in women's history and gender, in the history of particular ethnic groups, and of marriage and the family, and of material or popular culture. But they do not now often happen in British history *per se*, and especially in "Tudor and Stuart," without some vigorous priming of the pump.

Leadership means several things here, and we require it at several levels: from the individual professor, from the departments in which we may teach, and from such professional associations as the North American Conference on British Studies (NACBS) and its seven regional branches, on whom we depend to facilitate our communication and interaction.

First and foremost leadership means academic expertise. This is true at all institutional levels, but the burden falls particularly on that small number of our leading, Ph.D.-granting, institutions whose facilities, resources and reputations best equip them to serve and encourage the rest. But in current circumstances it means that all those who teach the field must extend their efforts beyond research, publication and teaching. It means engaging students and colleagues outside the classroom before they can be engaged inside the classroom. It means engaging junior as well as senior colleagues, those outside as well as inside the Department of History, and those outside as well as inside the university.

Colleagues at smaller or less specialized institutions (probably a majority of the whole), and the many recent Ph.D.s employed in marginal circumstances if at all, soldier on with few opportunities to bring their scholarship to the classroom, much less encouragement, and far fewer resources to continue their own research. They must rely more than ever on the specialists and facilities of more senior institutions, both to help them sustain themselves and also to help them keep the field alive for their students and colleagues. This places a greater responsibility than ever on those senior programs and (whether senior or junior themselves) those who teach therein. Because they can best do so, it is more than ever up to them to support conferences and seminars and colloquia, to open those meetings up to colleagues elsewhere in the region (and elsewhere within the university), and both figuratively and literally to meet others for lunch when they come down to use the research library.

To go further along this road, the time seems well at hand when we should extend our presence and activity beyond the university level entirely. Much of our future as a viable, doctorate-granting and job-sustaining field may depend on our ability to rekindle interest in our wares amongst the general public, whence our undergraduates either will or will not come, or from high school or community college faculty who might—if properly supported and encour-

aged—help bring this enthusiasm to their classrooms. This may require some reaching out in (dare one suggest it!?) an entrepreneurial manner: sponsoring on-campus “days” for teachers and prospective students; offering presentations at community colleges, high schools or public libraries; writing the occasional op-ed piece in the quality press, sponsoring field trips to appropriate sites. It might also mean the continued development of high-tech teaching tools—internet presentations and CD Rom packages—which are part of the new vocabulary of secondary instruction, and which our students are coming to expect.

There is an interdisciplinary element to this as well. Both because the subject matter of the field has become so much more inclusive, and because there *is* strength in numbers amongst all who currently teach the Humanities and Social Sciences, leadership also means inviting practitioners of cognate fields to join with us. Happily, these tendencies are well along. One has come to take literally the “British Studies” part of the NACBS label to a degree that the organization’s founders probably never envisioned and certainly rarely practiced. Our conference panels have come, quite properly, to abound with those working outside departments of history, and the first winner of NACBS’s annual John Ben Snow Prize for the Best Book in Early Modern British history who did not teach in a history department stepped up to receive her award in 1995.²⁸

These tendencies must be encouraged and extended, and they certainly invite a wider involvement by NACBS itself.²⁹ I see no reason why the umbrella of the national group need be fully spread only in the annual conference. NACBS seems an appropriate agency (perhaps the most appropriate agency) to encourage the sponsorship of regular seminars and colloquia with regional attendance, and to publicize such meetings when they arise. Perhaps it could help co-ordinate outside funding from institutions like the National Endowment for the Humanities or the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada or the British Council to achieve this. Such programs have been successfully sustained at, for example, the Universities of Texas and Michigan, and on an inter-university basis in cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

NACBS should be encouraged in its efforts to reach towards its sister organizations in the Humanities—e.g., the American Legal History Society, the Modern Languages Association, and so forth—as well as more frequently to other societies of historians—like the Sixteenth Century Studies Association, and the Canadian as well as the American Historical Association—to collaborate on projects and share experiences in funding, enrollments, and curricular reform. We should consider, along with these other groups, the prospect of political lobbying, both in defense of such endowed projects as Yale’s Center for Parliamentary History, and in support of history curricula with state and provincial

²⁸ Annabel Patterson, now of Yale University, for *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles* (Chicago, 1994).

²⁹ I am pleased to note that, as of this writing, an NACBS committee has been struck to deal with the state of the field, but I am not aware of the nature or progress of its deliberations.

departments of education. Toward the same end of inclusivity, NACBS might well reconsider its distressing tendency to hold annual meetings in some of the most expensive venues on the Continent at a time when travel money shrinks steadily and when graduate students, untenured faculty (and one is regrettably tempted to say, most Canadians) find it financially difficult to attend the meetings and offer the papers on which their careers depend.

There seems great irony in the fact that there is so little collaboration between the two organizations in North America that have most at stake in reviving interest in Britain and British history in general: the NACBS and the British Council, the latter operating in separate American and Canadian offices. Occasional embassy receptions and abundant good will to the side, we may do very well to explore more actively the potential for regular British Council funding for current or future projects which might usefully prime our particular pump.

Such funding might allow us to emulate the small but determined Classical Association of Canada, whose members have perfected the task of working in isolation to a virtual art form! They have raised funds to establish an annual travelling speakers' series, enabling one or two senior classicists each year to visit and speak at the less favored or more remote institutions or cities. We might think about renegotiating the successful pilot project of 1995 whereby British Council in Canada subsidized Canadian doctoral students to attend and present a paper at the NACBS meeting of that year. Perhaps we could explore the funding possibilities for the production of CD-Roms and internet courses, which could readily transcend the university's precincts and thus rekindle interest in our field amongst potential undergraduates.

It will take a great deal of effort and the involvement of many people to bring some of these efforts to fruition. But now is the time, and—if the plethora of conference panels on “Darkest Early Modern Britain and the Way Out!” (with apologies to General William Booth)—is any indication, the will is abundantly there. Let us act while we still have the numbers to do so.

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