

Getting Along?

**Religious Identities and Confessional Relations
in Early Modern England – Essays in Honour of
Professor W.J. Sheils**

Edited by
Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton

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Professor W.J. Sheils

EDITED BY

NADINE LEWYCKY

University of Warwick, UK

AND

ADAM MORTON

University of York, UK

ASHGATE

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Abbreviations

BI	Borthwick Institute for Archives, York
BL	British Library
Bod	Bodleian Library, Oxford
ERRO	East Riding Record Office, Beverley
FHL	Friends House Library, London
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
SP	State Papers
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
TT	Thomason Tracts, British Library, London
UCA	Ushaw College Archive, Durham
VCH	Victoria County History
West	Westminster Diocesan Archives, Westminster
YML	York Minster Library, York

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Contributors

Dr. Andrew Cambers

Andrew Cambers received his PhD from the University of York and has since taught at the Universities of Exeter and Lancaster. He is the editor of *The life of John Rastrick, 1650–1727* (Cambridge, 2010) and has just published his first monograph, *Godly reading: print, manuscript, and puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge, 2011). He has also authored many articles, which have been included in *Past & Present*, the *Journal of British Studies* and the *Historical Journal*.

Professor Stuart Carroll

Stuart Carroll is currently Professor of Early Modern History and Head of Department at the University of York. He is the author of *Noble power during the French Wars of Religion: the Guise affinity and the catholic cause in Normandy* (Cambridge, 1998), *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2006) and *Martyrs and Murderers: the Guise Family and the Making of Europe* (Oxford, 2009). He is a two-time winner of the Nancy Roelker prize for best article published in English on Early Modern France (2000 and 2003) and winner of the American Historical Association “J. Russell Major Prize” for the best book published on French history (2010).

Dr. Katy Gibbons

Having received her PhD from the University of York in 2006, Katy Gibbons has since held teaching posts at the Universities of York and Warwick, and is currently a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Portsmouth. She has recently published her first monograph, *English Catholic Exiles in Late Sixteenth-Century Paris* (2011) through the Royal Historical Society, and has articles in *French Historical Studies* and *Recusant History*.

Dr. Andrew Hopper

Andrew Hopper received his PhD from the University of York in 1999. His thesis examined the extent of support for Parliament in Yorkshire during the first civil war. He has written several articles on allegiance in Yorkshire, East Anglia and the West Midlands, together with a new study of Parliament’s foremost general: ‘Black Tom’: *Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2007). In 2003 he was appointed an AHRC Postdoctoral Fellow to research the Court of Chivalry Project with Professor Richard Cust at the University of Birmingham, a collaboration which produced: Cust and Hopper (eds), *The High Court of Chivalry*,

1633–41 (Publications of the Harleian Society, NS, 18, 2006). He has been a Lecturer in the Centre for English Local History at the University of Leicester since 2006. He is currently researching a monograph entitled *Turncoats and Renegades*, as well as editing a volume of the papers of Sir John Hotham, Governor of Hull, during the Civil War.

Dr. Simon Johnson

Simon Johnson completed both his MA and PhD at the University of York under the supervision of Bill Sheils, where he researched the English College at Lisbon, 1622–1761. He is currently the Associate Director of Historical Research for the Abbot of Downside, Dom Aidan Bellenger, for whom he is writing a biography of the monastic historian, David Knowles. His main research specialism is the English Catholic Diaspora in Europe and he is currently working on English Catholic exiles in North America and Australia.

Professor Peter Lake

Peter Lake is Professor of Early Modern British history at Vanderbilt University (Nashville, TN). He has written four books, the most recent of which are *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat* and *The Boxmaker's Revenge*, and has co-edited six collections of essays including the recent *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, with Steven Pincus (Manchester, 2007). He is currently working on three projects: a book on Shakespeare's history plays and the religious and dynastic politics of the 1590s; a book on Catholic critiques of the Elizabethan regime as a conspiracy of evil counsel and a tyranny; and a book about Samuel Clarke's collections of godly lives.

Professor Peter Marshall

Peter Marshall is Professor of Early Modern religious and cultural history at the University of Warwick. His books include *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), *Reformation England, 1480–1642* (Arnold, 2003), *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Ashgate, 2006), *Mother Leakey and the Bishop: A Ghost Story* (Oxford, 2007), and *The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009).

Dr. Rosamund Oates

Rosamund Oates is Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has published on strategies of conformity in Northern Catholic communities (*Northern History*) and the relationship between theological and political thought (*Cultural and Social History*). Forthcoming articles include 'Puritans and the Monarchical Republic: Conflict and Conformity in the Elizabethan Church' and 'Tudor Histories

of Christian Origins', in S. Ditchfield, K. Van Liere and H. Louthan (eds), *Historia sacra: Visions of Christian Origins in the Renaissance World*. She is currently completing a monograph, *A Godly Commonwealth of Elizabethan England*, which examines the intellectual, political and cultural influences underpinning Elizabethan Puritanism.

Professor Robert Swanson

Robert Swanson is Professor of Medieval Ecclesiastical History at the University of Birmingham, and is a leading historian of the late medieval English church. His major publications include *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge, 2007), *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215 – c.1515* (Cambridge, 1995), and *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989). Since 2003, he has held Guest Professorships and lectured at several universities in China. In 2006 he was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University. He is also a former editor of *Studies in Church History* (1996–2004).

Professor Alexandra Walsham

Alexandra Walsham is Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, having recently moved from the University of Exeter. In addition to numerous articles and essays on the religious and cultural history of early modern England, she is the author of *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Royal Historical Society, 1993); *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999); and *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England 1500–1700* (Manchester, 2006). She has also co-edited (with Julia Crick) *The Uses of Script and Print 1300–1700* (Cambridge, 2003) and (with Peter Marshall) *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2006). Her most recent monograph is *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (2011).

Dr. Emma Watson

Emma Watson completed both her MA and PhD at the University of York. Her doctoral thesis examined the varieties of popular reactions to the English Reformation within the county of Yorkshire. She has published numerous articles on northern resistance in the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* (2005) and *Studies in Church History* (2007) amongst others. She recently completed a position as a Research Assistant on the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funded project 'Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York 1300–1858' taking place at the Borthwick Institute for Archives in York. She has also produced (with James Sharpe)

an edition of the 1663 Archdeacon's Visitation Return for the East Riding of Yorkshire (forthcoming).

Editors

Dr. Nadine Lewycky

Nadine Lewycky holds a PhD in History from the University of York where she was supervised by Professor Bill Sheils, and has since taught at Manchester Metropolitan University as an Associate Lecturer. In October 2007, she won the Sheldon Memorial Trust Essay Prize for a piece on Cardinal Thomas Wolsey's patronage of the City of York, a version of which has appeared as an article in *Northern History*, vol. 46, no. 1 (March, 2009). She is currently the Impact Officer for the Faculty of Arts at the University of Warwick.

Dr. Adam Morton

Adam Morton has the distinction of being Bill Sheils' final doctoral. He has just completed a doctoral thesis – 'Printed Images of the Papacy in Early Modern England, c.1530–1685' – at the University of York. His research interests lie primarily in the fields of post-Reformation visual and print cultures and anti-Catholicism, and he intends to extend his doctoral research into a wider survey of anti-Catholic imagery in the period up to the Glorious Revolution. He was formerly an Associate Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, and is currently a Teaching Fellow at the University of York.

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Introduction

Adam Morton and Nadine Lewycky

This volume examines the impact of the English Reformation on social interaction, familial and community harmony, and the unsteady and contested process in which religious identities were formed. It highlights the tension and degree of accommodation amongst ordinary people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when faced with significant religious and social upheaval. It is based on the premise that the development of religious identities in the early modern period is best understood by examining ordinary life at the parish level, and by situating that life within broader cultural and mental frameworks. The contributors address the potential that new confessional groupings had to undermine longstanding social practices and traditions, from the mundane, such as providing hospitality to neighbours and travellers, to the overtly religious, such as churchyard burials. With the increasing likelihood of conflict between confessional groups over the allocation of religious space and the religious health of the community, this volume emphasises the processes of negotiation and accommodation that sustained a pragmatic underpinning for many communities in the face of religious upheaval, often in contradiction with official church and state policies. As such, this volume engages with the long-standing contention that religious toleration, so long considered the cornerstone of the Enlightenment, should truly be considered the preserve of early modern European society.

The title of this volume, *Getting Along*, is borrowed from one of W.J. Sheils' more recent articles – “Getting on” and “getting along” in parish and town: Catholics and their neighbours in England’ – published in a collection of essays on Catholic communities in Britain and the Netherlands from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.¹ Analysing the place of Catholics in communities in Yorkshire, the Midlands and London, Sheils underscored how harmonious relations between supposedly embattled confessions proved to be, even at times of political turmoil. Noting that early modern people belonged to families, kin, trades, professions and parishes as much as confessional groupings, Sheils posited that we could better understand the complexities of the ‘ecumenicity of the everyday’ if

¹ W.J. Sheils, “Getting on” and “getting along” in parish and town: Catholics and their neighbours in England’, in Benjamin Kaplan, Bob Moore, Henk F.K. Van Nierop, and Judith Pollmann, (eds), *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands, c.1570–1720* (Manchester, 2009), pp. 67–83.

we were to eschew the language of religion in favour of one of community, replacing discussion of ‘toleration’ with one of ‘neighbourliness’.² That is to say, by focusing on how religious minorities ‘got on’ – seeking to improve their social, political and cultural standing – whilst ‘getting along’ – maintaining cordial relations – with their neighbours. To do so is to present a more holistic vision of the parish, placing inter-relationships between faiths in the fuller complement of the forces, constraints and obligations acting upon early modern people. By arguing that social relationships and pragmatism often outweighed confessional divisions in early modern communities, this article contributes to a burgeoning field of scholarship which highlights the cordial interactions between groups of different faiths. This trend serves as a corrective to narratives of post-Reformation history which continues to be written from a national-confessional standpoint.³ Social historians of the Reformation period are increasingly moving away from understanding the church and confessional groups as monolithic and rigid entities towards an appreciation of the diversity, complexity and unpredictability of shifting religious faiths *in situ*.⁴ The impact of the emergence of environments with a multiplicity of religious identities is best characterized at the local level, rather than in the doctrinal statements of states and their churches. Admittedly, the deep-set impulse towards peace and harmony which formed the ‘moral tradition’ underpinning European society was strained by the multiplication of religious groups.⁵ Nonetheless, recent historiography has underscored the mutual cooperation of differing

² Ibid., pp. 67–9 in particular.

³ B.J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA/ London, 2007), pp. 127–293; A. Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester/ New York, 2006), pp. 160–290; C. Marsh, *Popular Religion in sixteenth-century England: holding their peace* (New York, 1998), *passim*; C. Scott Dixon, D. Freist and M. Greengrass (eds), *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2009); K.P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, 2005), *passim*; K. Cameron and M. Greengrass (eds), *The Adventure of Pluralism in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2000); A. Höfele and E. Ruge (eds), *Representing Religious Pluralization in Early Modern Europe* (Münster, 2007); R.C. Head and D. Christensen (eds), *Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Early Modern German Culture: Order and Creativity 1500–1750* (Leiden, 2007); C. Scott Dixon, ‘Urban Order and Religious Coexistence in the German Imperial City: Augsburg and Donauwörth, 1548–1608’, *Central European History*, 40 (2007): pp. 1–33; R. Po-Chia Hsia and H. van Nierop (eds), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁴ See W. Frijhoff ‘How Plural were the Religious Worlds in Early-Modern Europe? Critical Reflection from the Netherlandic Experience’ in Dixon, Freist and Greengrass, pp. 21–7. See also his *Embodied Belief: Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History* (Hilversum, 2002).

⁵ J. Bossy, *Peace in the post-Reformation* (Cambridge/ New York, 1998), p. 2 and *passim*.

confessional groups, arguing that neighbourly accommodations and compromises forged a social peace in the face of officially prescribed intolerance. These researchers recognise that the polemical divisions of early modern theology were not necessarily replicated in the practicalities of ordinary life amongst contending confessional groups of Christians. Rather, what emerges is an integrationist account of the means by which communities mitigated the seismic upheavals of the Reformation. A linear, empiricist understanding of church history has given way to the portrayal of the early modern parish as a civil-spiritual organism constantly negotiated and re-imagined. Historians have labelled this process ‘cooperative confessionalism’, ‘practical rationality’ or ‘the ecumenicity of the everyday’.⁶ Such terminology more accurately reflects the fact that ‘confessional relations were ambiguous and shaped more by [everyday] contingencies than the higher principles of faith’.⁷

Historiography

Scholarly interest in the historical development of religious toleration in Western Europe has mainly been the preserve of intellectual historians who created a Whig narrative in which the intellectual ideal of toleration contrived by the ‘great minds’ of Europe propelled Western society towards the secular liberal state.⁸ This narrative presented a ‘rise of toleration’ as part of a progressive social, intellectual and political development in Europe in which the Reformation represented a critical phase. Lord Macaulay, W.E.H. Lecky and other nineteenth-century historians argued that the practical problems posed by religious pluralism during these centuries encouraged statesmen and intellectuals to break-out of their medieval tribalism, and to battle excessive religious zeal with the rigour of reason. Following numerous outbreaks of religiously-motivated violence throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the intellectual movement towards religious toleration was promoted by thinkers such

⁶ W. Frijhoff, ‘Shifting identities in hostile settings: towards a comparison of the Catholic communities in early modern Britain and the Northern Netherlands’, in Kaplan and Moore et al, p. 12; W. Frijhoff, ‘The threshold of toleration: interconfessional conviviality in Holland during the early modern period’ in his *Embodied Belief*, pp. 39–65 at p. 44; R.W. Scribner, ‘Preconditions of tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth century Germany’ in O. Peter Grell and R.W. Scribner (eds), *Tolerance and intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 38.

⁷ C. Scott Dixon ‘Introduction’, in Dixon, Freist and Greengrass, p. 2.

⁸ Lord Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, 4 vols (London, 1967 edn; first publ. 1864); W.E.H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2 vols (London, 1865).

as David Joris, Sebastian Castellio and Hugo Grotius, and culminated in the writings of the liberal philosopher John Locke. Locke argued for a separation between church and state, and demanded that religion should be a private matter between a man and his Creator. Nineteenth-century historians considered Locke's *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689–92) as the meridian moment.⁹ The argument that toleration of different religious views was both in keeping with the gospel and the reasonableness of God – and consequently that any state or church which persecuted religious conscience acted contrary to divine reason – not only broke the mould of post-Reformation confessional factionalism, but existed as a yardstick for a civilised and liberal society and a signpost for modernity.

This teleological view of the development of a civilised liberal state continued to carry weight into the twentieth century, championed by historians such as William Haller, A.S.P. Woodhouse and W.K. Jordan.¹⁰ In the face of an increasingly menacing fascist threat, these works imbued the English Civil War of the seventeenth century with a special importance in the development of political and religious liberalism.¹¹ Toleration was seen as a symptom of the emergence of secularism and scepticism.

The first account to challenge the triumphalist Protestant view of the rise of toleration was Joseph Lecler's *Toleration and the Reformation* (1955).¹² Rather than locating the rise of toleration in the secularisation of Western society, Lecler situated its roots in the medieval period. As such, Lecler continued to present the development of toleration from a confessional and teleological standpoint, simply extending its development over a longer period of time. Challenges to Lecler's work were made by later historians, such as R.I. Moore, whose *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (1987) reinforced the notion that medieval Europe was dominated

⁹ For a detailed review of Locke see J. Marshall, *John Locke: Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and 'Early Enlightenment' Europe* (Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁰ William Haller (ed.), *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan revolution, 1638–1647* (New York, 1933–34), *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1938) and *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1955); A.S.P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty* (London, 1938); W.K. Jordan, *The Development of religious Toleration in England*, 4 vols (London, 1932–40); Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty: Nine Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia, 1951).

¹¹ John Coffey's *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England* (Harlow, 2000) has re-imagined the case for the radical puritanism of the 1640s and 1650s being a watershed in the history of toleration.

¹² Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation* (1955). Henry Kamen's, *The Rise of Toleration* (London, 1967) also offered a significant challenge to Whig models. Noting that during the Reformation toleration was a principle which proved piecemeal in its application, he stressed that economic changes ushering in a bourgeois society was more significant than religious change. Freedom of religion was a concomitant of freedom of trade.

by a drive towards persecution within the governing elite.¹³ Lecler's work has been supported by a body of recent scholarship which argues that the pre-Reformation church accommodated a plurality of voices.¹⁴ *Beyond the Persecuting Society*, edited by Cary Nederman and John Laursen, argued that the practice of *de facto* toleration in medieval and early modern Europe has been hitherto underappreciated by historians.

Building upon the insights of Herbert Butterfield, recent scholarship has marked a break from the view that the Reformation began a demise of the 'persecuting society' which characterised the Middle Ages.¹⁵ Rather, the early modern period is seen to have continued and intensified practices of intolerance. *From Persecution to Toleration* (1991), a set of essays edited by Ole Grell, Jonathon Israel and Nicholas Tyacke which marked the tercentenary of the Glorious Revolution and Act of Toleration of 1689, was salutary in this regard. Allowing William III's statute seminal status, this volume nevertheless stressed the decidedly ambivalent character of the toleration for which it stood.¹⁶ The Act – celebrated in so many Whig accounts – was a product of politics not principle. In granting toleration to dissenters, William of Orange was motivated not by a belief in the equality of co-religionists, but rather by the conviction that continued persecution was both ineffective and counter-productive. His motivations for extending toleration to Catholics were decidedly pragmatic, built on the necessity of assuring the Catholic powers of Europe that their brethren in England would be safe under his rule.¹⁷ *From Persecution to Toleration* did much

¹³ R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250* (Oxford, 1987).

¹⁴ C.J. Nederman and J. Christian Laursen (eds), *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Lanham, MD, 1996); C.J. Nederman, *Worlds of Difference: European Discourses of Toleration, c.1100 – c.1550* (University Park, PA, 2000); C.J. Nederman and J.C. Laursen (eds), *Beyond the persecuting society: religious toleration before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, 1998); S.L. Waugh and P.D. Diehl (eds), *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 1996); D. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1996); R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215 – c.1515* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. ch. 8.

¹⁵ H. Butterfield, 'Toleration in early modern times', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38 (1977): pp. 573–84.

¹⁶ O. Peter Grell, J.I. Israel and N. Tyacke (eds), *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution in England* (Oxford, 1991), especially 'Introduction' pp. 10–15 and ch. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13; J.I. Israel, 'William III and toleration' in Grell, Israel and Tyacke, pp. 129–70; J. Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 375–6; M. Goldie, 'John Locke, Jonas Proast and religious toleration 1688–1692' in J. Walsh, C. Haydon and S. Taylor (eds), *The Church of England c.1689 – c.1833* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 155–6; J. Miller, 'James II and toleration' in E. Cruickshanks (ed.), *By Force of by Default? The Revolution of 1688–9* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 21–3.