

Jacobitism. Importantly, Nolan's biography provides an example of how the lives and contributions of elite women can be recovered from the archives when their presence there is limited.

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T.A. Birrell, *Aspects of Recusant History*, eds. Jos Blom, Frans Korsten, Frans Blom, Abingdon, Routledge, 2021, pp. xiii, 236, ISBN, ISBN 9780367364434

Thomas Anthony Birrell played an important role in establishing the Catholic Record Society and in ensuring that the post-Reformation English Catholic experience was reflected in mainstream history. This edited volume of his essays ensures that his work is available in one collection, which is of value to historians and students of early modern England. Birrell's interests lay with the later seventeenth century, a period which often attracts less attention from scholars. This may account for the lack of prominence of many of these pieces in other contexts. Birrell's work raises a number of important questions in two broad categories: firstly in terms of the inclusion of the role of Catholic history in the wider context of national history and secondly in relation to the value of interdisciplinary study.

The volume's editors (Jos Blom, Frans Korsten, Frans Blom) have compiled several other texts relating Birrell's work other notable Catholic authors and bring this expertise to editing this volume. They provide a short preface which sets the scene for the book. The essays are presented in the order they were written, which reflects the presentation of this work as a biography of Birrell's academic career. The chapters vary in length and nature; for example, chapter four, 'English Catholics without a Bishop' is a substantial piece of work, and was originally an article in *Recusant History* in 1958; whereas other essays, for example chapter three are primarily extended book reviews. This is to be expected given the volume aims to bring together a corpus of Birrell's work, and the book reviews and some of the shorter articles at the close of the volume will be of interest to scholars focusing on the nature of book culture.

Birrell was Professor of English and America Literature and thus many of the essays reflect the cross-over between the literary and the historical. Modern readers will be familiar with interdisciplinary approach taken by Birrell. The fact that he felt the need to defend his choice to present Catholic history to literature students illustrates the challenges in successfully communicating the value of both interdisciplinary study and Catholic topics in 1950s academia. Birrell's work is very much a product of an era where a history of the Catholic experience had to justify itself and this does date the essays.

Such a robust defence of the value of including Catholics in the national story may not be necessary in the twenty-first century, but does serve to remind the reader that this was not always the case.

Given the diversity of topics covered in this volume and the varied natures of the chapters the focus here will be upon three substantial topics covered by Birrell: The Popish Plot, the period of English Catholic emancipation and English Catholic mystics. Chapters one and two were inaugural lectures to mark Birrell's appointment as Reader, and then Professor, at the University of Nijmegen. They focus on a varied range of literature and authorship. The first of the essays in the volume takes 'Catholic Allegiance and the Popish Plot' as its theme. Birrell argues that the plot was the result of an era of decadence and moral decay alongside an unscrupulous politician who sought to overthrow monarchical authority. The focus of the chapter is pamphleteering and the allegiance of the Catholic community in the later seventeenth century. Birrell examines the written works of three Catholic authors: the Earl of Castlemaine, Dom. James Corker and Fr John Warner. The second chapter looks at non-Catholic writers who will be well known to many readers — Sidney Smith, Shelley, Coleridge and Corbett — and examines their views on Catholic emancipation. He rightly points out that the Catholic question was a live debate and thus it is to be expected that prominent figures of the era would have an opinion on the topic, which makes this chapter in particular very relevant to literature and history scholars studying these well known writers. Chapter eight highlights the popularity of English Catholic mystics in the post Reformation era up to the twentieth century. It focuses on the recognizable works by medieval mystics (Walter Hilton, Dame Juliana and the anonymous *Cloud of Understanding*) and later mystical texts such as Benet Canfield's *The Rule of Perfection* in the sixteenth century. Birrell traces bibliographical patterns across the centuries to illustrate the influence of these medieval mystical writings on a variety of authors and makes interesting points about their use and misuse. Birrell suggests this essay will only be of use to students of comparative literature and the history of ideas, but historians of material culture and the written word are increasingly keen to track their sources. This chapter amply illustrates how access to a specific version of a text or translation, and the libraries which held them, shaped ideas across eras.

Birrell's style is often verbose which may not suit the modern reader. The concluding paragraphs of many of these chapters are revealing of his personal opinions. His work covers a long historical period, but of particular interest is his work on the Restoration and period of emancipation, which are less well trodden ground. His work on authorship and writers of the restoration era brings to light debates over Catholic loyalties in the early modern and modern era. These are live topics in

current scholarship as is the issue of Jesuit influence on the English Catholic experience. In the case of the latter, Birrell often alludes to disagreements over the role that Jesuits should or should not play in Catholic leadership in Britain, though does not always tackle this directly.

This volume contains several essays that are of interest to those with a specific interest in Catholic history and literary studies. They illustrate changing approaches to integrating the English Catholic story into mainstream historical writing. Although some of the more substantial essays have been published previously, it is useful to have these works compiled into one volume, offering the reader a chance to see the views of the author in the round. Birrell's work covered a great deal of ground, and it is only when these works are seen together that this becomes evident.

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W.M. Jacob, *Religious Vitality in Victorian London*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 368, £75, ISBN: 978-0-19-289740-4

Victorian London was a place of violent contrasts: a 'World City' where industrial and imperial wealth rubbed up against prostitution and poverty. Metropolitan sprawl was always a religious as much as a social problem: when the crusading journalist W.T. Stead labelled London a 'Modern Babylon' in 1885, he was drawing on a long tradition of evoking the moral decay beneath the urban glitz. Yet as W.M. Jacob reminds us in his new book, laments about the lapsed faith and loose morals of the masses were also calculated. Pious Jeremiahs wanted to be proven wrong: to inspire their hearers to redouble their efforts and to dip into their pockets. Judged in those terms, Jacob argues, they had tremendous success. Even a church in impoverished Paddington could in 1898 boast three curates and fifty-one district visitors; communicants' guilds; branches of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament; temperance organizations; boys', girls' infants' and Sunday schools; communicants' classes; Bible classes; debating clubs; sports clubs; a savings bank; a burial club; a goose club; a missionary association; an embroidery guild; a library; free meals; a choir school; and a penitentiary, many of these with separate women's and men's branches (p. 90). Hyperactive philanthropists also evolved associations to tackle a staggering array of specific problems: the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations; Boys' and Church Lads' Brigades; Christian Policemen's Association; Public House Brigade; League of the Cross; Bands of Hope; Cabmen's Shelter Fund; Diocesan Police Court Missioners; Bible Flower Mission; Blue Ribbon Army; White