

Surveying a field come of age

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A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland: From Reformation to Emancipation, edited by Robert E. Scully and Angela Ellis (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022), pp. xvii, 662, £227, ISBN 978-90-04-15161-1

The publication of Brill's *Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland*, edited by Robert E. Scully and Angela Ellis, is without doubt a major event in the historiography of British and Irish Catholicism. The ever-expanding field of Catholic history in Britain and Ireland has not hitherto been the subject of a summative companion authored by multiple scholars under the care of a major academic publisher, and Scully and Ellis's volume provides a snapshot of the entire field at a time when Catholic history is not only a mainstream subject — as indeed it has been for at least twenty years — but also a mainstream subject in need of the conventional instruments of communicating its wider significance to other historians and other disciplines. Such instruments include a well-known and highly-regarded journal (as *British Catholic History* has been since its rebirth under its present title in 2015), regular major conferences, textbooks introducing students to the field, and summative companions authored by the major scholars of the subject. It is this latter need that Scully and Ellis's *Companion* fulfils, and it is a volume that reveals both the tremendous potential of the study of early modern British and Irish Catholicism but also the creative tensions in the field's self-understanding and historiography.

Companions of this kind are never final, of course, and the selection of authors and subjects to be included for coverage is inevitably subjective; but they often stand as way-markers in the historiography of a field, surveying the direction that has been taken over recent decades, the present state of research, and pointing ahead to the future possibilities of a subject area. This review of *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland* draws out and examines five major themes of the volume which illustrate both the potential and the tensions of early modern Catholic history. In the first place, the volume deals with questions of historiographical consensus and dissent, seeking to describe a general movement towards consensus

on certain key interpretations among scholars of the field. Secondly, the volume deals with —and depends upon— certain influential models of how Catholic history ought to be told: in the case of early modern Catholicism, the model of ‘community history’. Thirdly, the volume grapples with issues of periodisation and the chronological divisions that mark Catholic history. Fourthly, the book seeks to illuminate both centres and peripheries of British and Irish Catholicism, although the particular geographical and political circumstances of Catholics ensured that the very concepts of centre and periphery are difficult to apply to them. Fifthly and finally, many of the volume’s chapters engage with the variety of evidence and sources for the study of Catholic history, including both literary and material evidence – with the latter being treated on an equal footing in this book.

After a general introduction by Scully, William Sheils offers a historical overview of early modern British and Irish Catholic history from the break with Rome to Catholic emancipation. The first part of the volume then deals with ‘The [Catholic] Community and Its Place in the National and International Scene’, with chapters on the secular clergy, the Jesuits (and other male religious), women religious, laywomen, the nobility and gentry, and Catholic exiles. This part of the volume also includes essays on Irish, Scottish and Welsh Catholics. The second part of the volume, entitled ‘Opposition: Within and Without’ deals with debates about recusancy and the phenomenon of anti-Catholicism. Finally, the third part (‘Catholic/Recusant Culture’) contains chapters on the role of martyrdom, recusant literary culture, political and theological culture, material culture, devotional culture, and the Catholic Enlightenment.

Consensus and dissent

Any summative companion to the field of the history of Catholicism in Britain and Ireland must, by necessity, be a book in search of broad themes of historical consensus in its chosen field. The development of consensus and scholarly convergence is, after all, a large part of what lends a historical field coherence, even when significant differences of opinion remain. Scully and Ellis’s volume, and especially the introduction by Robert Scully, does a fine job of tracing the evolution of consensus within the historiography. While exceptions and outliers remain, the tendency of the historiography of British Catholicism since the 1970s has generally been to accommodate dissenting views in order to present a more complex and nuanced picture of the Catholic community. Protean clashes between opposing scholarly points of view, with the corresponding formation of rival historiographical schools of interpretation, has been largely absent from British Catholic history –

perhaps, in part, because the field remains even now a fairly small one in terms of the number of scholars involved in writing Catholic history.

However, the fact that much research into early modern Catholic history is genuinely primary—in the sense that many scholars are working on hitherto unnoticed sources for the first time, rather than re-treading or reinterpreting well-known sources—is surely another reason for the development of a generally collaborative historiography. It is one of the hallmarks of the field that scholars' new contributions are often integrated into a fluid re-evaluation of Catholic life that remains open to new knowledge. It is difficult to see how the field of Catholic history could be otherwise; the dozens of scholars who have explored the riches of untapped archives, especially the archives of religious communities and the extensive printed legacy of early modern Catholicism have all made valuable contributions to a field that, while full-grown, is nonetheless still young and with an ever-expanding base of primary sources. The purpose for which the Catholic Record Society was founded remains as urgent now as it was in 1904: 'Gather the fragments, lest they perish'.

The successive waves of confessional, non-confessional, revisionist and post-revisionist historiography in British Catholic history have seen the development of a model grounded in the idea of Catholic community (an idea will be further explored below) extended in both time and space. Accordingly, the focus of much of the debate has been on who counted as a member of that community. While everyone could agree that recusants formed a core part of the Catholic community, Christopher Haigh and others brought adherents of a 'sub-Catholic', 'survivalist' popular Catholicism within the definition of the Catholic community,¹ while Alexandra Walsham broadened that community still further by showing that the church papists should be considered part of the Catholic community rather than mere Nicodemites.² The revitalisation of the historiography of the exiled Catholic community and the greater attention paid to marginalised groups has further deepened our understanding of who Catholics were, and the central roles played by women and children in that community.

In addition to the composition of the Catholic community, debate has flared over the relationship between that community and wider society. Generally speaking, scholars such as Michael Questier have dispelled a former idea of the Catholic community as a closed, self-contained separatist community, emphasising instead that community's

¹ See Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

² Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Boydell, 1999).

integration into the wider life of the nation.³ However, whereas revisionist historiographies have somewhat undermined the coherence and meaningfulness of some common terms by recognising the complexity of their construction — ‘Puritanism’ is a case in point — the coherence of ‘Catholicism’ as a category has not generally been diminished through the adoption of more nuanced understandings of who counted as a Catholic. While other terms, such as ‘religious conservatism’, may sometimes be more appropriate up to the reign of Mary I, Catholics were thereafter a self-conscious and self-defining minority, even if they sometimes defined themselves differently. However, the fervour with which the national myth rejected Catholicism — a theme explored in Adam Morton’s chapter on anti-Catholicism in this volume — ironically helped sustain Catholicism as a definitive other. As the variety and diversity of the chapters contained here demonstrate, there is nothing to be feared from interpretative change, and we should expect to see the formation of new consensus and new interpretations in the course of time — even if some of them wholly or partially overthrow the assumptions that underlie this collection.

Models of Catholic history: community history and political history

As has already been observed, the modern history of post-Reformation British Catholicism has classically been told as the history of a community. Even before John Bossy’s *The English Catholic Community* (1975) rendered such an interpretation quasi-canonical,⁴ the confessionalised Catholic history of the mid-twentieth century — as represented, for example, by *Biographical Studies of English Catholics* and its successor journal *Recusant History* — was a community history written from within a contemporary Catholic community eager to see itself in continuity with the persecuted Catholics of the past. The overt confessionalism of Catholic historians like Peter Guilday or Bede Camm seemed like eccentric contrarianism when faced with the scholarship of a mainstream historian like A. G. Dickens, but Bossy turned this situation on its head by providing a professional ground for the historiography of British Catholicism as something more than counter-cultural hagiography. As Scully acknowledges in his introduction to the volume, with reference to the work of Gabriel Glickman, key works of scholarship after John Bossy have been both ‘a debt and a

³ See, for example, Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *All Hail to the Archpriest: Confessional Conflict, Toleration, and the Politics of Publicity in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁴ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975).

response' (p. 9), but the point might be extended to British Catholic history more generally. It is first and foremost Bossy's decision to tell the history of British Catholicism as a *community* history that has endured and continues to command broad academic consensus.

Bossy's legacy is evident in the centrality of the concept of 'community' to the structure of Scully and Ellis's *Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy*; indeed, the first part of the volume is 'The Community and Its Place in the National and International Scene' (pp. 59–367). The work of the historian of British Catholicism, on one reading, is to isolate the components of the Catholic community and deepen the texture of our understanding by exploring the histories of these subsections of the community: the different groups of clergy (secular and religious), female religious, laywomen, gentry and nobility, exiled Catholics and the various national minorities that made up British and Irish Catholicism. In one sense, the concept of a 'community' is sufficiently vague to make it possible to apply the term to almost any identity. However, the 'Bossyan' tradition of making Catholic history a community history undoubtedly disposes historians of Catholicism to think in particular ways. Most obviously, the long shadow cast by Bossy may leave the historian thinking that the history of Catholicism in Britain and Ireland cannot be told as *anything other* than as a community history. It cannot, for example, be told as an institutional history of the structures of the church, nor as a legal history of the development of the categories of recusants and recusancy.

While the older historiographical tradition of representing the history of British and Irish Catholicism as the history of recusancy is clearly problematic —and drastically limiting — it is noteworthy that this volume does not shy away from using the term. As well as featuring in the title, the book's third part avowedly focuses on 'Catholic/Recusant Culture' (pp. 451–636), as if in acknowledgement that there was something special and culturally distinctive about those Catholics who were prepared to defy the law and render themselves liable to fines in order to practise their faith. The existence of such a distinctiveness is certainly borne out in the chapters by Anne Dillon, Victor Houlston, Gary Jenkins, Jan Graffius and Lisa McClain, which focus mainly on Catholic 'separatists' and the literary, artistic, material, intellectual and devotional cultural artefacts they generated. This willingness to recognise the peculiarity of recusancy, while conscious of the diversity of potential expressions of Catholic identity, is perhaps an instance of the 'revisionism revised' (p. 6) identified by Scully. At the same time, however, there is no sense in which a renewed emphasis on the recusants as an especially culturally productive category of Catholics is a return to the narrow prosopo-hagiographical methodology of early Catholic Record Society volumes, where the identification of those

who appeared in returns of recusants as the 'true Catholics' formed the raw material of evidence for the Catholic past of Britain.

The consensus that has formed around Catholic history in Britain and Ireland as 'community history' is not without its dissenters. Michael Questier's emphasis on the institutional history of the ecclesiastical structures of the archpresbyterate and the vicariate apostolic that succeeded it, for example, supplied a helpful corrective to the pervasive idea that Catholicism was too inchoate to be considered anything other than a vaguely defined 'community'. The impact of this historiographical strand emphasising the jurisdictional nuts and bolts of how Catholicism in Britain and Ireland actually *worked* is evident in this volume too, most notably in the chapters by Peter Phillips on the secular clergy, by Thomas McCoog on the Jesuits and male religious, and by Robert Scully on debates within the Catholic community. However, it is surely the sheer messiness of British Catholic history that draws historians back, again and again, to the model of a broadly self-defining and self-limiting community; jurisdictions came and went, and one group of Catholics routinely attempted to exclude another (such as the Jesuit attack on non-recusants, and periodic secular attacks on the Jesuits). The classification of early modern Catholics as a community neatly avoids the need for an 'emic' classification of Catholics as those accepted as Catholics by Catholic ecclesiastical authorities, or an 'etic' classification of Catholics as those deemed papists by the government, both of which are unsustainably limiting approaches.

If there is broad consensus that the history of early modern Catholicism in Britain must be a community history, there is less agreement that this can *only* be a community history. Here we touch upon another tenet of Bossyan orthodoxy: that early modern British Catholicism should be seen as a separatist sect, or a variety of nonconformity. Bossy's original confidence that the nonconformist sect of Catholics and the recusant community were more or less the same thing has been comprehensively challenged, but what has survived is a tendency to view Catholic history by analogy with the histories of nonconformist sects. What this obscures, however, is the extent to which Catholics were always enmeshed with court culture and therefore with high politics, in a way that Protestant separatists and nonconformists could only imagine until the second half of the eighteenth century. Catholics were not simply a heterogeneous group of people who decided they would be Catholics; it mattered *who* Catholics were, and the fact that their number often included some of the most influential peers of the realm. British and Irish Catholicisms thus have a political history as well as a community history; the Catholic community was not a self-contained unit whose only history is its own history. Integrating the internal 'community history'

of Catholicism and its political history as an influential phenomenon in the wider life of the nation into a single narrative —the internal and external lives of a religious minority —is one of the challenges of early modern Catholic historiography, but it is a challenge to which Scully and Ellis's *Companion* certainly rises.

Periodisation

The question of the periodisation of British and Irish Catholic history is a familiar locus of debate within the field, and the positions adopted within the periodisation debate are often not unrelated to other differences of emphasis within the historiography. For example, the view a historian takes on whether to follow a chronology set by major events in the history of the English state, or a chronology set by major papal decisions regarding the organisation of the English mission, may reflect that historian's emphasis on Catholicism either as a political phenomenon or as a nonconforming religious community. One unavoidable yet intractable question concerns the beginning of early modern British Catholicism. While most historians will accept a clear 'break' between medieval religion and early modern Catholicism, whether that historiographical 'break' should be identified with Henry VIII's break with Rome (typically identified as occurring in 1534 in England, with the Act of Supremacy) is far from clear.

William Sheils, in his ambitious and wide-ranging historical overview included in the volume, takes 'c. 1530' as his starting point for a narrative of the development of early modern Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, but only in the sense that 'The King's Great Matter' marked the beginning of historical processes that would result in the Reformation and the creation of a distinct Catholic (as opposed to Protestant or Reformed) identity. One other author in this volume, John McCafferty, writing on Ireland, takes 1534 as an avowed *terminus post quem* for the development of a Catholic identity. However, for other authors such as Peter Phillips and Janet Graffius it is 1558/9 that marks the notional beginning of English Catholicism, at least as they are concerned with it. However, the choice of 1558/9 as the year English Catholicism began is ambiguous. For Bossy, the 1560s represented the beginning of the English Catholic community, with the foundation of the English College at Douai in 1561 suggesting Catholics' future direction as religious separatists. But the year 1559 also represented the introduction of the first recusancy legislation, by which the Elizabethan government created a group —recusants —whose identity was defined by their subjection to penal legislation.

Whatever the historiographical rights or wrongs of selecting 1558/9 as the beginning of early modern British and Irish Catholic history, the fact that it is possible to select the same period for two different reasons

and from two different perspectives illustrates the interrelated nature of questions of periodisation and questions of historiographical emphasis. Should the chronology of British Catholicism be marked out by key events in the internal history of the Catholic community, or by events in the English state's approach to Catholics? In some cases the question is a redundant one: government policy directly produced significant events in the Catholic community, such as the provocation of the Appellant Controversy by the introduction of a new oath of allegiance. Yet government action also inadvertently produced more constructive developments in the Catholic community, such as Catholic excitement about Elizabeth I's potential marriage to the duke of Anjou, King James I and VI's hoped-for Catholic sympathies, and Prince Charles's potential marriage to the Spanish Infanta.

The relationship between government policy towards Catholics and the internal politics of the Catholic community was complex; it is self-evidently impossible to tell a history of the Catholic community concerned only with its internal affairs, without dealing with changes and subtleties in government policy. But the reverse is also true; it is impossible to trace the history of the Catholic community *solely* through the vicissitudes suffered as a result of government policy. The Catholic community was a vulnerable one in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, without doubt, but it was also a community with its own independent internal life. Crucially, a jurisdictional umbilical cord bound the Catholic community to Rome —however tenuously at times — thereby creating another source of pressure on the community beyond its own internal dynamics and the relentless effects of the penal laws. Phillips's, McCoog's and Scully's chapters on the secular clergy, the Jesuits, and the debate on recusancy respectively bear witness to this three-way tension between Westminster, Rome and the internal dynamics of the community, that defined Catholic life. As many historians have observed, Rome's ignorance of the realities of Catholic life on the ground in post-Reformation Britain and Ireland sometimes meant that papal and curial interventions did more harm than good to the Catholic community, with Pius V's bull *Regnans in Excelsis* often serving as the historiographical *locus classicus* of a damaging own goal imposed from without on English Catholics, since the papal deposition of Elizabeth brought a rain of persecution on the Catholic community.

In this sense, shifts in papal policy are as important as English government policy or internal events within the Catholic population for marking out and selecting key events in the history of early modern British Catholicism. But there are other complicating factors to a neat periodisation as well; the challenges of synthesising a single Catholic history for Britain and Ireland as a whole are considerable (and will be considered further below), but it is also necessary to engage with the argument, popularised most notably by Eamon Duffy in his

Fires of Faith (2009),⁵ that a distinctive and self-conscious English Catholicism developed during the reign of Mary I. In contrast to Bossy's view that Catholic identity developed in the early 1560s as a reaction to the Elizabethan Settlement (and other Protestant movements that preceded it), Duffy has portrayed Marian Catholicism as a confident and pioneering harbinger of the Catholic Reformation that can be dismissed neither as a reactionary return to the pre-Reformation world nor as a conservative reaction to the advanced reformed experimentation of Edward's reign. Frederick Smith's work on the continuity in personnel between the cathedrals of Mary's reign and the leadership of the Catholic community (in England and in exile) in the 1560s has thoroughly dispelled an older view of the Marian priests under Elizabeth as a remnant of poorly-educated 'hedge-priests' attached to the old liturgy,⁶ and it now seems clear from the work of scholars such as Duffy and Ceri Law that without the foundations laid in Marian Oxford and Cambridge there would have been no intellectual powerhouse of English Catholic thinkers at Louvain and elsewhere.⁷ As Anne Throckmorton acknowledges in her chapter on exiles in this volume, drawing on the insights of historians of the expatriate community such as Katy Gibbons and Liesbeth Corens, the roots of the exile community stretched back to earlier connections between England and the European mainland.⁸

Another periodisation-related challenge faced by historians of early modern British and Irish Catholicism is determining a *terminus ante quem* for what we mean by 'early modern Catholicism'. In following the traditional periodisation 'from Reformation to Emancipation', as the book's subtitle proclaims, Scully and Ellis's *Companion* is compelled to grapple with a definition of 'early modern' more extended than that found in most other fields of history. While some formulations of early modernity distinguish it from the 'Enlightenment', others take it into the eighteenth century and up to the end of the *ancien régime* in the post-revolutionary Europe of the 1790s and 1800s, but few take it into the 1820s. The traditional historiographical position occupied by Catholic Emancipation in 1829 as the definitive end of 'the penal times' for British and Irish Catholics implies a view of the Catholic experience defined by the legal status of Catholics. Yet, while the importance of Emancipation is undeniable for the re-entry

⁵ Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁶ Frederick Smith, 'The Origins of Recusancy in Elizabethan England Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal* 60:2 (2017): 301–32.

⁷ Ceri Law, *Contested Reformations in the University of Cambridge, 1535–1584* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2018).

⁸ Katy Gibbons, *English Catholic Exiles in Late Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011); Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

of Catholics into the nation's political life, in practical terms the phenomenon of recusancy had long since faded away and ceased to be meaningful in a pluralistic, albeit mainly Christian, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century religious marketplace.

There is no shortage of other dates that might be chosen as the *terminus ante quem* of early modern British Catholicism: the appointment of a bishop in 1624, the appointment of multiple vicars apostolic in 1687, the deposition of James II in 1688 (marking the definitive end of realistic hopes of a restoration of Catholic England by centralised royal power), the failure of the last Jacobite rising in 1745, or the first Catholic Relief Act of 1778 are all possibilities. The ongoing significance of 1829 for Catholic historiography reflects, above all, a perception of the pre-Emancipation Catholic community formed in the light of Newman's 'Second Spring' sermon (1852) as an embattled remnant, while Emancipation freed Catholics to come into the open at last. Yet this 'teleological' approach to Catholic history, in which Emancipation is the destination to which Catholics were always heading, risks obscuring the vitality and creativity of the eighteenth-century Catholic community.

The growth in scholarship on eighteenth-century Catholicism witnessed in the last two decades, exemplified in the work of Gabriel Glickman, James Kelly and others,⁹ is amply reflected in this *Companion*, most notably in Jonathan Wright's chapter on the Catholic Enlightenment. Underpinned by the scholarship of Ronie Po-chia Hsia, Ulrich Lehner and others on the global Catholic Enlightenment,¹⁰ there is now widespread acknowledgement both that there *was* a Catholic Enlightenment, and that it was intellectually distinctive. The Catholic community in Britain and Ireland was not a static phenomenon, clinging on to life in a state of near-dormancy in hope and expectation of a nineteenth-century reawakening. All of this raises the question of whether eliding the eighteenth-century history of the Catholic community with its early modern history remains appropriate. Many of the trends of revival and reinvention hitherto associated with the nineteenth century were, in fact, present a century earlier —albeit in the absence of a major theological movement like Tractarianism, which rendered many Anglican divines sympathetic to Catholic theological and ecclesiological claims. Arguably, the apologetics of an Anselm Mannock or a John Milner were as much a harbinger of Newman and the Tractarian converts as they were an after-

⁹ Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688–1745: Politics, Culture and Ideology* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009); James Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe, c. 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹⁰ R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ulrich Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

echo of Reformation controversies. However, the question of ‘what to do with the eighteenth century’ is by no means unique to the historiography of Catholicism. In the end, while questions of periodisation matter more in a trendsetting companion of this kind than in most academic monographs, they are ultimately of less consequence than the use made of the evidence by the collection’s authors within the limits made possible by the periodisation selected. Debates will continue, with the prospects of any consensus no doubt even further off than ever.

Centres and peripheries

One noteworthy development in the historiography of British and Irish Catholicism over the last two decades —and perhaps an even briefer period —has been a shift in the language used to discuss the geography of Catholicism in these islands. In step with a ‘new British history’, which seeks to emphasise the importance of all parts of the archipelago of Great Britain and Ireland and the interconnectedness of centres and peripheries, the historiography of British and Irish Catholicism has become more geographically expansive. This is in contrast with the situation in the mid-twentieth century: when the history of Catholicism was still a confessionalised niche pursuit, the emphasis of ‘recusant history’ was very much on England (with Wales often elided with England), while the history of Irish Catholicism was often seen as nothing less than the history of the Irish nation itself, and the history of Scottish Catholicism was marginal. Examples of mid-twentieth-century historians who subverted this stereotyped regional historiography in order to achieve something more can be found, of course, but the idea that a single Catholic historiography of all parts of Britain and Ireland is possible is still a fairly new one.

In one sense, the proposition that the historiography of British Catholicism ought to take in the peripheries as well as the centre is self-evident. While a court Catholicism focused on London existed as a phenomenon at various times in the seventeenth century, English Catholicism was both a regional phenomenon and a religion that flourished in some of the kingdom’s least accessible provinces, such as Lancashire and County Durham. However, the English shires with their seats of major resident landowners were never as peripheral as Wales or Ireland; and for the survival of Catholicism, geographical liminality was a positive advantage. As Hannah Thomas notes in her chapter on Wales, closeness to borders was a crucial tool used by Catholics to exploit the vagaries of judicial jurisdictions (pp. 341–2), and therefore we should expect to find Catholics in border areas such as the Welsh Marches. In Wales, in Ireland, and in Scotland, linguistic

as well as geographical barriers hindered the progress of a Reformation whose initial language was English or Scots.

The integration of Ireland into a collective British and Irish Catholic history is, on the face of it, potentially controversial. After all, while the history of English Catholicism is a history of a minority community within a Protestant nation, Irish Catholicism remained the religion of the great majority of Irish people throughout the early modern period, and nothing in England compared with the ethnic and sectarian divisions in Ireland between such groups as the Old English Catholics of the Pale, the new English Protestants of the Pale, Gaelic Irish Catholics, Ulster Scots settlers and so on. Furthermore, in contrast to Wales, Ireland had its own parliament that had to enact recusancy laws separately from the English parliament. On the other hand, English and Irish Catholicism were entangled from early on — consider the time Edmund Campion spent in Ireland, for example — and both countries shared a similar legal system and had similar laws, even if those laws often proved unenforceable in Ireland; the Church of Ireland was also an institution with an approach to reform similar to the Church of England, and similarly established. The same legal concept of recusancy existed in Ireland, even if the identification of Catholics sometimes had more to do with their exclusion from an ascendancy class than with any serious attempts to stamp out Catholic practice. Furthermore, Ireland's Catholic rebellions were of evident importance beyond Ireland's shores. As John McCafferty observes in his chapter on Irish Catholics, Catholicism in Irish history has been 'hidden in plain sight' (p. 228) as an unquestioned given; but the effect of this tendency to treat Catholicism as mere background has been to obscure the connections between Irish Catholicism and the Catholicism of the other nations.

Catholicism in Scotland is the subject of two chapters in this volume, by Jane Stevenson and (jointly) Peter Davidson and David Walker, who focus on the material culture of Scottish Catholicism. Just as Thomas challenges the traditional view of Wales as a place where the Reformation took off in the late sixteenth century, so Stevenson confronts the idea that the Scottish Reformation was a popular movement supported by most Scots. While there was recusancy legislation in Scotland, Stevenson points to certain factors that made Scotland rather different from England, such as the prevalence of church papistry (supported by the Jesuits in Scotland, in contrast to Jesuit support for recusancy in England) and the absence of sustained lethal judicial persecution of Catholics in Scotland (pp. 279–80). Scotland's distinct and entirely different system, together with the very different character of religious reform in Scotland and the organisation of the Scottish church, render Scotland perhaps the nation most unlike England in the experience of early modern Catholics.

The geography of Britain and Ireland was not, of course, the only way in which British Catholicism can be said to have had peripheries. The expatriate Catholic community in Catholic countries was paradoxically both a centre and a periphery of English Catholic life; a centre, because directing figures such as Cardinal Allen and Robert Persons were leaders in the Catholic community, and because the overseas colleges and monasteries sustained the priesthood; but a periphery, because many (perhaps most) Catholics continued to see England as their home. The Jesuit emphasis on England as an infidel missionary territory, little different from China or Japan, stood in contrast to the emphasis of the seculars and some other religious orders, such as the Benedictines, on the restoration and maintenance of pre-Reformation traditions. To a large extent, the concepts of centre and periphery are inapplicable to British Catholicism in the usual way, because what might be thought to be peripheral so often turns out to be central to Catholic history.

There was also another British Catholic periphery which constitutes one major omission from Scully and Ellis's *Companion*; that is, British and Irish Catholic missionary activity elsewhere in the world, which has garnered considerable recent scholarly attention.¹¹ British and Irish priests were active as far afield as Brazil, Eastern Europe and India, as well as the English colonies in North America. It is possible to dismiss such missionaries as committed agents of the Catholic Reformation who just happened to be British or Irish, but such an interpretation assumes that the standard 'Catholic exile' was someone focused primarily on a hypothetical return to the homeland rather than someone intent on bringing the distinctiveness of British and Irish Catholic traditions to bear in the wider Counter-Reformation. The question of whether to include such phenomena in a volume on British and Irish Catholicism raises the issue of whether the study of early modern British Catholicism is first and foremost the study of a people group —British and Irish Catholics —or the study of a religious group within particular territories, the Catholicism of Britain and Ireland. Yet it is difficult to meaningfully disentangle the Catholic community in Maryland, for example, from the English Catholic community, at least until the American Revolution. Clearly, there remain unresolved issues regarding the different centres and peripheries of British and Irish Catholicism.

¹¹ See, for example, James Kelly and Hannah Thomas, eds. *Jesuit Intellectual and Physical Exchange between England and Mainland Europe, c. 1580–1789: 'The World is our House'* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Teresa Bela, Clarinda Calma and Jolanta Rzegocka, eds. *Publishing Subversive Texts in Elizabethan England and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

The varieties of evidence

A significant strength of Scully and Ellis's *Companion* is its emphasis on the variety of sources for the history of British and Irish Catholicism; two chapters (by Peter Davidson, David Walker and Janet Graffius) are devoted to material culture, while two (by Jane Stevenson and Victor Houliston) deal with literary culture. A further chapter, by Gary Jenkins, is focused on Catholic political writings. The expansion of Catholic historiography beyond traditional bodies of evidence has been a feature of the field in the last two decades, reflected in the variety of texts published by the Catholic Record Society. Recent volumes in the Records Series have included the financial accounts of Mannock Strickland (edited by Richard G. Williams) and a work of eighteenth-century Catholic historiography, Philip Perry's *Essay on the Life and Manners of Robert Grosseteste* (edited by Jack Cunningham).¹² As Catholic historiography moves beyond the traditional sources of chronicles, letters, registers and government records of recusants, new avenues of enquiry are opened up and it becomes possible to study the Catholic community from a variety of different perspectives.

The study of literature produced by British and Irish Catholics is a well-established field, albeit one that has not always been integrated into the mainstream of Catholic historiography because it has been pursued in English Literature departments. However, the longstanding shift to historicism within literary studies has ensured ever greater dialogue between historians and literary scholars, to the extent that literary studies is now thoroughly integrated into the practice of British and Irish Catholic history. This is reflected in this volume, particularly in the chapters by Stevenson and Houliston. Yet there is still much work to be done on the literary legacy of early modern British Catholicism, not least on literature in languages other than English and other vernaculars such as Irish and Welsh. Catholic expatriates sometimes wrote in the languages of their host countries, but it is the Latin literature of the English Catholic community that represents the largest lacuna in scholarship at the present time. It is noteworthy that, when Latin literature gets a mention in this *Companion* it is in relation to Scotland, where there is greater awareness of the importance of early modern Latinate culture. The work of scholars such as Victoria Moul is beginning to chip away at the vast edifice of early modern English

¹² Richard P. Williams, ed. *Mannock Strickland (1683–1744): Agent to English Convents in Flanders: Letters and Accounts from Exile* (Woodbridge: Catholic Record Society, 2016); Philip Perry, *Essay on the Life and Manners of Robert Grosseteste*, ed. Jack Cunningham (Woodbridge: Catholic Record Society, 2022).

poetry in Latin (both Protestant and Catholic) but there is a long road yet to be travelled before Latin literature receives due recognition.¹³

While the editorial choices needed to bring together a *Companion* of this scale will always be difficult, the absence of a dedicated discussion of music in the early modern Catholic community is a surprising omission, especially in light of recent work on the subject by Emilie Murphy,¹⁴ and a long tradition of musicological interest in Catholic figures such as Thomas Tallis and William Byrd. However, Scully and Ellis's *Companion* is notable for the space it devotes to another category of evidence whose place in the historiography of British Catholicism is more recent: that is, the material culture of early modern Catholicism, which is the subject of chapters by Peter Davidson, David Walker and Janet Graffius. Anne Dillon's chapter on martyrdom also draws significantly on visual culture, while Lisa McClain's chapter on Catholic devotional life allows objects to speak for those Catholics who may have left behind no written records or literary legacy. From the 'Alleluia Chasuble' embroidered by Helena Wintour that appears on the book's front cover to the images of vestments, reliquaries, chalices, statues and even architecture that appear inside the book, the 'material turn' is much in evidence in this *Companion*. Had such a volume appeared even ten years ago, it seems unlikely it would have paid such attention to the material witnesses of Catholic Britain and Ireland.

While the 'material turn' is clearly a broader historiographical phenomenon, a shift in archival and curatorial practices in Catholic collections over the last two decades has undoubtedly enabled much greater use and examination of Catholic material objects by scholars. Leading curators such as Graffius have made communicating the content of the collections in their care a priority, while Catholic objects on loan to exhibitions have increasingly entered the mainstream of national heritage. Where Catholic collections were formerly seen as the private ephemera of religious orders and Catholic organisations, with little relevance for wider culture, the appointment of professional curators and archivists over the decades, as well as the repurposing of former seminaries and monasteries has required the reimagining of their value as heritage, leading to a greater recognition of the exceptional cultural value of Catholic material culture. Catholicism is, of course, a religion of materiality; and indeed Catholics defined

¹³ Victoria Moul, *A Literary History of Latin and English Poetry: Bilingual Verse Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁴ Emilie Murphy, 'Adoramus te Christe: Music and Post-Reformation English Catholic Domestic Piety', *Studies in Church History* 50 (2014): 240–53; Emilie Murphy, 'Music and Catholic Culture in Post-Reformation Lancashire: Piety, Protest and Conversion', *British Catholic History* 32:4 (2015): 492–525.

themselves against Protestants by their continued reliance on visible sacramentals and material aids to devotion.

Three phenomena in particular deserve special mention when it comes to Catholic material culture: Catholic preservation of medieval artefacts, the exceptional quality of some clandestine Catholic art, and Catholic creativity in adapting objects to circumstances of secrecy and persecution. The English Catholic colleges and convents on the continent became remarkable storehouses of pre-Reformation treasures, particularly in the form of vestments and reliquaries, although many objects were also preserved by the Catholic laity (often laywomen) at home as well. The subsequent provenance of these objects, or their accession to museum collections, can have the effect of obscuring the key role Catholics played in saving them from destruction. Yet Catholics also created new objects, and recusant women like Helena Wintour played a key role in the creation of exceptional devotional displays of needlework. In this sense, parallel material cultures developed in the English Catholic community at home and abroad; while Catholics at home treasured medieval relics or relied on their own resources to create new objects, on the continent English Catholic culture interacted with continental artistic resources to produce distinctively English art in a continental idiom.

Yet, as Scully observes, 'Catholics were on the move, improvising in various ways, and transforming earlier notions of identity and ritual' (p. 11), and the fact of persecution produced great creativity in Catholic material culture, from tiny chalices to fold-away altars and multipurpose vestments. The lavish material culture of the late medieval church gave way to furtive and utilitarian expressions of Catholic liturgical life, but as Lisa McClain argues these devotions no longer supplemented Catholic sacramental life, yet they often stood in for it (p. 598). Furthermore, Catholic devotion did not simply perpetuate medieval devotions in forms adapted for domestic use; new devotions sprang up, such as Margaret Clitherow's barefoot pilgrimages to Knavesmire because Catholic priests had been executed there. On account of its furtiveness, much of the material culture of Catholics in Britain and Ireland was ephemeral unless, like the celebrated symbolic architecture of Sir Thomas Tresham or the Scottish Catholic tower-houses discussed by Davidson and Walker, it concealed a profession of Catholicism in plain sight. Most of what survives of early modern Catholic material culture was preserved in continental religious communities or originated there.

The expansion of the range of evidence Catholic historians are now prepared to consider has many advantages. One prominent advantage is the dialogue it prompts with individuals who might otherwise go unheard in the historiography: the craftspeople and devout individuals who created material objects. Yet these objects also have the capacity

to become witnesses in themselves, mutely testifying to successive phases of altered use and significance. The multidisciplinary character of the study of the early modern Catholic community, involving literary scholars, curators, art historians, archivists, musicologists and translators, is now well-established, and the boundaries of the field will surely only expand in the future.

Historiographies within the historiography

When a historical companion attempts to cover a ‘community history’ over three hundred years, it inevitably becomes necessary to engage with questions of the changing self-understanding of the community itself, and this is no less true of the Catholic community than of any other. As adherents of a faith grounded in a particular understanding of historical time, and where concepts of chronological continuity were central to Catholic polemical claims, Catholics naturally took an interest in historiography. The historian will often find the past looking back like a reflection in a mirror: these people who are the subject of historical investigations were themselves historians, endeavouring to tell their own story. The legitimacy of Catholic Englishness, Welshness, Scottishness or Irishness depended on the historical construction of Catholic identity, just as much as Protestant legitimacy relied on historiographers like John Foxe.

As Houliston notes, when early modern Catholics wrote the history of the Reformation it was ‘the history of their own times, the story of their own experience and that of their immediate ancestors’ (p. 523). But it was also a history that looked ahead to the future; Persons’s *Certamen ecclesiae Anglicanae* (‘Struggle of the English Church’), for example, was written ‘to lay the foundation for self-understanding’ in the event of a restoration of Catholicism after Elizabeth’s death (p. 524). In the same way, eighteenth-century Catholic perceptions of the past were as much informed by the future Catholics envisaged as by their historiographical agendas. The Catholic community was divided between those who hoped the British state would bend to accommodate Catholics, those who hoped Catholics would accommodate themselves to the demands of the British state, and a few Enlightenment idealists who hoped a prevailing atmosphere of rationalism rendered further religious intolerance unnecessary. The evolution of imagined Catholic futures, from the imagined papal- and emperor-backed invasions of the 1530s and 1540s to the dynastic scheming of Persons and dreams of tolerance under James I and Charles I (briefly realised under James II) is the history of the place of Catholicism in the life of the nation. By the late eighteenth century, however, dreams of a political or dynastic conversion had faded, except perhaps in Ireland. The nation would be returned to the faith,

if at all, by the prayers of the saints and the holiness of Catholic witness. Catholic emancipation thus inaugurated a new era in the life but also in the internal historiography of the Catholic community; tolerance was achieved, but the goal of spiritual restoration remained to be striven for.

Conclusion

Scully and Ellis's *Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland* will no doubt become a standard text in the field, and deservedly so. This volume, substantial in all senses, finally supplies a worthy multidisciplinary edited collection whose avowed purpose is the summation of the field. For graduate students, in particular, this companion will signpost the key themes and subfields within the historiography of early modern British Catholicism. Such omissions as there are not sufficiently serious to mar the whole, and overall this *Companion* is a magnificent achievement — not least because it provokes much reflection about the progress of this field, its present state, and the future directions it may take.