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The Welsh Trust, 1674–1681: a Charitable Proposal for Comprehension

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The Welsh Trust (1674–81), established by Thomas Gouge, an ejected Presbyterian minister, brought together clergy and laity across emerging denominational divides who shared a desire to unite English Protestants against the perceived resurgence of Catholicism. The enterprise serves as a miniature of the tension among many Presbyterians between the reality of their dissent and the desire for church comprehension, challenging the traditional binary of 'Dons' and 'Ducklings'. Furthermore, it reveals the creative ways in which mobilisers of comprehension pursued their ideals, which profoundly shaped the many godly reformations of the English Church after the Glorious Revolution.

Thomas Gouge (1605–81), an ejected Presbyterian minister, might seem to have discarded all hope for reform of the national Church, turning to less controversial pastoral alternatives when he ventured into Wales for charitable and educational projects in the 1670s. This article however argues that the Welsh Trust, established by Gouge in 1674, was a rare enterprise that brought together clergy and laity across emerging denominational divides, united in a desire for both greater comprehension in the established Church and a more robust Protestant defence against Catholic influence going far beyond the Welsh Marches. The Trust members included prominent dissenters like Richard Baxter, leading Anglicans like John Tillotson and, quite remarkably, the Socinian merchant Thomas Firmin – not only blurring ecclesiological boundaries and hence escaping confessional historians' attention, but also challenging the traditional picture of Presbyterian dissent.

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The Welsh Trust was a grand literary and educational project that focused on printing and distributing Welsh Bibles and devotional works in Welsh as well as setting up charity schools for children to learn English and be educated.[1] It became the most influential provider of Welsh-language Protestant literature in the late seventeenth century, primarily due to its successful partnership with local parishes. The Trust, however, has not received the attention it deserves. Scholars have occasionally pointed out its contribution to Welsh literature, literacy and Protestant dissent, its direct impact on the emergence of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and less frequently, its ecumenism.[2] What is missing is a rigorous investigation into the strong desire to present a unified front against Catholicism among many Anglicans and Protestant dissenters, a crucial, yet largely neglected, motive behind the founding of the Welsh Trust. While charitable schemes were not uncommon in Restoration England, the Trust was distinctive in its surprisingly wide cross-confessional collaborations that played a strategic role in the mobilisation of church comprehension, prefiguring strikingly similar projects in post-revolutionary England, such as the societies for the reformation of manners.

This study of the Welsh Trust further complicates the traditional picture of Presbyterianism as a binary of 'Dons' and 'Ducklings'. Restoration Presbyterianism is traditionally depicted as a dichotomy between the 'Dons', who still aspired to a unified national Church and therefore sought comprehension, and the younger, more militant 'Ducklings', who preferred toleration and the liberty to form their own dissenting identity.[3] Scholars like Ann Hughes and George Southcombe have recently challenged this rigid antithesis and persuasively argued that Presbyterian dissenters often demonstrated a much more flexible or ambivalent attitude towards the established Church than the ones presented by these rehearsed categories.[4] Those who toiled for comprehension, like

[1] M. G. Jones, 'Two accounts of the Welsh Trust, 1675 and 1678 (?)', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* ix (1937–9), 71–80; Edmund Calamy, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter's history of his life and times*, London 1713, ii. 10.

[2] Lloyd Bowen, 'Wales, 1587–1689', in John Coffey (ed.), *The Oxford history of Protestant dissenting traditions,* I: *The post-reformation era, 1559–1689,* Oxford 2020, 239–40; Eryn White, 'Protestant dissent in Wales', in Andrew Thompson (ed.), *The Oxford history of Protestant dissenting traditions,* II: *The long eighteenth century,* c. *1689*–c. *1828,* Oxford 2018, 163–4; Mark Goldie, *Roger Morrice and the Puritan Whigs: the entring book, 1677–1691*, Woodbridge 2016, 75–7.

[3] The terms were originally coined by Secretary of State Joseph Williamson in 1671: TNA (PRO), SP 29/294, fo. 223r. See also Roger Thomas, 'Comprehension and indulgence', in Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick (eds), *From uniformity to unity, 1662–1962,* London 1962, 208.

[4] George Southcombe, 'Presbyterians in the Restoration', in Coffey, *Protestant dissenting traditions,* i. 77ff., and *The culture of dissent in Restoration England: 'the wonders of the*

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Gouge and Baxter, could actively engage in illegal preaching and organise conventicles without seeing these activities as a contradiction to their occasional participation in parish services and desire for accommodation, and historians have struggled to find a single example of a 'Duckling' who outright rejected the idea of comprehension.

This article pushes these considerations further by thoroughly investigating one specific, but rich and complex, instance. As a piece of propaganda, the Trust illustrated how effective anti-Catholic evangelism required Protestant unity, which the re-established Church fatally lacked. Its missional work softened the pastoral barriers between those ejected ministers traditionally dubbed the 'Dons' and the establishment, integrating dissenters back into the parish system in a much more creative, systematic and theologically intrusive way than the already well-known practice of 'occasional conformity'.[5] And yet while the Trust so contested the boundary of conformity, it left a dissenting legacy through its educational schemes for the Welsh poor and the high-profile dissent of some of its members. Edmund Calamy (1671–1732), historian and grandson of the leading Presbyterian divine of the same name, no doubt enjoyed observing about the work of the Trust: 'If the Growth of Dissenters in Wales be an effect of the Increase of Knowledge there, we can't help that.'[6]

The Welsh Trust was therefore a rare institutional expression of the tension among many Presbyterians between the reality of their dissent and yet the desire for church comprehension in pre-revolutionary England – a tension greatly felt by their Anglican sponsors who would become the key opponents of James II and the most senior church authorities after the Glorious Revolution. A closer look at Thomas Gouge's establishment of the Welsh Trust, the charitable work of the Trust as well as its ecclesiologically diverse lay-clerical partnership reveals a definite confessional broadening of the Presbyterian dissent that played a crucial role in the shaping of post-revolutionary Anglicanism.

Thomas Gouge and the founding of the Welsh Trust

Thomas Gouge, unlike his father William Gouge, Puritan luminary and celebrity preacher of St Ann's Blackfriars, left few literary traces before

Lord', Woodbridge 2019, esp. ch i; Ann Hughes, 'Print and pastoral identity', in Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page and Joel Halcomb (eds), *Church life: pastors, congregations, and the experience of dissent in seventeenth-century England*, Oxford 2019, 169.

[5] A frequently cited article on occasional conformity is J. D. Ramsbottom, 'Presbyterians and "partial conformity" in the Restoration Church of England', this JOURNAL xliii (1992), 249–70. See also Michael P. Winship, 'Defining Puritanism in Restoration England: Richard Baxter and others respond to *A friendly debate*', *HJ* liv (2011), 689–715; Southcombe, 'Presbyterians in the Restoration', 78; and Anthony Milton, *England's second reformation: the battle for the Church of England, 1625–1662*, Cambridge 2021, 505.

[6] Calamy, *Abridgement*, ii. 10.

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1662 and hence has attracted little scholarly attention. As vicar of St Sepulchre, he was a staunch member of what Elliot Vernon calls the 'Sion College conclave', a self-conscious London Presbyterian circle throughout the mid-seventeenth century.[7] In September 1661, Sir Edward Broughton identified Gouge as one of those preachers who seduced people to 'suffer any thing … then [than] to comply with those … in power'.[8] In April 1662, Gouge was again accused of 'refusing the authority of bishops', this time by his own parishioners, when he and his supporters first rejected the election of William Rogers to be churchwarden at St Sepulchre, fearing that Rogers would enforce the use of the Prayer Book and place the communion table at the east end of the chancel, and later resisted the order of Gilbert Sheldon, bishop of London, to restore the election.[9] With the intervention of the Privy Council, Rogers eventually secured his election; he would soon see his vicar ejected thanks to the Act of Uniformity in late 1662.

For the last two decades of his life, the ejected minister divided his energy between two realms of ministry: devotional writing and charity work. Gouge's publications were his channel to continue pastoral care for both St Sepulchre and the wider society and would form the basis of the literary output of the Welsh Trust in the 1670s. The first of this series of resources was a treatise on family worship, *The Christian housholder* (1663), in which Gouge repeatedly referred to families as 'little churches', which were 'not to receive all … [that was] delivered in the Pulpit', but must guard true religion against false teachers.[10] Despite being dissatisfied with certain theological influences within the Caroline Church, Gouge did not fully denounce the institution.[11] He affirmed the usefulness of

[7] Gouge, his father William Gouge, and many other London Presbyterians subscribed to *A testimony to the trueth of Jesus Christ, and to our Solemn League and Covenant*, London 1648 (Wing T.823) in 1647. In 1648 William and Thomas Gouge, along with fifty-four other ministers, again subscribed to *A vindication of the ministers of the Gospel, in and about London,* London 1648 (Wing B.5690A) to protest against the imposition of capital punishment upon King Charles I.

[8] TNA (PRO), SP 29/41, fo. 135r.

[9] TNA (PRO), SP 29/53, fo. 157r; Paul Seaward, 'Gilbert Sheldon, the London vestries, and the defence of the Church', in Tim Harris, Paul Seaward and Mark Goldie (eds), *The politics of religion in Restoration England,* Oxford 1990, 59–60.

[10] Thomas Gouge, *The Christian housholder,* Wolverhampton 1787, 3, 10, 22.

[11] Another treatise, *Joshua's resolution: or, The private Christian's duty in times of publick corruption,* London 1663 (Wing G.1369), was published anonymously and attributed to Gouge by Donald Wing: *Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America, and of English Books printed in other countries, 1641–1700,* 1st edn, New York 1948, ii. 122. The author however clearly believed that the English Church was going through a time of trial and persecution (pp. 13, 18), and admonished those 'excluded from publick places', which were 'polluted by Idolatrous mixtures, and inventions of men, who abuse[d] their Authority', to avoid giving 'a seeming assent unto those undue impositions' and set up family worship (p. 12).

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'publick Ordinances' and encouraged his readers to sanctify the sabbath by attending church services.[12] If Richard Baxter is to be believed, Gouge, like many other dissenters, did not adopt a clean-cut separation from the national Church, but practised partial conformity and 'went constantly to the parish Churches', a detail Baxter deliberately included to sarcastically contrast Gouge's 'true episcopacy' to Anglican suppression of dissenters' evangelism and preaching.[13]

In reaction to the Conventicle Act of 1664 and the Five Mile Act of 1665, Gouge further published a catechism, *The principles of Christian religion*, and a treatise on regeneration, *A word to sinners, and a word to saints*, in 1668, which provided godly families with tools to maintain 'true' worship when conventicles were abolished and ejected ministers far away from them.[14] Following the long-standing practice of binding small books into a collection of practical divinity, Gouge appended *A word to sinners* with *The Christian housholder*, the catechism and a set of prayers, presenting it as his last provision for St Sepulchre: 'Though I cease to be your Minister, yet I shall not cease to do what in me lyeth to further your eternal happiness.'[15] While Gouge could affirm the usefulness of attending parish churches and perhaps even practised partial conformity himself, this deliberate creation of a separate set of pastoral tools undoubtedly nurtured Presbyterian separatism.

A thorough investigation into the Welsh Trust reveals that Gouge's other major pastoral alternative – charity projects – could be just as ecclesiologically ambiguous and even transgressive.[16] Gouge's commitment to work

Considering its obscure authorship, differences in both tone and content compared to *The Christian housholder*, and the fact that it was published without the author's consent to suit the publisher's nonconformist agenda that 'in all Ages the Saints of God have been Separatists' (sig. A2v), this article will not discuss *Joshua's resolution* in detail.

[12] Gouge, *The Christian housholder*, 26. While Gouge did not clearly speak of attending parish churches, the fact that he did not limit his reference to collective worship as the 'ordinary means … for the reforming' of Christian life to conventicles is revealing.

[13] Richard Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ: or, Mr. Richard Baxters narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and times*, London 1696 (Wing B.1370), pt III, 190.

[14] Thomas Gouge, *The principles of Christian religion explained to the capacity of the meanest*, London 1668 (Wing G.1371), and *A word to sinners, and a word to saints*, London 1668 (Wing G.1379).

[15] Idem, *A word to sinners*, sig. A2v. For the practice of binding works of practical divinity together see Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and people in Elizabethan and early Stuart England*, 1st edn, Cambridge 1998, 26.

[16] Besides the Welsh Trust, Gouge had engaged in many other charity works. For instance, upon the Great Ejection, Gouge fundraised among the wealthy in London for fellow ejected ministers and their families. During the Great Fire of London in 1666, he also served as treasurer for a financial relief scheme set up by Henry Ashurst, London draper and renowned philanthropist: Samuel Clarke, *The lives of sundry eminent persons in this later age in two parts*, I: *Of divines*; II: *Of nobility and gentry of both sexes*, London 1683 (Wing C.4538), 204.

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in Wales does not seem to have arisen from any strong previous connection to the principality but, rather remarkably, from a contemporary literary text. Samuel Clarke recalled that it was his memoir of Joseph Alleine (*bap.* 1634, d. 1668) that inspired Gouge to follow Alleine's footsteps into Wales. Compared to Gouge, Alleine was a younger and more fervent Presbyterian minister based in Taunton, Somerset, who actively promoted continual preaching by the ejected ministers and organised private gatherings.[17] According to Clarke, Alleine's arrests, imprisonments, subsequent poor health, premature death in 1668 and most importantly, unfulfilled zeal for evangelism in Wales deeply touched Gouge, who became determined to go to Wales in 1671.[18]

Gouge first went to Wales to preach in 1672, targeting the Welsh Marches where many understood English.[19] This first round of evangelism was immediately met with opposition. Gouge was cited for unlicensed preaching by Francis Davies, bishop of Llandaff, and was excommunicated and silenced after non-appearance in court. Gouge eventually appeared before the church authorities and promised not to preach again. The judgement sparked various interpretations. Clarke and Baxter, both dissenting activists for godly missions that aimed at conversions and spiritual renewal, labelled these attempts to block Gouge's preaching as Satan's attack.[20] According to them, Gouge relied on an old, perfectly lawful, licence issued by the University of Cambridge. John Tillotson, on the other hand, left out this inconvenient detail and simply commented that Gouge obtained a licence later in life 'from some of the Bishops to preach in *Wales*' when the dissenter became 'better satisfy'd in some things he doubted of before'.[21] This claim however lacked supporting evidence. Preaching at Gouge's funeral, Tillotson was obviously compelled to smooth out controversial points of a dissenter's life in order to protect his own orthodoxy and loyalty. With a shared concern for comprehension lurking in the background, dissenters like Clarke and Baxter and Anglicans like Tillotson agreed that Gouge's pastoral alternatives and evangelistic charity should not have been considered problematic.

Gouge's initial attempts at preaching in the Welsh Marches, just like his publication of a separate set of pastoral resources for St Sepulchre, blurred the lines that historians have drawn between 'Dons' and 'Ducklings'. Gouge could be easily identified as a 'Don' for his age, associations with key negotiators for comprehension like Baxter, William Bates and Thomas Manton and finally his turn to seemingly uncontroversial charity

[17] Winship, 'Defining Puritanism in Restoration England', 703–5.

[18] Clarke, *Lives*, 204.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid. 204, 205; Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, pt III, 190.

[21] John Tillotson, *A sermon preached at the funeral of the reverend Mr Thomas Gouge*, London 1682 (Wing T.1234), 82.

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projects after 1662. What we see, however, is someone who had trodden the dangerously high-profile path of a young Presbyterian troublemaker, Alleine. Traditional categories proposed by Roger Thomas become even more problematic if one considers Alleine's continual attendance at parish services and exhortations for others to do so.[22] As Ann Hughes points out, if 'Dons' could be just as active in illegal preaching as 'Ducklings' while attending parish services, the tensions between comprehension and toleration might have been operating within each individual, prompting them to different decisions under different circumstances, rather than neatly dividing them into fixed Presbyterian subgroups.[23]

The establishment of the Welsh Trust in 1674 was Gouge's change of strategy in pursuit of higher impact and lower risk. Two Welsh ejected ministers, Stephen Hughes and Charles Edwards, were the key players.[24] Hughes translated English religious writing into Welsh, and in 1678 edited a new edition of the Welsh Bible; Edwards busied himself in Oxford and London with proof-reading, editing and publishing Welsh-language books; Gouge introduced English pastoral works and was successful in raising funds.[25] They collaborated to translate, print and disseminate around 8,000 Welsh Bibles to give away or sell at a cheap price as well as a wide range of Protestant writings in Welsh for the poor.[26] These works included Welsh translations of Gouge's *Christian directions* (1661), his 1668 catechism and *A word to sinners* as well as Baxter's immensely popular *Call to the unconverted* (1658) and *Now or never* (1662).[27] They also published and distributed the newly-revised Book of Common Prayer, a version of the Prayer Book that had once again failed to satisfy the demands of Presbyterian divines in 1662, when its enforcement had at first been firmly resisted by Gouge himself. The two extant reports,

[22] Winship, 'Defining Puritanism in Restoration England', 703.

[23] Hughes, 'Print and pastoral identity', 169.

[24] Gouge also collaborated with other Welsh translators, Richard Jones (1603–73), a schoolmaster in Denbigh and a fellow dissenter, and William Jones (d. 1679), another ejected minister whose nonconformity seemed to have been influenced by Baxter: Calamy, *Abridgement*, ii. 714; Robert Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, ed. Robert Pope, Cardiff 2004, 77.

[25] Bowen, 'Wales, 1587–1689', 239–40; Charles Edwards, *An afflicted man's testimony concerning his troubles*, London 1691 (Wing E.191), 9; Derec L. Morgan, 'A critical study of the works of Charles Edwards (1628–1691?)', unpubl. DPhil diss. Oxford 1968, 23.

[26] Jones, 'Two accounts', 77; Calamy, *Abridgement*, ii. 10.

[27] These works were either translated by Richard Jones or by William Jones, Gouge's other collaborators. The first editions of these translations are *Gwyddorion y grefydd Gristianogol*, London 1679 (Wing G.1368A); *Hyfforddiadau Christianogol*, London 1675 (Wing G.1368B); *Gair i bechaduriaid, a gair i sainct*, London 1676 (Wing G.1367); *Galwad ir annychweledig idroi a byw*, London 1659 (Wing B.1273A); and *Bellach neu Byth*, as part of a collection of writings entitled *Tryssor ir Cymru*, London 1677 (Wing T.3206A).

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one dated 1675 and the other possibly recorded in 1678, clearly intended to highlight the lawfulness of this project and only explicitly named two conformist works that the Trust sponsored: the royalist Richard Allestree's *The whole duty of man* (1658) and the former Welsh bishop Lewis Bayly's *The practice of piety* (*c.* 1612). At one point, the reports noted that at least 2,500 free copies of *Practice of piety* were given to the poor through parish clergy and churchwardens, along with 'other Licensed Treatises' – a deliberately vague statement meant to obscure the Trust's Puritan output.[28] This partnership with local parishes, especially those in market towns, extended to the Trust's establishment of charity schools that instructed and catechised children in English, possibly using Gouge's 1668 catechism. The Trust successfully funded more than 1,000 children to attend school within its first year, inducing others to sponsor another 863 pupils by the summer of 1675. Gouge was actively involved, visiting the schools once or twice a year to supervise their administration.[29]

Protestant philanthropic and educational initiatives should not have struck contemporaries as novel. Baxter's ministry at Kidderminster and leadership in the Association Movement in the 1650s, including his emphasis on preaching, catechising and spiritual formation, served as a pastoral model for Protestant missions and parochial ministries both within the re-established Church and without.[30] Thomas Wadsworth, for example, followed Baxter's strategies in his own parish of Newington Butts, Surrey, distributing free copies of the New Testament, catechisms and pastoral treatises to the poor, teaching the illiterate how to read and, finally, instructing parishioners through sermon repetitions, catechising and the reading of pastoral writings, such as Baxter's *Call to the unconverted*.[31]

Puritans did not monopolise these charitable or educational ministries, either. Anglican authorities, such as those who would collaborate with Baxter and Gouge for the Welsh Trust, already had a track record of similar endeavours, often marked with prominent lay involvement that blurred confessional boundaries. For instance, during the Great Plague of London in 1665–6, Simon Patrick, then rector of St Paul's, Covent Garden, solicited generous funding from wealthy laymen, including Dr Thomas Willis, physician and a devout royalist episcopalian, and Sir William Jones, a young, prominent lawyer from a strongly parliamentarian

[28] Jones, 'Two accounts', 73. [29] Ibid; Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, pt III, 190.

[30] Eamon Duffy, 'The long Reformation: Catholicism, Protestantism and the multitude', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England's long Reformation, 1500–1800*, 1st edn, London 1998, 48–50.

[31] Ibid. 47; Richard Baxter, preface to Thomas Wadsworth, *Mr. Thomas Wadsworth's last warning to secure sinners*, London 1677 (Wing W.187).

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family, to distribute alms to the poor and infected households.[32] Edward Stillingfleet assisted his friend Richard Kennet, an ejected minister, to acquire a house to run a school in his own parish of Sutton, Bedfordshire, a Nonconformist ministry 'conniv'd at' because local gentry sent their sons to him.[33] What the Welsh Trust achieved was that it intentionally gathered these existing pastoral energies to facilitate a remarkably broad lay-clerical co-operation across ecclesiological divides to work towards a shared vision of national godliness. Just like these other charitable programmes, the Welsh Trust enjoyed the sponsorship and endorsement of local gentry as well as at least tacit support from the Anglican authorities, and was allowed to team up with parish churches, carefully keeping a list of the clergymen and magistrates who worked with it.[34] This extraordinary union of Anglican and dissenting strains of piety revealed a determination shared by both sides to eradicate a common enemy, the Catholics.

Anti-Catholic sentiments and local gentry support for the Welsh Trust

Many Welsh gentry saw Catholicism as a real threat to the Welsh Marches, a religious crisis exacerbated not least by the Catholicism of the marquis of Worcester, principal magnate in the area. Suspicion of the recusant Somerset dynasty was the main reason why south-east Welsh Anglicans, clergymen and magistrates alike, were divided, and why many regarded the Welsh Trust as a driving force for an urgently needed Protestant unity against papalist threats rather than as an outlet for dissent. Sir Trevor Williams and the Morgans of Tredegar led Monmouthshire's opposition to Worcester. Throughout the 1660s and 1670s, Williams competed for the county seat in parliament with candidates supported by Henry Somerset. Along with like-minded MPs, such as Sir William Morgan and John Arnold, Williams actively drew attention in parliament to the marquess's Catholic sympathies, referring to Chepstow with its still formidable castle as Worcester's 'cathedral garrison', where 'mass was constantly sayd'.[35] Such political duels lasted for more than a decade, ending with

[32] Simon Patrick, 'A brief account of my life, with a thankful remembrance of God's mercies to me', in *The works of Symon Patrick: including his autobiography*, ed. Revd Alexander Taylor, Oxford 1858, ix. 442–4.

[33] Calamy, *Abridgement*, ii. 118; J. T. Cliffe, *Puritan gentry besieged, 1650–1700*, 1st edn, London 1993, 46.

[34] Jones, 'Two accounts', 71–80.

[35] The first remark was John Arnold's and the second Sir Trevor Williams's, meant to reinforce each other's attacks on the marquess in parliament. Arnold's comparison of Chepstow to a 'cathedral' was likely meant in the sense that Chepstow was the marquess' principal seat: *The manuscripts of the duke of Beaufort, K.G., the earl of Donoughmore, and others*, London 1891, 114.

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Williams's imprisonment in 1683 on a charge of violating the statute of *Scandalum magnatum* soon after Somerset became duke of Beaufort.

These conflicts reflected the anxiety of many about a Catholic resurgence in politics, both in Wales and on a national scale. Sir Edward Mansell, Williams's political ally from Glamorgan, was already a harsh critic of the duke of York, the future James II, in 1672, and would side with Williams to support Anthony Ashley Cooper, first earl of Shaftesbury, in the opposition to the prospect of a Catholic monarchy as well as advocacy of 'King by law' and frequent parliaments as bulwarks against any notions of *iure divino* kingship.[36] This network of proto-Whigs, including Mansell, Williams, Morgan, Evan Seys, MP for Gloucester from 1661 to 1681, and Sir Edward Harley, a former Presbyterian and MP for Radnor and Herefordshire on multiple occasions throughout the 1670s, dominated the political make-up of the Welsh Trust. They formed both local opposition to Worcester and support of Shaftesbury in parliament. For these Anglican gentry, the anti-Catholic Welsh Trust and opposition to the duke of York were both attempts to achieve the same religious and political goals.

The Welsh Trust, an Anglican-dissenter alliance for regional evangelism that enjoyed generous gentry support and a creative lobbying tactic for comprehension, could find few domestic equivalents of the same scale in Restoration England, but it did have counterparts outside the country. For example, the royally-chartered New England Company, under the leadership of natural philosopher Robert Boyle and patronage from Presbyterian gentry like the earl of Manchester, had already been seeking collaborations between Anglicans, independents and Presbyterians across the Atlantic since the 1660s. In order to solicit support in London, the company framed its missions among the natives in America, the perceived 'other' even more foreign than the Catholics at home, with the language of comprehension.[37] The Trust obviously lacked the same official endorsement, and yet, sheltered by a strong Welsh gentry sponsorship, the organisation demonstrated an astonishing diversity in conformity among its clerical participants, built upon a unanimous aversion to popery. The two Welsh ministers who worked alongside Gouge, Stephen Hughes and Charles Edwards, set the ecclesiologically transgressive tone of the Trust – an inclusivity further expanded by its London Presbyterian and latitudinarian members, who disregarded

[36] Philip Jenkins, 'Anti-popery on the Welsh Marches in the seventeenth century', *HJ* xxiii/2 (1980), 275–93 at pp. 283, 285, and *The making of a ruling class: the Glamorgan gentry, 1640–1790*, Cambridge 1983, 128; Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Two speeches*, Amsterdam 1675 (Wing S.2907), 10.

[37] Gabriel Glickman, 'Protestantism, colonization, and the New England Company in Restoration politics', *HJ* lix/2 (2016), 365–91 at pp. 369, 379–81.

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differences among themselves for the sake of greater causes: charity, anti-Catholic evangelism and comprehension.

Gouge's Welsh collaborators: Stephen Hughes and Charles Edwards

Gouge, Hughes and Edwards formed the core of the Welsh Trust. Like Gouge, Hughes was an ejected minister who continued preaching and ministering, based at several dissenting churches in Carmarthenshire. Congregationalism enjoyed a greater influence in Wales than Presbyterianism, and Hughes contributed significantly to the maintenance of many independent churches in Carmarthen, earning him the name 'the apostle of Carmarthenshire'.[38] Taking advantage of his affluent upbringing and the wealth of his wife, Catherine, Hughes devoted himself to literary ventures, especially promotion of Welsh religious literature, often at his own expense.[39] One of Hughes' most memorable literary endeavours was his collection, publication and dissemination of the poems of Rhys Prichard (1579–1644/5), 'the Old Vicar' of Llandovery and an immensely popular preacher, whose religious verses often laid out the fundamentals of the Gospel for the poor and uneducated in a way that was easy to memorise.[40]

Charles Edwards, also an ejected minister, was best remembered for his *Y ffydd ddi-ffuant* (1667), a brief abridgement of John Foxe's *Actes and monuments* that took on a life of its own independent of Foxe: Edwards would expand it with an extra section on the history of faith in Wales in the second edition (1671) and another section on the efficacy of faith in the third and definitive edition (1677).[41] Like Hughes, Edwards published religious texts in Welsh, including a 1671 republication of Morris Kyffin's *Deffynniad ffydd Eglwys Loegr* (1595), a translation of Bishop Jewel's *Apologia pro Ecclesia Anglicana*.[42] In the preface to Kyffin's translation of the *Apologia*, Edwards compared such classic Protestant texts to faithful yet neglected witnesses of the Gospel that deserved a better

[38] 'Apostol Sir Gâr': Dylan Rees, *Carmarthenshire: the concise history*, Cardiff 2006, 70; Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, 74.

[39] Calamy, *Abridgement*, ii. 718; Geraint H. Jenkins, *Literature, religion and society in Wales, 1660–1730*, 1st edn, Cardiff 1978, 204.

[40] D. Densil Morgan, 'The Reformation and vernacular culture: Wales as a case study', in Jennifer Powell McNutt and David Lauber (eds), *The people's book: the Reformation and the Bible*, Downers Grove, Il 2017, 85. An example of Hughes's publication of Rhys Prichard's religious verses is *Canwyll y Cymru, sef, gwaith Mr. Rees Prichard, gynt ficcer Llanddyfri*, London 1681 (Wing P.3403B).

[41] Matthew Kilburn, 'The learned press: history, languages, literature, and music', in Ian Anders Gadd (ed.), *The history of Oxford University Press*, Oxford 2013, i. 434–5.

[42] John Jewel, *Eccho of the sons of thunder: Dad-seiniad meibion y daran*, trans. Morris Kyffin, Oxford 1671 (Wing J.738).

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welcome in Wales, clearly seeing his publishing endeavours as a way to restore true Christian faith among their ancestors in the last century.[43] It is quite clear from Edwards's translation of Jewel that he was perfectly happy with at least the pre-Laudian episcopal Church of England, with its anti-popery and acceptance of the non-episcopal reformed churches of the continent – a sharp contrast with Hughes's more purely dissenting output. Remarkably, with a shared zeal to consolidate Protestant resources against the spread of Catholicism, three ministers of different stripes of Protestant dissent could collaborate to print and distribute conformist writings and the Prayer Book. This basic ecclesiological triangle laid the foundation of the confessional diversity of the Trust, which would be widened and deepened by the rest of its members.

A Presbyterian-Latitudinarian alliance for comprehension

In 1674, the year when the Welsh Trust was established, John Tillotson, then dean of Canterbury, and Edward Stillingfleet, then residentiary canon of St Paul's, reopened discussions about comprehension with Richard Baxter, Matthew Poole, William Bates and Thomas Manton after the last attempt to pass a comprehension bill in parliament, spearheaded by Sir Matthew Hale, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, failed in 1668. They nevertheless again toiled in vain because of a fierce opposition from both within the Anglican hierarchy, led by Gilbert Sheldon, archbishop of Canterbury, as well as in parliament. Under such pressure, sympathetic bishops like Seth Ward, bishop of Salisbury, and George Morley, bishop of Winchester, withdrew their parliamentary support. Tillotson explained to Baxter on 11 April 1675 that while he did 'most heartily desire an Accommodation' and would 'always endeavour it', he was reluctant to publicly endorse the bill because it would be a 'prejudice' to himself and 'signify nothing to the effecting of the thing'.[44]

Gouge was not directly involved in these discussions, but the fact that key negotiators from both sides supported the creation and running of the Trust from 1674 to 1681 revealed his strategic role in the grand scheme of things. Frustrations with yet another failure at accommodation must have motivated its key mobilisers and sympathisers, Anglicans like Tillotson and Stillingfleet, as well as Benjamin Whichcote, Simon Patrick, Edward Fowler, Hezekiah Burton and William Outram, dubbed by contemporaries as the 'latitudinarians', and dissenters like Baxter, Poole and Bates, to cast aside their theological differences and collaborate through

[43] Edwards, preface to Jewel's *Eccho of the sons of thunder*.

[44] John Tillotson to Richard Baxter, 11 Apr. 1675, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, pt III, 157.

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Gouge's charity project, longing to see at least some form of Protestant unity.

The leading Anglicans of the Trust, Whichcote, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Patrick and Fowler, already had close links with one another in Cambridge in the 1640s and were part of the philosophical school now called the Cambridge Platonists, an academic network Baxter once disparagingly termed 'Cambridge Arminians'.[45] Despite being dubbed Arminians, this group of latitudinarian Anglicans did not explicitly espouse Arminian views, but generally rejected doctrinaire claims concerning soteriology.[46] Take Simon Patrick as an example. Admitted to Queens' College, Cambridge, in 1644, Patrick met John Smith, a leading Cambridge Platonist and Fellow at Queens', whose guidance encouraged him to reject others' advice 'to silence carnal reason' and liberated him from doubts about absolute predestination.[47] Eventually settled in the conviction that 'God would really have all men to be saved', Patrick would stay at Queens' throughout the early 1650s and gain a reputation as a public Arminian through his teaching that relied on Henry Hammond's *Practical catechism*.[48] Patrick however denied the labelling: '[The use of Hammond's catechism] procured me with many the name of an Arminian, though I never made controversy about those matters … but preached God's love to mankind as the most evident truth.'[49]

Many latitudinarians, such as Tillotson, Stillingfleet and Fowler, were heavily influenced by the Laudian theologian William Chillingworth, who, with a heightened trust in human reason, argued that faith was not based on an infallible authority but a moral certainty supported by evidence accessible to all men.[50] He criticised the Calvinists' 'fantasticall persuasion' that they were 'predestinate' and their lack of good works to confirm their calling.[51] Chillingworth was far from a fierce exponent of Arminianism, however, but asserted his preference for an inaccurate but 'charitable judgment' of others' errors over a true, yet uncharitable one: '[We] shall always … retain those in our Communion which deserve to

[45] Ibid. 19–20. The term 'Cambridge Platonists', coined in the nineteenth century, is highly contested, not least because Platonism was merely one of the many strains of philosophy with which they interacted. For a more thorough analysis of how these religious philosophers, while far from being intellectually unified, can still be appropriately identified as a group, see Sarah Hutton, 'The Cambridge Platonists: some new studies', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* xxv (2017), 851–7, esp. pp. 852–3, and 'The Cambridge Platonists', in Sacha Golob and Jens Timmermann (eds), *The Cambridge history of moral philosophy*, Cambridge 2017, 235–56, esp. pp. 245–8.

[46] John Spurr, '"Latitudinarians" and the Restoration Church', *HJ* xxxi (1988), 61–82 at pp. 63–4.

[47] Patrick, 'A brief account of my life', 419.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid. 425–6.

[50] John R. T. Lamont, *Divine faith*, London 2004, 95–7.

[51] William Chillingworth, *The religion of Protestants a safe way to salvation*, Oxford 1638 (*RSTC* 5138), 386.

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be ejected, then [than] eject those that deserve to be retain'd.'[52] Similarly, latitudinarians demonstrated an aversion to the heated Puritanism they regarded as prideful and divisive and instead advocated toleration of dissent.[53] In quite an opposite fashion, here we see mildly Arminian latitudinarians willingly walking alongside predestinarian dissenters for the perceived greater good, campaigning for religious inclusivity in the form of the Welsh Trust – an advertisement for comprehension and a miniature of their shared ecclesiological values. The Presbyterians seized the occasion to showcase their willingness to accommodate theological differences and pastoral assets, whereas latitudinarians generously opened the door to the Welsh parishes for them as a gesture of approval.

With comprehension in mind, the Trust not only avoided dissenting writings more overtly critical of the Church of England, but also endorsed the Anglican liturgy. The historian Edmund Calamy was quick to grasp this opportunity to praise Gouge, whose printing and free distribution of the Prayer Book proved that the founder of the Trust was far from 'that narrowness of Spirit or Bigotry to the Interest of the Dissenters'.[54] Calamy's defence of Gouge revealed the ingenuity of the Welsh Trust. The charity scheme could not have been so effective without its recognition of the parish system as well as promotion of the Prayer Book and some of the staple literature of the Restoration Church, like Allestree's *The whole duty of man*. This compromise, however surprising it might sound, successfully enabled the Trust to promote Baxter and Gouge's solidly Reformed teaching as well. Gouge's retreat from dissenting preaching to found a charity was in fact an attempt at a systematic distribution of Puritan resources to the Welsh public. Seen from this perspective, the Welsh Trust was a significant step-up in Gouge's influence on Puritan dissent, again demonstrating how preference for comprehension and impact on separatism were far from mutually exclusive in individual Presbyterians' endeavours. Humphrey Lloyd (1610–89), bishop of Bangor, was not entirely distorting the reality in his letter to Archbishop Sheldon when he called Gouge an 'itinerant Emissarie, entrusted by the leading Sectaries' to lure both the 'Credulous com[m]on people … [and] the weaker gentrie' away.[55] Aware of the exaggeration in Lloyd's accusation that the Trust drew people into 'a disaffection to the Government and liturgie of the Church', Sheldon urged caution in his reply: 'considering the nature of the design, it must receive no open discouragement from us'.[56]

One wonders how Gouge might have felt when he ordered and oversaw the printing, publishing and free distribution of copies of the Prayer Book

[52] Ibid. 407. [53] Lamont, *Divine faith*, 95–7; Spurr, 'Latitudinarians', 81.
[54] Calamy, *Abridgement*, ii. 9.
[55] Humphrey Lloyd to Gilbert Sheldon, 10 Aug. 1676, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Tanner 40, fo. 18r. [56] Ibid; Sheldon to Lloyd, undated, ibid, fo. 19r.

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in Wales. Did he ever think of his previous grievances against William Rogers, who wanted to enforce the use of the Prayer Book at St Sepulchre? Gouge in the 1670s was no longer the Gouge of late 1662. His ecclesiological ideals might still be similar, but his conscience over the extent of nonconformity must have undergone changes over the years, since the balance between dissent and pastoral urges was difficult to maintain. He now learned to broaden his network and embrace necessary compromises with the established Church, at least with those Anglicans who shared similar concerns for Protestant unity and flexibility in ceremonial conformity.

Several latitudinarian members of the Welsh Trust would rise to ecclesiastical prominence, all as part of the establishment that took over the Church of England after the Glorious Revolution. Tillotson would become archbishop of Canterbury (1691), Stillingfleet bishop of Worcester (1689), Patrick bishop of Chichester and Ely (1689, 1691) and finally Fowler bishop of Gloucester (1691). In that new political configuration, they would clinch new efforts at comprehension in the form of the Toleration Act of 1688 and continued to cultivate Protestant unity through similar Anglican-dissenter collaborations. In a way, the Trust foreshadowed the latitudinarians' ecclesiological ideals after 1689: a firm assertion of Protestant fundamentals and the downplaying to the point of irrelevancy of non-essential doctrinal disputes.

The curious case of the Socinian Thomas Firmin

If the Welsh Trust drew people together for its appeal to the Protestant fundamentals, Thomas Firmin (1632–97), an anti-Trinitarian girdler and mercer, certainly stood out as an anomaly. How did a Socinian fit in the narrative of the Welsh Trust and contribute to its agenda? Firmin was heavily influenced by John Goodwin's preaching at St Stephen's Coleman Street. Goodwin's challenge to the Reformed doctrine of predestination and promotion of general redemption moved Firmin away from his Reformed upbringing, which might have encouraged him to explore more radical thoughts like Biddle's unitarian doctrines.[57] Biddle's teaching on charity also turned Firmin into a passionate philanthropist, who faithfully pursued the former's ideal of charity that must extend beyond almsgiving to first-hand involvement in the lives of the poor.

Firmin's affluence, hospitality and charity enabled him to befriend many and establish a powerful cross-confessional network despite his Socinian convictions. Stephen Nye, a close friend and fellow unitarian, recalled

[57] Stephen Nye, *The life of Mr. Thomas Firmin, late citizen of London*, London 1698, (Wing N.1508), 6–7.

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that Firmin actively sought a friendship with Gouge, whom Firmin 'could not but esteem and love' for their shared passion for charity.[58] Dinners at Firmin's house were also frequented by many influential figures in the 1650s, including Tillotson and Whichcote.[59] Perhaps it was those dinner parties at Firmin's that enabled Gouge and future Anglican sponsors for the Trust to maintain an amicable friendship when they had no other opportunity to stay connected in the 1650s and 1660s. Firmin would not only contribute to the Trust financially, but actively engage in the day-to-day running of its work, opening his house on Lombard Street in London as a base for the Trust to store and examine its publications.[60]

What was even more surprising than Firmin's collaboration with mainstream Protestants in charity works was their joint attacks on other sects, such as the Quakers, despite the merchant's unitarian beliefs. William Penn, an apologist for Friends' teaching and future founder of the province of Pennsylvania, spotted a collaborative relationship between Firmin and mainstream Protestants, especially John Faldo, a congregationalist preacher whose anti-Quaker treatise *Quakerism no Christianity* was endorsed by many in 1675, including Gouge and Baxter.[61] In one of his responses to Faldo, Penn referred to Firmin as 'John Faldo's Mr. T.F', 'the Promoter and Scatterer of these Pamphlets [against Penn]'.[62] It seemed that the Socinian willingly channelled his hostility to Quakerism into active promotions of mainstream Protestant polemics.

Latitudinarians relied on Firmin's resources as well. Nye remembered that Firmin helped Tillotson arrange preachers for Tuesday lectures at St Lawrence when the latter was out of town, deliberately highlighting that 'there was hardly a Divine of Note … but Mr. *Firmin* was come acquainted with him'.[63] It becomes clear that Firmin could present himself as as mild a heretic as one could possibly get, actively pouring out resources to reinforce the boundary of mainstream Protestant orthodoxy despite his own beliefs, and developing genuine friendships and an astonishingly wide network. Again, mainstream Protestants could shrug off confessional differences among themselves as well as with those with deviant beliefs, as long as such accommodation contributed to a wider maintenance of what

[58] Ibid. 49.

[59] Philip Dixon, 'Firmin, Thomas (1632–1697), philanthropist', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, at <https://www.oxforddnb.com>.

[60] Jones, 'Two accounts', 72, 76, 77; Nye, *Life*, 50.

[61] The endorsements can be found in John Faldo, *Quakerism no Christianity*, 2nd edn, London 1675 (Wing F.303).

[62] William Penn, *The invalidity of John Faldo's vindication of his book, called Quakerism no Christianity*, London 1673 (Wing P.1305), 414. For a more thorough analysis of Penn's dispute with Faldo and his anti-Socinian polemic see Madeleine Pennington, *Quakers, Christ, and enlightenment*, Oxford 2021, 127–31.

[63] Nye, *Life*, 14.

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they perceived to be Protestant orthodoxy. Firmin's usefulness and his willingness to be so used therefore secured him a place in this *mélange* of Gouge's evangelistic charity scheme.

The Welsh Trust was initially a way for Gouge to pursue a less public, non-preaching, form of ministry, focusing on fundraising, publishing and education in Wales, far from the centre of ecclesiological tensions and political bargains. This collaboration between Anglican authorities and Presbyterian dissenters, traditionally categorised as the 'Dons', effectively spread Puritan literature and Reformed theology in the Welsh parishes, especially among the young. Its success alerted authorities like Bishop Lloyd and Archbishop Sheldon, who suspected Gouge's activities as a campaign for dissenting ideologies. Hence this study of the Welsh Trust – a Puritan project that sowed dissent as well as a Presbyterian-latitudinarian experiment in comprehension – challenges not only overly rigid ecclesiological groupings of Anglicans, dissenters and radicals, but also the perceived antithesis between the 'Dons' and 'Ducklings' among Presbyterians.

After Gouge died in 1681, Hughes (d. 1688) and Edwards (d. in or after 1691) would carry on producing more Welsh-language publications on their own, but the Trust itself came to an end. Towards the end of its life, the mutual trust between its Anglican and dissenting members had begun to crumble. Latitudinarians certainly hoped that their sponsorship of Gouge's charity would be one of the measures to win occasional conformists over, but repeated failures of comprehension schemes and the rising fear of the Popish Plot exhausted the patience of many with Baxter and his friends, who were simply not for turning. In 1680, Stillingfleet denounced partial conformity as the 'most unjust separation' and asserted that semi-separatists' affirmation of the established Church to be a true Church only aggravated rather than lessened their fault because 'the very separating is a tacit and practical condemning of our Churches, if not as false, yet as impure'.[64]

Stillingfleet's criticism incited many dissenters to fight back, including his fellow Trust member Baxter, who reasserted the effort by London Presbyterians to seek 'Concord and Reformation' as early as 1660, specifically their proposal of an 'Ussherian' episcopacy as well as a modified liturgy and flexibility in its use.[65] He protested that, for the past twenty years, the re-established Church had not only failed to address their requests properly, but had indeed raised the bar of conformity even higher: 'the Change of the Liturgy on pretense of easing us, and the Act

[64] Edward Stillingfleet, *The mischief of separation*, 2nd edn, London 1680 (Wing S.5605B), 35, 36.

[65] Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxters answer to Dr. Edward Stillingfleet's charge of separation*, London 1680 (Wing B.1183), sig. A2r.

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of Uniformity, have made Conformity now quite another thing than it was before'.[66] This 'new conformity' would not have been acceptable even to the old episcopalians. 'Ri. Hooker, Bishop Bilson, Bi-Usher and such others were they now alive would be Nonconformists.'[67]

This wrestling match would continue, with latitudinarians eventually making significant compromises in 1688–9. James's toleration of Catholics, harsh dealings with the Covenanters and suspension of parliament from November 1685 were all dangerously reminiscent of his father's arbitrary rule, prompting many Anglicans to favour a stronger Protestant union against what was perceived to be the greatest papist threat since Mary Tudor's reign.[68] The liturgy of comprehension was finally completed, a task committed by Convocation in 1689 to William Lloyd, bishop of Worcester, Tillotson, Patrick and Stillingfleet; however, in the end 'comprehension' would yield to 'toleration' in the form of the Toleration Act of 1689. The older generation of Presbyterians had entered into the twilight of their lives by now, without much chance of seeing the acceptance of dissent and the end of the many ways in which they were penalised for their beliefs.

Although short-lived, the Welsh Trust paved the way for numerous similar initiatives with equally strong lay-clerical alliance that sprang up after the Glorious Revolution. The most notable example would be the SPCK, which absorbed part of the Trust's remaining funds and continued to pour forth Protestant literature in Welsh and set up charity schools in Wales, especially in the market towns which the Welsh Trust once targeted.[69] While the SPCK had a tight grip on its exclusively Anglican membership, another religious movement, the societies for the reformation of manners, undoubtedly inherited the spirit of comprehension that characterised the Welsh Trust.[70] Tillotson, Patrick, Fowler and Stillingfleet were all prominent clerical supporters of this court-sponsored, laity-led reformation that embraced dissenting preachers and lay informers of

[66] Ibid. sig. A2r–v.

[67] Ibid. sig. A2v.

[68] Tim Harris, *Politics under the later Stuarts: party conflict in a divided society, 1660–1715*, London 1993, 117.

[69] Barry J. Lewis, Madeleine Gray, David Ceri Jones and D. Densil Morgan, *A history of Christianity in Wales*, Cardiff 2022, 224–9; Richard Suggett and Eryn White, 'Language, literacy, and aspects of identity in early modern Wales', in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The spoken word: oral culture in Britain, 1500–1850*, Manchester 2002, 68–9; Isabel Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the celestial city: dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical literary culture in England, 1720–1800*, Oxford 2018, ch ii.

[70] Craig Rose, 'Providence, Protestant union and godly reformation in the 1690s', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* iii (1993), 151–69; Brent S. Sirota, *The Christian monitors: the Church of England and the age of benevolence, 1680–1730*, New Haven 2014, ch ii.

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moral offences. Thomas Firmin, the Socinian philanthropist, was again a sponsor.[71] In this perspective, the Welsh Trust had left an indelible mark on the developments of post-revolutionary England, not only in the forms of toleration of Presbyterians and independents, anti-Catholicism and a strengthened parliament, but also similar Anglican-dissenter initiatives that aimed at a national revival of Protestant godliness.

[71] Andrew G. Craig, 'The movement for the reformation of manners, 1688–1715', unpubl. PhD diss. Edinburgh 1980, 57–60.

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