

Joy Rowe FSA, 1926–2020

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Joy Rowe, who died on 7 September 2020 at the age of 93, was a member of the Catholic Record Society from the 1950s and a distinguished historian of post-Reformation Catholicism in East Anglia.

Born Margaret Joyce Whale on 28 September 1926 (but always known as Joy), Joy studied for a Master's degree at the University of London, writing a thesis on medieval monasticism in southern Italy which was submitted in 1958. She obtained a job teaching History at the Convent of the Assumption at Hengrave Hall. However, Joy's marriage to Alan Rowe and subsequent move to a house near Bury St Edmunds, Ixworth Abbey, in 1962 caused her attention to turn to medieval history closer to home. At the same time Hengrave Hall—one of the great recusant houses of England—inspired an interest in post-Reformation Catholicism. Joy began restoring Ixworth Abbey, a small Augustinian priory founded by Gilbert le Blund in the twelfth century, and became an advocate for the restoration of historic buildings, serving for many years on the grants committee of the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust. Joy Rowe also worked for many years at the West Suffolk Record Office.

Joy's first major article was on the medieval hospitals of Bury St Edmunds, and in 1959 she wrote the first version of a history of post-Reformation Catholicism in Bury St Edmunds which drew on the surviving records of a parish founded as a Jesuit mission in the 1760s. Joy's historical interests were shared by the then parish priest, Fr Bryan Houghton, and the two collaborated on Fr Houghton's attempt to demonstrate the authenticity of supposed relics of St Edmund held at the Basilica of St Sernin in Toulouse, which Fr Houghton wanted translated to Bury St Edmunds. However, the introduction of the Ordinary Form of the Mass led Fr Houghton to resign in 1969. Joy found herself in a race to protect the parish's records from clergy less than eager to preserve the past; on one occasion she had to rescue the eighteenth-century parish registers from a wastepaper basket. These records she donated to the Suffolk Record Office.

Meanwhile, Joy had begun an academic collaboration with Patrick McGrath at the University of Bristol, with whom she co-authored five articles between 1960 and 1991. The most important of these was surely Rowe and McGrath's 1960 article on the Elizabethan recusant

Thomas Cornwallis.¹ This challenged the idea that recusancy meant marginalisation from society: Thomas Cornwallis of Brome became a highly influential figure who formed an alliance of convenience with Bishop Edmund Freke of Norwich against the appointment of Puritan clergy. Joy Rowe contributed a number of articles to *Recusant History* (as *British Catholic History* was then known),² and her work foreshadowed the revisionism of historians such as Michael Questier by emphasising the involvement and influence of Catholics in their local communities, especially in resisting Puritanism. The meticulous study of the local Catholic community was at the heart of Joy Rowe's work; she ensured that the history of Catholicism was represented in the historical atlases of Suffolk (1988) and Norfolk (1994), while her most important work was arguably undertaken in the late 1990s on the eighteenth-century Catholic community in Suffolk.

In 1996 Joy edited and published a manuscript of the 1767 returns of papists for the diocese of Norwich which, unlike the official document, included names as well as numbers of Catholics.³ This made it possible to trace the history of East Anglia's eighteenth-century Catholics in unprecedented detail. Then, in her 1998 chapter in Christopher Tyacke's book *England's Long Reformation* (1998) Joy did exactly that, putting forward a powerful case that Suffolk's Catholics functioned much like any other nonconformist sect in both rural and urban areas and were not, as the traditional historiography had it, mere dependents of the Catholic gentry.⁴ Through this work, Joy Rowe played a key role in the transformation of historiographical attitudes towards eighteenth-century English Catholicism, especially in the south of England.

Joy Rowe was a founding member of the Suffolk Records Society in 1957 and served on the Society's council until 2008, when she became a Vice-President. She was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 2002, and became a prolific contributor to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published from 2004 onwards. In 2016 Joy was the general editor of my edition of the papers of the Rookwood family

¹ J. Rowe, and P. McGrath, 'The Recusancy of Sir Thomas Cornwallis', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 28 (1960): 226–71.

² J. Rowe and P. McGrath, 'The Marian Priests under Elizabeth I', *Recusant History* 17:2 (1984): 103–20; J. Rowe and P. McGrath, 'Anstruther analysed: the Elizabethan Seminary Priests', *Recusant History* 18:1 (1986): 1–13; J. Rowe and P. McGrath, 'The Elizabethan Priests: their Harbours and Helpers', *Recusant History* 19:3 (1989): 209–33; J. Rowe and P. McGrath, 'The Imprisonment of Catholics for Religion under Elizabeth I', *Recusant History* 20:4 (1991): 415–35.

³ J. Rowe, 'The 1767 Census of Papists in the Diocese of Norwich: The Social Composition of the Roman Catholic Community' in David Chadd (ed.), *Religious Dissent in East Anglia III* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1996), 187–234.

⁴ J. Rowe, "'The Lopped Tree': The Re-formation of the Suffolk Catholic Community' in Nicholas Tyacke ed. *England's Long Reformation 1500–1800* (London: UCL Press, 1988), 167–94.

for the Suffolk Records Society and contributed a paper to a conference celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Diocese of East Anglia, as well as a chapter to a new diocesan history. The same year, surrounded by her family and friends, Joy Rowe celebrated her ninetieth birthday at Ixworth Abbey, where she was presented with a medal by the Diocese of East Anglia for her many years of transformative service to the history of post-Reformation Catholicism in Suffolk and Norfolk.