

Chaplains in Early Modern England: Patronage, Literature and Religion

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Editor:

Hugh Adlington

Tom Lockwood

Gillian Wright

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Nicholas Cranfield

The three editors are all senior lecturers at the University of Birmingham in the department of English Literature and the volume is the result of a one day colloquium that was held at Stratford by the department in June 2010 under the auspices of the Centre for Reformation and Early Modern Studies at Birmingham. The intention of the interdisciplinary day was to study the cultural significance of chaplains in the early modern period. Tom Lockwood, in his own essay on the poet William Lewis (1627–76), who served as a chaplain in Ordinary to Charles I from June 1628 until February 1642, calls this ‘cultural agency’, a term with which David Crankshaw is demonstrably unhappy.

The overview that this gives of hitherto often neglected areas of the Church’s ministry is critical for the questions that it throws up where work still needs to be done, and it is a pity that the editors have not articulated this more strongly in their preface. They do acknowledge the need for a similar enterprise, that might look at other establishment chaplains such as those in the forces or in schools and colleges, which I would echo.

Not that the research is necessarily straightforward, not least as not all serving chaplains were ordained in the Church of England for instance, which makes rather different demands for searching records than simple

recourse to the Clerical Database. John Thornton, who served the fifth Earl and first Duke of Bedford as a domestic chaplain, was a non-Conformist, and a frequent correspondent.⁽¹⁾

Although the last senior appointment of a layman in the Church of England was that of Sir Adam Newton as dean of Durham on 16 September 1605 (he resigned 25 April 1620) laymen continued to serve in households as lay chaplains. Where the duty of a chaplain was simply to read the prayers daily and lead family worship such an appointment would make little difference. Besides, not all aristocratic households had consecrated chapels for the performance of the sacrament. Others, such as the Talbots of Shrewsbury who held the manor of Sheffield, opted to use the parish church as their chapel. Sheffield remains a unique example where the 16th-century chapel within the church – now a cathedral – remained consecrated for Catholic worship long after the Reformation and was only ceded, ‘for the use of parishioners’, in 1933 for Anglican usage.

Bishops were required to consecrate chapels and it would be interesting to know how many of the more scrupulous among them resisted doing so in order to maintain a closer control over a family or an estate through the more transparent structures of the parish. In his essay Professor Fincham finds Archbishop Neile of York refusing to consecrate a chapel for one baronet as he had ‘express command not to consecrate any, least it may be occasion of conventicles’, a fear that may have been encouraged by Archbishop Laud’s attempt to prevent the gentry from maintaining ‘common-law’ chaplains who might be laymen or puritans.

The ten papers are arranged in near chronological sequence and offer studies of chaplains who served at Court, in noble households and in the service of bishops. That even the term chaplain carries a broad range of expectation and deployment is an obvious point, but it is one that needs re-iterating and that is tellingly developed by Mary Morrissey in her chapter on the bishop of London’s chaplains as censors. A chaplain to the nobility and the upwardly mobile gentry might be expected to offer pastoral support as well as to provide for the learning of the family beyond catechesis, whereas a bishop’s chaplain would often act as part of the bishop’s staff, assisting at visitations and ordinations in preaching and in examining ordinands. Where the former might allow for some latitude and could be carried out by a locally beneficed clergyman the episcopal chaplain would become rather more of an ecclesiastical civil servant who was readily promoted.

A chaplain in the royal household, whether serving in Ordinary or ‘Extraordinary’, however, had rather more defined duties, to supply sermons and a monthly eucharist at the direction of the Lord Chamberlain, and in the period under review James VI and I added to the duties of the chaplains by insisting on a second weekly sermon during Lent. As sermons preached at Court, whether before the sovereign or the household, had a greater chance of publication than those given in parish churches or even in the houses of the nobility this may distort the level at which surviving printed instances can be seen as representative of literary changes. As recipients of patronage and as seekers of preferment royal chaplains followed a rather more exalted path than other chaplains.

In 1610 James VI and I provided 24 chaplains to serve monthly in pairs in his son’s household at the creation of Henry as Prince of Wales ⁽²⁾, an arrangement that derived from his own household in which 48 chaplains served ‘in Ordinary’, four by four. More than 70 clergymen served James VI & I in this office, a number of men ‘inherited’ from Elizabeth I. For many, as I have shown earlier ⁽³⁾, this was a ready path to an early Stuart bishopric. In an appendix to his paper Grant Tapsell shows that such a pattern continued after the Restoration; of the 81 bishops who served under Charles II and James II, 66 had definitively served as chaplains ⁽⁴⁾, 57 of whom had been chaplains to the king or another member of the royal family. By contrast less than 20 per cent appear to have served in bishops’ households. He cites D. R. Hirschberg’s 1976 PhD thesis that showed that between 1660 and 1674 28.5 per cent of those raised to the episcopate had earlier been chaplains in such households themselves, a figure that falls to just 8 per cent for the remaining period 1675–88.

Professor Fincham opens with an examination of the influence of household chaplains before the Restoration, and the last essay examines the career of Archbishop William Sancroft who had abhorred the prospect of becoming a chaplain when he was safely ensconced as a Cambridge don. As might be expected

from his research to date, Fincham gives most attention to chaplains who served in the king's household and for bishops. The dispensation rolls provide only partial evidence but his findings are based on a wide survey. In the early Stuart period alone, when the number of sees remained fixed at 27 and the aristocracy doubled in size from 55 at Elizabeth's death to 126 at the start of the period of Personal Rule, the rolls report 215 chaplaincies for bishops and 415 for the nobility.

James's reign is interesting by way of contrast to that of his successor for the number of its royal households. Whereas Charles I only had his own to supply as his heir was a minor (Henrietta Maria maintained her own catholic chaplains), James, his wife Anna of Denmark and, after 1610, the successive princes of Wales each had household chaplains. This observation points up one regret that I have, as none of the authors has sought to address the appointments necessitated by having two monarchs regnant. How many appointments were jointly made and how many were individually licensed to the Dutch Stadtholder or to his Stuart wife after 1689? The immediate aftermath of the Glorious Revolution led to its own ecclesiastical turmoil although it was not until August 1691 that Archbishop Sancroft was finally forced out of Lambeth into his exile; 'I must be my own chaplain', as he wrote to a friend.

Edward Young was a Fellow of Winchester College, and licensed to preach at Winchester between 1680 and 1691. In 1693 he preached the Easter Day sermon before Queen Mary at Whitehall and later in the same year he could proudly claim that he was 'chaplain to Their Majesties' on the title page of a sermon concerning the Wisdom of Fearing God preached on 30 July at the Assize in Salisbury. Other royal chaplains served both sovereigns jointly; a fine portrait, attributed to Thomas Murray, of Thomas Lynford (1650–1724) hangs in his *alma mater* at Christ's College Cambridge, where he had been a Fellow before becoming Canon of Westminster and later Archdeacon of Barnstaple who was a chaplain in ordinary to both monarchs, as were the bishops William Beveridge and Francis Atterbury (Atterbury continuing in royal service under Anne).

The second essay by David Crankshaw uses his own database of 809 chaplains who served in noble households and shows how many encouraged their patrons to be leading figures in literature, the arts and scientific development. Under the Earls of Pembroke Wilton House was a virtual college in its own right, and included Dr Thomas Moffet who was a Paracelsian physician when he was not rescuing his daughter from arachnophobia, as well as a number of Calvinist theologians.

Dr Morrissey confines her study to the chaplains who served at London and at Lambeth as press censors for the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The 1586 Star Chamber decree delegated all press censorship to both bishops and by the 1630s this brought the domestic chaplains to prominence in the debate between Arminians and the avant-garde conformist party. After 1638 it was the bishop's chaplains rather than the Master of Revels who licensed all plays and Morrissey shows that Laud and Juxon as bishop of London were not politically neutral in the 1630s when it came to licensing books for publication.

Hugh Adlington has examined the role of embassy chaplains and considers Daniel Featley who was the Anglican chaplain in Paris alongside the career of John Sandford, who accompanied Sir John Digby to Madrid (1610–13). As we learn more about travellers across Europe [\(5\)](#) we can hope that other such studies will follow.

William Lewis is not particularly widely known among Caroline poets but his office of chaplain to the king allowed him to seek earnestly for 'a prebende, and two Livinges' in 1630, the allowance offered to all chaplains under the Henrician statute of 1527. More famous as a poet (often scurrilous) is Bishop Richard Corbett, and Christopher Burlinson shows him using his versifying to seek patronage from the new Chancellor of Oxford University who happened to be Archbishop Laud.

William Rawley (d. 1667), a disgraced fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who had been ordained in September 1611, became chaplain to Francis Bacon in 1617/8 and in his household served the Lord Chancellor until his death in 1626 as his amanuensis (alongside Thomas Hobbes and George Herbert), secretary and editor. Angus Vine uses his commonplace book to shed valuable light on Bacon and to offer

further apothegms.

Two further chaplains in noble households form the core of the papers by Erica Longfellow, writing about the Isham family of Lamport House and their all-too-familiar chaplain Daniel Baxter, and Professor William Gibson who has studied the seventh earl of Huntingdon and his chaplain from 1660, Samuel Willes, who died aged 44 in 1685 and is interred in All Saints' Derby where his epitaph mistakenly claims he had ministered for 25 years. Clerical Database 60855 reports his appointment there from 1676 but Gibson shows that he had moved to Derby in 1671 by way of an exchange that also commended a friend to be the earl's chaplain in his stead.

These prosobiographical studies suggest that the nature of chaplaincy had already begun to evolve and the later 18th-century pattern of an extended household in which the chaplain was a tutor was already taking root. These ten essays should provoke much thought and suggest afresh the need to research the ministry of the Church of England as broadly as possible at every stage.

Notes

1. R. A. Beddard 'Nonconformist responses to the onset of Anglican uniformity, 1661–1664,' *Bodleian Library Quarterly* (2000), pp 106–49.[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. BL. MS. Harl., 641, fo. 241.[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. N. W. S. Cranfield, 'Chaplains in Ordinary at the early Stuart court: the purple road', in *Patronage and Recruitment in the Tudor and Early Stuart Church*, ed. C. Cross (York, 1996), pp. 120–47 [Back to \(3\)](#)
4. From entries in the ODNB Tapsell found that only 66 can definitely be regarded as Chaplains in Ordinary. His *Appendix*, p. 205.[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Edward Chaney and Timothy Wilks, *The Jacobean Grand Tour: Early Stuart Travellers in Europe* (London, 2013).[Back to \(5\)](#)

The editors accept this review and do not wish to comment further.

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[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/82667>