

Scandal and Religious Identity in Early Stuart England

A NORTHAMPTONSHIRE MAID'S TRAGEDY

C. 17 *2* *3*
79°
THE
ARaignment
OF
HYPOCRISIE:

OR,
A Looking-glasse for Mur-
derers and Adulterers;

And all others

That Profes Religion, and make shew of Holinesse,
yet deny the Power and Practice thereof in their
Lives and Conversations.

Being a fearfull EXAMPLE of Gods Judgements
on Mr. Barker, Minister of Gods Word at Pytchley
two miles from Ketterin in Norhamptonshire;

Who

For living in *Adultery* with his neer Kinswoman,
and concealing the Murder of her Infant, was
with his Kinswoman and Maid-servant
executed at *Northampton.*

With the strange manner of the Discovery of
that horrid Murder;

And their severall SPEECHES imme-
diately before their Deaths.

Printed at L

1652

SCANDAL AND RELIGIOUS
IDENTITY IN EARLY STUART
ENGLAND

A NORTHAMPTONSHIRE MAID'S TRAGEDY

PETER LAKE AND ISAAC STEPHENS

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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STUDIES IN MODERN BRITISH RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Volume 32

SCANDAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN
EARLY STUART ENGLAND

A NORTHAMPTONSHIRE MAID'S TRAGEDY

STUDIES IN MODERN BRITISH RELIGIOUS HISTORY

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This series aims to differentiate 'religious history' from the narrow confines of church history, investigating not only the social and cultural history of religion, but also theological, political and institutional themes, while remaining sensitive to the wider historical context; it thus advances an understanding of the importance of religion for the history of modern Britain, covering all periods of British history since the Reformation.

*Previously published volumes in this series are listed at the
back of this book*

A New Ballad
called

The Northamptonshire High Constable

Containing certain observations of y^e Lives & Deaths
of Barker, Beatrice, & Virgula, arraigned & hang'd
at Northampton y^e last Summer Assizes
1637

Digested into 3 Dialogues betwixt
Vicar Marke-well & John Shrewd-
gate his parishioner & high constable

Written by y^e said John Shrewd-gate
high constable for the hundred of
Willi-brooke in y^e aforesaid County

In w^{ch} hee does professe to speake y^e truth
& nothing but y^e truth, soe helpe him God

Calculated for y^e torrid Zone of
Northamptonshire, but for as it
may give satisfaction in this
businessse to y^e whole Realme
of England

Title page of *A New Ballad called the Northamptonshire High Constable*, ca. 1640, HM 60666. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

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Introduction

At its core, this book centres on the story and scaffold performances of John Barker, the puritan vicar of Pytchley, and his two accomplices – Beatrice, the minister's niece by marriage, and Ursula, their maid servant – in the committal and then the cover-up of the crime of infanticide. The book owes its origin to the remarkable researches of John Fielding, who first found a manuscript separate describing the scaffold performances of Barker and his partners in crime.¹ Fielding made passing use of the separate in his outstanding Birmingham Ph.D. thesis of 1989,² and very generously passed on a copy of it to Peter Lake, who in the mid-1990s used it as the foundation of an article largely comprised of an analysis of puritan sermons preached by Joseph Bentham and Robert Bolton during the 1630s at the Kettering combination lecture.³ The material proved outstandingly rich; preached by leading moderate puritan divines before a self-selecting audience, the sermons allow us to eavesdrop on the Northamptonshire godly community talking to itself about some of the pressing problems, key doctrinal cruxes, and most urgent casuistical issues of the increasingly stressful and contested period of Charles I's personal rule.

Barker's domestic tragedy – an adulterous affair that spun out of control into pregnancy and then infanticide – was precisely the sort of scandal upon which the early modern pamphlet press and popular stage fed. Under normal circumstances it would have very likely attracted considerable public attention. Because of Barker's identity as a godly preaching minister, it took on a considerably heightened, both religious and political, significance, especially in the charged atmosphere of Northamptonshire, in the later 1630s. Barker's crime and fate was a gift for the enemies of the godly and to counteract just such a virulently anti-puritan use of the tragedy the Northamptonshire puritans quickly

¹ Northamptonshire Record Office, Isham (Lamport) Mss 2570.

² John Fielding, *Conformists, Puritans and the Church Courts: the Diocese of Peterborough, 1603–1642* (Birmingham University Phd thesis, 1989)

³ Peter Lake, "'A Charitable Christian Hatred': The Godly and Their Enemies in the 1630s" in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560–1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 145–83. Lake has also discussed the Barker case in the context of puritan appropriations of the popular literary genre of murder pamphlets in post-Reformation England. For such discussion see Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 155–58, 171, 179, 221, 265, 418; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, "Appropriation and Rhetoric under the Gallows: Puritans, Romanists and the State in Early Modern England", *Past and Present*, 153 (1996): 64–107, p. 91. See also John Fielding, *Conformists, Puritans, and the Church Courts*.

circulated a manuscript account of the affair, which centred not so much on the crime as on Barker's performance of a good death on the scaffold, which occurred before an audience of thousands in Northampton on 14 July 1637.⁴

When Lake wrote his article it seemed certain that the puritan version of the Barker affair was designed as a damage limitation exercise, distributed to confute other rabidly anti-puritan glosses on the very same events. In fact, when a version of the separate achieved the apotheosis of print in the 1650s, the anti-puritan potential of the tale was revealed by the fact that a virtually unchanged version of the puritan account was enlisted for what the pamphlet makes clear were explicitly and aggressively anti-puritan purposes.⁵ Thus it seemed very likely that such accounts, in more or less polished form, were circulating at the time of the execution, by word of mouth, if not in manuscript. But in the absence of such an account, that was as much as could be said or surmised.

Years later these suspicions were confirmed when an aggressively anti-puritan account of Barker's demise – *The Northamptonshire High Constable* – turned up as a recent purchase at the Huntington Library.⁶ This time it was Tom Cogswell who alerted both of us to the existence of this remarkable document. Peter Lake had a stake in the subject because of his earlier article; Isaac Stephens because he was well on his way to completing a thesis on the *Book of Remembrance* of Elizabeth Isham, another remarkable manuscript produced in Northamptonshire in the late 1630s, this one discovered, again by Cogswell, as a recently catalogued manuscript in the Princeton University Library. Once Stephens began a post-doctoral fellowship in early modern English history at Vanderbilt University, it seemed logical that we try and produce a co-written article based on the new evidence relating to the Barker affair. However, it rapidly became obvious that there was a great deal more here than an article. To begin with, it was now certain that we were in possession of a virtual transcript of Barker's last dying speech and that therefore the very considerable emotional and linguistic energy pulsing through the speech as it has come down to us derived from the fact that these were his actual words, taken down under the gallows in shorthand and available as a separate, within days of the execution. Moreover, there was the intrinsically gripping, indeed both ghoulish and tragic, nature of the basic story itself, which could now be substantiated and considerably fleshed out with material taken from *The Northamptonshire high constable*.

Of course, using this source for such purposes entailed an element of interpretative risk, or rather a calculated suspension of hermeneutic suspicion. It is our belief that, by reading this aggressively anti-puritan account against the grain, we can extract essentially reliable details about the central events at

⁴ 'Brief relation of Mr Barker, a Minister's Speech, 14 July 1637 immediately before his death,' BL MSS, Sloane 363, ff. 1r–8v.

⁵ John Crouch, *The Arraignment of Hypocrisy: or a Looking-Glass for Murderers and Adulterers* (London, 1652), Wing (2nd ed., 1994) C52.

⁶ Huntington Library Mss HM60666

stake. We have been encouraged in this by the way in which, on the central matter of the felons' behavior on the scaffold, the anti-puritan account sticks to, indeed simply reproduces, the puritan account; not altering 'the facts' but merely subjecting them, and the puritan gloss placed thereon, to a radically hostile interpretation. From this we gleaned that precisely because the text was addressed firstly (but, it must be said, not only) to a local audience or readership, aware, if not of the simple facts of the matter, then certainly of what were generally taken to be the facts of the matter, our author was constrained in what he could say. Attempting to convince the reader of his view of the meaning or significance of what everybody already knew (or thought they knew), there was simply no point in our author making stuff up. To have done so would have invited the incredulity of readers armed with any degree of local knowledge, and would thus have entirely discredited the intensely *parti pris* message that he was otherwise trying to send.⁷

But the entirely partial, partisan nature of the tract, was not only a source of interpretative difficulty. The wealth of commentary and aside with which our author surrounded the case was not mere polemical white noise to be carefully suppressed in order to discover 'what really happened'. On the contrary, this material represented wonderful evidence of the sort of rabidly anti-puritan, both Laudian and Arminian opinions and prejudices which at least some contemporaries brought to the Barker case. *The Northamptonshire high constable* thus allowed us to embed our expanded account of the affair in a far more richly documented reconstruction of the religious discourse of Northamptonshire in the late 1630s than had been available to Lake when he wrote his article in the mid-1990s. For we found that the vividly Laudian, doctrinally explicit and polemically aggressive commentary upon the tragedy of Beatrice, Ursula and Barker contained in that text could be used to counterbalance the equally vivid testimony in sermons by Joseph Bentham and Robert Bolton, preached at the same Kettering combination lecture of which Barker himself had been a member. These dealt at length with precisely the core doctrines that underpinned Barker's performance on the scaffold, and were designed, throughout, to respond to, analyse, and indeed to emotionally inhabit precisely the sorts of anti-puritan stereotype and satire out of which *The Northamptonshire high constable* was itself constituted. Thus not only did a detailed and densely contextualised recounting of the actual events themselves have a great deal to tell us about the dynamics of puritan culture and religion, an equally detailed and contextualised

⁷ The dynamics here are very similar to those surrounding (and constraining) exchanges between Catholics and Protestants about the behaviour of Catholic martyrs/traitors. Again precisely because these addressed audiences and opponents with a good sense of what had actually happened, there was no point in simply making stuff up; the point was to interpret and appropriate what was generally agreed to have happened according to very different canons of interpretation and expectation, and for very different edificational and polemical purposes – which, of course, is precisely what we are arguing was happening here. See Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Agency and appropriation under the gallows: Puritans, Romanists and the State in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 153, (1996), pp. 64–107.

analysis of the interpretative reception of the affair had a great deal to tell us about the polarised religious culture of Northamptonshire on the eve of the Civil War. And so we started to write a (short) book about all that.

In so doing, we found ourselves almost entirely reliant on public, (either actually or implicitly) polemical sources. The puritan separate on the case was clearly intended for circulation and did indeed circulate, and *The Northamptonshire high constable*, although it never achieved it, was clearly meant for print. As for the sermons, there was no doubting their public status; preached at the Kettering lecture, versions of them were then printed in several editions during the 1630s. While they presented themselves not as polemic, but rather as expositions of scripture for the edification of a largely self-selecting godly auditory, the sermons' contents made it quite clear that both preachers were directly addressing what they took to be the remarkably polarised setting of early seventeenth-century Northamptonshire, a context that lent virtually all of their disquisitions a decidedly aggressive, both polemical and self-justificatory, edge.

As a member of the Kettering combination lecture, Barker almost certainly heard at least some of Bentham's sermons, and definitely heard tens, if not hundreds, more like them. Consequently, we can see in Bolton's and Bentham's portrait of the godly life a sort of script for Barker's performance on the scaffold and an outline of the sorts of assumptions and expectations that the more puritan members of his audience would have brought to the occasion.

However the aggressively Laudian anti-puritanism of *The Northamptonshire high constable*, and the equally aggressive puritanism of Bolton's and Bentham's sermons do not exhaust the interpretative frameworks brought to the affair by contemporaries. Just two days prior to Barker's execution, Edward Reynolds, the moderate puritan vicar of Braunston in Northamptonshire, preached a sermon at Daventry during the episcopal visitation of Francis Dee, the Laudian bishop of Peterborough. Reynolds lamented the poisonous, polarised atmosphere of the moment and deprecated the viciousness of the theological and ecclesiological disputes of the day. He called upon his colleagues in the ministry to cease and desist, by uniting in the preservation of what his sermon's title termed 'the peace and edification of the church'.

But self-consciously moderate as it was, Reynolds' text was, in its turn, a piece of polemic and an entirely public document twice over, being preached at Daventry in 1637 before the massed ranks of the clergy and then printed in London the following year. Now, as is notorious, myriad scholars of the politics and religion of post-Reformation England have called into question the reliability of such public, printed and polemical sources as guides to contemporary social and political reality and as it stood our project was vulnerable to such critiques. However, as luck would have it, Northamptonshire in the late 1630s produced some of the best and most interesting life writing of the entire early modern period. We refer here to the diary of Robert Woodford and the *Book of Remembrance* of Elizabeth Isham – both composed between 1637 and 1641. Woodford's

diary was, if not precisely discovered, then certainly brought before the scholarly world by John Fielding, first in a seminal article of 1988 and now in a brilliant edition for the Camden Society.⁸ It is a document as vivid, detailed and revealing as any of the rather more famous texts produced by Pepys and Evelyn later in the century. Isham's *Book of Remembrance* is one of the first and longest early modern autobiographies in the English language. Of crucial interest to students of women's writing and of life writing of all sorts, it is only now beginning to attract the attention it deserves from literary and historical scholars.⁹

Both Woodford's diary and Isham's narrative were entirely private sources, that is to say, they appear to have been intended primarily for the private use and edification of the authors themselves. There is some suggestion that Isham might have intended her text to serve as a sort of apologia directed at, and even as a source of spiritual instruction intended for, her nieces, but there is no evidence that it in fact served that purpose. Isham's primary audience, her ideal and intended readership, seems to have been herself and her God. Indeed, the book seems to have been both a product of, and an aid to, her attempts at spiritual self-medication. She suffered from life-long bouts of melancholia and despair, of temptation by the devil and by the prospect of something she called 'atheism', and her narrative seems to have functioned as a record of her experience of, and successful emergence from, past affective states of the most sanity- and soul-threatening sort. As for Woodford's diary, it seems to have been a matter between himself and his God. Certainly, there is nothing remotely 'public', still less polemical, about either source.

Alongside these we can set the almost equally remarkable cache of letters of Robert Sibthorpe to be found in the Huntington Library and the National Archives. These were not private in the same sense as either Isham or Woodford's texts, but they were private in so far as they were intended only for the

⁸ John Fielding, 'Opposition to the personal rule of Charles I: the Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637–41', *Historical Journal*, 31, (1988), pp. 769–88. *The Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637–41*, ed. John Fielding (Cambridge, 2012)

⁹ Recent accounts of English life writing barely mention the Isham text. See, for instance, Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2010) and Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford, 2012). On the other side of the ledger there is now an on-line edition produced by Elizabeth Clarke and Erica Longfellow at the University of Warwick, and the forthcoming monograph by Isaac Stephens. Also see Isaac Stephens, "'My Cheefest Work': the making of the spiritual autobiography of Elizabeth Isham", *Midland History*, 34, (2009), pp. 181–203; Idem, 'Confessional identity in early Stuart Britain: the "Prayer Book Puritanism" of Elizabeth Isham', *Journal of British Studies*, 50, (2010), pp. 24–47. Ann Cotterill, 'Fit words and the "pitts brink": the achievement of Elizabeth Isham', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, (2010), 73:2 (2010), pp. 225–48; Kate Hodgkin, 'Elizabeth Isham's everlasting library: memory and self in early modern autobiography', *History and Psyche*, eds. Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor (New York, 2012), pp. 241–64; Erica Longfellow, "'Take unto ye words": Elizabeth Isham's "Booke of Remembrance" and puritan cultural forms', *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women, 1558–1680*, eds. Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 122–34; Alice Eardley, "'like hewen stone": Augustine, audience and revision in Elizabeth Isham's *Booke of Remembrance*', *Women and Writing, c. 1340–c1650: The Domestication of Print*, eds. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillippa Hardman (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 177–95.

eyes of the recipients; recipients – mostly, but not always, Sir John Lambe – who were closely related to Sibthorpe, (in Lambe's case) by marriage, (Laudian) ideological affinity and (anti-puritan) political interest. Intended to enlist the support of Lambe and others at the centre in Sibthorpe's local struggles with the Northamptonshire godly, the letters were gloriously indiscrete and show Sibthorpe expressing his opinions and prejudices, hopes and fears, in what appear to be utterly unconstrained ways.

All produced between 1637 and 1641, this unique deposit of private manuscripts allows us to juxtapose insights culled from entirely private sources with those contained in the entirely public and polemical works discussed in part one of this book. In addition to the intrinsic interest of this material, this capacity to read public polemical texts against private, and in some cases intensely devotional, sources is of some historiographical significance in the light of recent claims that we need to turn from polemical, prescriptive and admonitory sources, to, in Alec Ryrie's terms, more purely 'devotional', or, in Peter White's, more properly 'theological' texts or, in Ian Green's, to the much reprinted steady sellers, the basic stuff of religious instruction, which reveal the bedrock of ordinary Christian belief.¹⁰ Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, we need to turn from theory (i.e. from formal theology) to (often liturgical) 'practice', and experience, from the pulpit to the prayer closet. If we do so, the argument runs, then many of the polarities that have traditionally dominated accounts of the religious history of the period disappear. Categories like puritan, conformist or Laudian, Calvinist or Arminian, cease to mean much of anything at all in the face of a common core of belief, practice and affect that in fact united the vast majority of English Protestant Christians.

That position has received a magisterial restatement in Alec Ryrie's *Being Protestant*, a survey of what he presents as an unbroken Protestant mainstream stretching from the 1520s to c.1640. Ryrie's account almost entirely omits the ideological and affective currents that culminated in Laudianism – they are conceded the smallest of walk-on roles under the trivializing soubriquet 'ceremonialism' – and seeks to marginalise the notion of puritanism, largely by collapsing the important, affective and devotional bits of it into his Protestant mainstream, while organising the remainder around what he portrays as essentially trivial disputes about mere externals; the polar opposite, presumably, of 'ceremonialism'. He does so by moving from texts and concerns he labels 'polemical' to others he labels 'devotional'.¹¹

The deposit of materials examined in this book enable us to test these claims in a particular time and place. Perhaps unsurprisingly the basic assumptions

¹⁰ Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic* (Cambridge, 1992); Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in early modern England* (Oxford, 2000); Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998); Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013).

¹¹ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*.

and categories which underpin Ryrie's account emerge as untenable and his overarching interpretative claims entirely incompatible with the basic purport and multifaceted nature of the sources under discussion here; texts, or rather source-mined bits of which texts, play a prominent role in his own analysis.

What we are getting at here, and what we are comparing the one with the other, are as close to the private thoughts, opinions and feelings of Woodford, Sibthorpe and Isham as any historian is ever likely to get to the internal life of an early modern historical actor. And what emerges from all this is the quite remarkable fact that scarcely a scintilla of difference exists between the testimony of the public polemical sources examined in part one and the private sources analysed in part two. The one confirms the other in almost every respect. And that, we think, is a quite remarkable fact, one that enables us, with complete confidence, to reject, in this instance at least, claims that polemical sources and printed sermons (of the sort with which we started out) can give us no real insight into either the nature of political and social reality or the real affective core of early modern English religion. In this instance, at least, the opposite appears to be the case. We can also reject the assumption that the devotional and the polemical existed in entirely separate worlds or categories and can easily be distinguished by the modern historian in search of what early modern English people really believed, experienced or felt.

One important consequence of this is that this congruence between the public and private sources serves to confirm the ways in which public polemical texts played off, and both confirmed and appropriated pre-existing scripts and rumours already circulating orally or in manuscript. Rumour and orally transmitted news play a central role in both the public, polemical texts under discussion here and, of course, in those entirely private sources, Woodford's diaries and Sibthorpe's letters. Consequently, the co-ordinated and comparative study of both sorts of source has a great deal to tell us about how the politics of the public sphere was constituted and exploited in this period; certainly far more than either sort of source, studied in isolation from the other, would allow.

But the private sources generated by Woodford and Isham, albeit not that produced by Sibthorpe, enable us to do something else as well; they enable us firstly to watch as the general doctrinal principles and statements of religious truth, the prescriptions and nostrums, contained in the sermon and tract literature were internalised and applied; turned, in fact, into styles of subjectivity at which the vast run of historical sources can at best merely hint and, for the most part, about which they remain stubbornly silent. These texts enable us to watch from the inside the operation of the word preached, and the private apprehension and experience of the testimony of the Holy Spirit operating within the consciousness of these two people. We can put experiential flesh on the bones of puritan theory about the way the word and the spirit, the public ordinances of the church and the private, often household, practices, and the still more private devotions, of the godly interacted to create godly Christians and elect saints, and we can watch, again from the inside out, two individuals

struggling to maintain that sense of themselves in the face of various distractions, temptations and threats.

Of course, even in these instances, we are not gaining access to anything like unmediated experience, but we are getting at the means and modes employed by two very different people to record, control and contain the workings of their own consciousness, or, as they conceived it, the workings of their own soul, and the sometimes irruptive, but just as often incremental, actions of the Holy Spirit and divine providence upon those souls. To be able to do that for two people – one, a man, forced to make his way and his living in and through almost constant contact with the world, the other, a woman, steadfast in her choice to lead an unmarried or ‘private life’ that revolved around the rhythms of the gentry household of Lamport Hall – is quite extraordinary. Indeed, it is rendered all the more piquant because Isham and Woodford were immediate contemporaries, who almost certainly met each other more than once, since Woodford tells us he was a relatively frequent, and, for a while, welcome, visitor at Lamport Hall.

This unique confluence of sources allows us to locate general ideological and affective discourses and trends within a very particular, densely personal, set of local contexts. Just how densely personal, can be gleaned from a brief look at the local terrain. Barker’s living at Pytchley was a mile or so from Bolton’s and then his successor Bentham’s living at Braughton. Two or three miles in the other direction is Sibthorpe’s living at Burton Latimer. All of these parishes are clustered around Kettering, where the weekly combination lecture, of which Bolton, Bentham and Barker were all members, met. A few miles north and east lies Sir Edward Montague’s seat at Broughton. Montague was the presiding spirit at the combination lecture and Bolton’s and Bentham’s patron. A few more miles towards Corby was Sir Christopher Hatton’s house at Kirby Hall. Hatton was the Laudian patron of Peter Hausted and some of Hausted’s interludes were performed at Kirby, where Robert Woodford saw one of them and had a heated exchange with one of Hatton’s chaplains about bowing to the altar. South and west of Kettering lay Isham Hall, where Woodford was a frequent visitor. John Dod was the broker of the abortive marriage between Elizabeth Isham and John Dryden, as well as being doctor of the soul to Elizabeth’s mother and the formative influence on young Elizabeth’s intense spiritual life. Dod was a client of the Dryden and Knightley families. As the sheriff who presided over Barker’s execution, Sir John Dryden was fingered by *The Northamptonshire high constable* as unduly favouring the puritan side and by Sibthorpe as conniving at the efforts of his local enemy, Mr Bacon, to undermine the king’s service in the matter of ship money. Bacon was one of Woodford’s legal clients. Daniel Cawdrey and Thomas Ball held livings near Northampton. They were close friends of Woodford’s and both attended Barker on the scaffold and feature prominently in the manuscript account of his execution. This, then, was a small and claustrophobic little world. All of our characters knew one another, either as friends or as enemies, as patrons or as clients.

The Northamptonshire high constable (and, indeed, the other works of the putative author of that text, Peter Hausted) are obsessed with how clerical careers got made and with the corrupting influence of the laity over the church and, in particular, over the preaching of puritan clergymen. One of the central themes in the religious discourse and polemic of the post-Reformation period concerned the nature of the clerical calling, the sources and nature of the authority and status of the clergy and the relationship between the claims of the clerical estate and the power of the laity.¹² It was this nexus of concern that produced, in puritanism and Laudianism, two mutually exclusive visions of the role of the ministry/priesthood, the mission of the visible church and the nature of the Christian community, and consequently two very different theories of lay/clerical relations. The exchanges recounted in this book are a perfect exemplification of how that all happened, as well as of just how intensely personal, how rooted in the very different experiences and careers, the aspirations, disappointments and resentments of specific individuals, those discourses and debates were.

Without a full consideration of the puritan tradition of thought and feeling, of religious and social practice, both Woodford's spiritual diary and Isham's autobiography would be not only unintelligible, but inexplicable. Isham's style of piety, and indeed her *Book of Remembrance*, would have been impossible outside of the context provided by the strenuous style of personal piety provided by puritanism. She makes it clear that the two formative influences on her were her mother, who suffered from a fairly spectacular (and quintessentially puritan) bout of soteriological despair and John Dod, the famous puritan doctor of the soul, brought in to cure her. But both Elizabeth Isham's text and the spiritual and writing practices that produced it also reveal that the interpenetration of the puritan mode of self-examination and spiritual physic with the rhythms of the prayer book and the godly household could produce a wide range of results. What Isaac Stephens' has termed elsewhere Isham's 'prayer book puritanism' was anything but identical to the style of piety cultivated by Woodford. But the resulting contrast was not only a matter of masculine engagement in the public issues of the day, leading to an increasing disaffection with, and withdrawal from, the national church, in the case of Woodford, with the stay-at-home Isham producing a passive prayer book piety, centred on dedication to the national church. On the contrary, the intensities of Isham's internal religious life, the workings of her 'prayer book puritanism', were almost entirely contained within the world of the household. If her *Book of Remembrance* is to be believed, her devotional style led to no very active spiritual engagement with the public worship of her parish church. Certainly, if such engagements took place, she did not deem them worthy of mention or record. As we shall see, in this, quite unlike Woodford, Isham seemed remarkably impervious to the impact of the

¹² The best treatment of this topic remains Christopher Hill's *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1956)

word preached and, insofar as she mentioned the sacrament, it was the effects of preparing to receive it rather than the actual reception of it in the parish church that affected her. In contrast, some of Woodford's most intense spiritual experiences were a product of his assiduous attendance at the word preached and the sacrament administered in the public face of the congregation.

And so through Isham (as well as, amongst our 'public' documents, through Reynolds) it becomes clear that, even in Northamptonshire on the eve of the Civil War, we cannot simply accept the mutually reinforcing, bi-polar vision of the Laudians and the puritans as anything like an adequate account of the contemporary religious scene. That is not because that vision was an illusion or a lie, or because puritanism and Laudianism were abstractions, the product of ideology and false consciousness, merely factitious constructs, generated by contemporaries in self-interested pursuit of polemical and political advantage. On the contrary, the collation of public and private, polemical, edificational and introspective texts, conducted below, demonstrates conclusively that they were nothing of the sort. Founded on positions, both publicly canvassed and privately held, these terms effectively encode and characterise what a considerable number of centrally placed and influential groups and individuals were thinking, saying and doing, throughout the 1620s and 1630s. But the resulting, self-confirming, visions remain partial, and the remarkable evidence vouchsafed to us by Elizabeth Isham and Edward Reynolds shows us just how and why this was also true, even in a county as religiously divided as Northamptonshire on the eve of the Civil War.

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