

History For Schoolteachers:

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND*

THE 1980s are a boom period for historians of seventeenth-century England, but they must be trying times for those who teach the subject in schools. Indeed it would seem that the gap between Stuart history in university and school has never been wider. There are, of course, several reasons for this divergence. Part of the trouble is the escalating cost of the printed word, as schoolteachers are increasingly forced to rely on out-of-date texts and old, and equally obsolete, undergraduate lecture notes. Perhaps the average school library can survive without a copy of Michael MacDonald's fascinating book on madness in seventeenth-century England, *Mystical Bedlam*, which in 1981 was selling for about NZ\$90.00.¹ But when a vital book like Anthony Fletcher's *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Edward Arnold, London, 1981) is available only in hardback and retails in New Zealand for \$85.20, something is clearly very wrong, and the book's impact in schools is going to be somewhat limited. However, the main reason for the gulf between university and school — ironic, given the current price of books — is the recent deluge of monographs, texts, and articles on seventeenth-century topics. In an important annotated bibliography which was published in 1980, John Morrill listed 900 books and 500 articles dealing with Britain during the period 1603–1714; and this, it should be noted, was a 'considered selection'.² I have calculated that in the last decade (1974–84) at least 200 significant books have been published which cover various aspects of English history from 1603–1660 (this does not include articles in scholarly journals or important unpublished theses). If we include Ireland, Scotland and Wales and extend the time span to 1714, then the figure

* I am most grateful to Michael Belgrave, Raewyn Dalziel, Michael Graves, and Andrew Sharp for their constructive comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Although in this essay I tend to concentrate on material in book form, teachers are reminded that the journal articles to which I refer can also be obtained on interloan through the Public Library system.

1 Now available in paperback: published by Cambridge University Press.

2 J. S. Morrill, *Seventeenth Century Britain 1603–1714*, London, 1980.

would be closer to 300 volumes. Most of the best work in Stuart history is recent work. Of the various articles and books used in my own university paper on seventeenth-century England, over 80% appeared in or after 1974, and over half of these from 1980 onwards. Clearly the material used in the schools must be out of date.³

Over the last ten years historical writing on the seventeenth century has been transformed. Parameters of debate have shifted. The once-hallowed debate over the rise of the gentry can now be dismissed in a few lines,⁴ or recommended to those with an interest in historiography or a passion for blood-sports.⁵ Studies of the county and local communities have reached a previously unimaginable level of sophistication. We can now chart centuries of change in a village community, or illustrate economic and religious developments in a variety of English counties.⁶ Social history has gradually established itself. In fact, for the first time we have a magnificent social history textbook, Keith Wrightson's *English Society 1580-1680* (Hutchinson, London, 1982), a *tour de force*, which must be read, and read again, by every teacher of Tudor-Stuart history.⁷ As one of Britain's leading historians explained last year during a visit to this part of the world,⁸ it is now possible to deal with topics which are closer to people's experiences and interests than the traditional staple of parliaments, kings, and courtiers: the family,⁹ sex,¹⁰ crime,¹¹ attitudes to the environment,¹² popular literature,¹³ the life-situation of

3 I notice that 1974 is the most recent date on the reading list for the Tudor-Stuart paper in New Zealand University and Bursaries Entrance Scholarships.

4 'The result of a vast amount of study on the fortunes of the gentry has been to show that there were some rising gentry and some declining gentry, but that no general picture emerges': C. Russell, 'Introduction', in C. Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War*, London, 1975, p.6. See also, B. Coward, *The Stuart Age*, London, 1980, pp.40-41.

5 Morrill, p.116.

6 K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village. Terling, 1525-1700*, London, 1979; M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities. English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Cambridge, 1974; A. Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex 1600-1660*, London, 1975; P. Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640*, Hassocks, 1977; C. Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century Lincolnshire*, Lincoln, 1980; W. Hunt, *The Puritan Moment. The Coming of Revolution in an English County*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983.

7 Available in paperback.

8 'Interview with Keith Thomas', *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, 36 (Sept. 1983), pp.24-26.

9 A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, Cambridge, 1970; L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, Harmondsworth, 1979; M. Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1984.

10 Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*; G. R. Quaife, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives. Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England*, London, 1979.

11 J. S. Cockburn, ed., *Crime in England 1550-1800*, London, 1977; J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England: A County Study*, Cambridge, 1983.

12 K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, London, 1983.

13 B. Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press. English Almanacs 1500-1800*, London,

women.¹⁴ 'History from below' has also become a legitimate subject of enquiry. We now know a great deal about radical religious groups¹⁵ and social and political protest at the popular level in seventeenth-century England.¹⁶ After Brian Manning's *The English People and the English Revolution 1640-1649* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978), there is no excuse for neglecting the role of pressure from below in the events of the early 1640s.

So the ground rules are changing; but even the more traditional concerns of Stuart history are in the midst of tremendous change. The new war-cry is 'revisionism'.

Revisionism has made its greatest impact on the historiography of English parliaments, where it has forced historians to rethink the role and significance of Lords and Commons in Stuart politics. It can be seen at its brilliant best in the work of Conrad Russell, at its justly-pilloried worst in the work of J. E. Farnell.¹⁷ As Russell wrote in 1976 in a seminal article, revisionism is essentially an attack on what 'Every schoolboy knows': 'that Parliament was growing more powerful in the early Stuart period, and that it was divided into supporters of "government" and "opposition".' These two beliefs 'are false', Russell continues, 'Before 1640, Parliament was not powerful, and it did not contain an "opposition".'¹⁸ It is impossible here to go into the finer points of the revisionist position, but its theses can be summarized quite briefly.

First, as Russell states in the quotation above, it is wrong to talk of an 'opposition' in parliament in the sense of a coherent group or party. One cannot divide parliament into 'two sides', 'government' and 'opposition'. 'Even the impeachment of Buckingham was not a confrontation between "government" and "opposition": it was a confrontation between two groups within the Council, in which both sides enjoyed support within the Lords and the Commons, but the less influential

1979; M. Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories. Popular fiction and its readership in seventeenth-century England*, London, 1981.

14 A. Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, 1982; A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1982 (reprint of the 1919 classic); H. Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth Century English Feminists*, Urbana, 1982.

15 C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, Harmondsworth, 1975; J. F. McGregor and B. Reay, eds., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, Oxford, 1984.

16 B. Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority. Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660*, Berkeley, 1980; K. Lindley, *Fenland Riots and the English Revolution*, London, 1982; P. Slack, ed., *Rebellion, Popular Protest and the Social Order in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 1984.

17 For the latest chapter in the controversy, with a bibliographical guide (pp.181-82) to the basic literature, see C. Russell, 'The Nature of a Parliament in Early Stuart England', in H. Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War*, Macmillan, London, 1983; an essential revisionist text, available in paperback.

18 C. Russell, 'Parliamentary History in Perspective, 1604-1629', *History*, LXI (1976), p.3.

group in the Council enjoyed majority support in the Commons.'¹⁹ The simple dichotomy between court and country, once so influential, of two parties lined up, one against the other, has been shot to pieces by Derek Hirst and Russell²⁰ (although in terms of culture and sentiment, the descriptions 'court' and 'country' still retain some value²¹). Members of the Commons had a foot in both camps, so to speak. They depended on the favour of both court and country. So we should think more in terms of overlap. Members of the Commons were 'not free agents, voting at their own whim: they were painfully aware of their need to preserve favour, both at court and in the country. . . . To ask an ambitious politician to choose between permanent allegiance to court or to country would have been to ask him to choose between alternative methods of political suicide.'²²

Second, parliaments were there to 'do the king's business'. 'Kings called parliaments for their own advantage or not at all.' Parliament was not made up of Lords and Commons: it was Lords and Commons *and King*. 'Parliament might best be described as a sounding board, for it resonated the monarch's will among the estates of the realm. Like the sounding board, its function was to amplify and enhance, to offer counsel and reason to bolster that preached by the monarch's permanent advisers.' Parliaments were also, in Geoffrey Elton's much-quoted phrase, 'points of contact' between ruler and ruled. They were not rivals to kings. In keeping with normative ideology, the doctrine of 'the great chain of being', parliament and monarch were interdependent. Until well into the 1640s, according to Mark Kishlansky, the keynote of parliaments was consensus rather than adversary politics.²³

Third, parliaments were weak, 'occasional and short-term assemblies', occupying about four of the thirty-seven years of Stuart rule between 1603 and 1640. A parliament 'was an event and not an institution'. The House of Commons was aware of its own corporate fragility and of the reality that in terms of power a Member of Parliament ranked below a Deputy Lieutenant and (perhaps) a Justice of the Peace. In effect, being an M.P. was a part-time job. Parliament was a relatively weak body which did not use its power of supply as a means of securing redress of grievances, and which in any case was unable to offer the amount of revenue required by the hungry Stuart state (the entire revenue from

19 Russell, 'Parliamentary History', pp.3, 18.

20 C. Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics 1621-1629*, Oxford, 1979, pp.5-26 (now in paperback); D. Hirst, 'Court, Country, and Politics before 1629', in K. Sharpe, ed., *Faction and Parliament*, Oxford, 1978.

21 P. W. Thomas, 'Two Cultures? Court and Country under Charles I', in Russell, ed., *Origins*; R. Ashton, *The English Civil War*, London, 1978, pp.21-42.

22 Russell, *Parliaments*, p.18.

23 Russell, 'Nature of a Parliament', pp.124, 130-32; M. Kishlansky, 'The Emergence of Adversary Politics in the Long Parliament', *Journal of Modern History*, XLIX (1977), pp.618-19.

England, it was alleged at one point, was less than that demanded from Normandy by the French monarch).²⁴

Fourth, one should put the business of parliaments into a correct perspective. Much of it was mundane, reflecting personal or local interests and preoccupations: a bill for an exchange of lands between Trinity College, Cambridge, and Sir Thomas Manson; whether Oxford or Cambridge should be mentioned first; the matters of the dredging of the River Ouse and Rye's desire for control of the Dungeness lighthouse. M.P.s were at Westminster to attend to these matters. Such 'little businesses' were the stuff of parliaments. Members did not come to London 'to move the pieces on a constitutional chess-board'.²⁵ Indeed Russell argues for the strength of localism in the history of early Stuart parliaments. Members of the House of Commons put their counties before the nation, again and again. Fear of the reaction of their electorates undermined their contribution to the making of foreign policy, for underneath the imperialist Protestant rhetoric of M.P.s lay their basic reluctance to make their counties pay for war.²⁶

Fifth, the Lords have been shamefully neglected. Apart from acting in their own institutional right, peers in the Privy Council and the Upper House pulled strings in the Commons. Patronage, aristocratic (i.e. noble) manipulation of clients in the Lower House, are all-important in the more extreme revisionist schema. For Farnell and Christianson, the Civil War begins as an aristocratic revolt: 'Despite appearances to the contrary [?], early seventeenth-century Parliaments were the instrument of revived aristocratic power.'²⁷

Sixth, ideology, principle, 'grand constitutional endeavour', have been much exaggerated in traditionalist accounts of parliamentary conflict. Here, although the drift of his argument is essentially the same, the emphasis of Russell is different to that of some of the other revisionists. Russell by no means denies ideological or constitutional conflict, he argues rather that such disharmony was atypical and was provoked, predominantly, by the strains of war. The Parliament of 1628-9 was greatly exercised about issues of liberty and the source of authority: it stands in contrast, however, to the relative quietism of the parliaments of 1621-5.²⁸ Revisionists argue that we should think more in terms of personal ambition, faction, struggles for power between competing cliques,

24 Russell, 'Nature of a Parliament', pp.136-37, 141; J. H. Hexter, 'The Early Stuarts and Parliament', *Parliamentary History*, I (1982), p.212; Russell, *Parliaments*, pp.3, 49; Russell, 'Parliamentary History'.

25 Russell, 'Nature of a Parliament', p.131; Russell, *Parliaments*, pp.7, 35, 37, 93.

26 Russell, *Parliaments*, pp.8, 81, 179, and *passim*.

27 P. Christianson, 'The Peers, the People, and Parliamentary Management in the First Six Months of the Long Parliament', and J. E. Farnell, 'The Social and Intellectual Basis of London's Role in the English Civil Wars', *Journal of Modern History*, XLIX (1977) (pp.643-44, for the quotation).

28 Russell, *Parliaments*.

than issues of English liberty. In Kevin Sharpe's classic phrase, it was 'personalities', not 'issues', that were a problem.²⁹

Seventh, and this follows from the preceding, the traditional (Whig) view is a mirage; there was no snowballing of parliamentary power from 1604 to 1642. The distrust and opposition during 1628 was unusual, and, Russell suggests, alienation was not intense enough to 'last unbroken' through the years without parliament, until 1640.³⁰

There is a certain irony in the fact that a vast literature on the history of parliaments is being spawned from the basic notion that parliaments were not central to events in the early seventeenth (and sixteenth) centuries. However, the revisionist assault has not been limited to Stuart parliaments. One now looks back with nostalgia to that golden age when the issues seemed so straightforward; the age of Lawrence Stone's *The causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642* (1972). It was then quite clear that in the seventeenth century (and in the sixteenth century too) parliament had been increasing in power and confidence, struggling for liberty, providing an 'institutional base' for deliberate challenges to the Crown, for the 'rise of opposition as a self-conscious political force'. It was clear that Puritanism was likewise engaged in opposition, likewise struggling for liberty. As Stone put it, 'A true revolution needs ideas to fuel it'. Puritanism 'provided an essential element in the Revolution [he is writing here in the section on preconditions to revolution, long term factors from 1529-1629], a feeling of certainty in the rectitude of the opposition cause, and of moral indignation at the wickedness of the established authorities. It also helped to construct the theoretical justification for a challenge to the existing order.' Nor was there much doubt that Charles I had botched things terribly in the 'eleven years tyranny' from 1629 to 1640, Stone's precipitants of revolution. In short, the tensions and events of the first four decades of the seventeenth century moved resolutely, if not inexorably, to the conflicts and triumphs of the 1640s.³¹

But, as we have seen, it now appears that parliaments were relatively unimportant during the early seventeenth century, were not increasing in power, and did not contain 'an opposition'. Puritanism — if indeed it has any meaning or coherence as a term — was a pretty conservative force which enjoyed a fairly unruffled existence in the Church of England until the ascendancy of Laud in the 1630s.³² In other words, as Elton warned many years ago, there never was either a parliamentary or

29 K. Sharpe, 'The Earl of Arundel, his Circle and the Opposition to the Duke of Buckingham, 1618-1628', in Sharpe, ed., *Faction*, p.244; J. Morrill and K. Sharpe, 'The Centre and the Provinces 1603-1640' (Sussex Tapes, 1980).

30 Russell, *Parliaments*, pp.419-20, 423-26.

31 L. Stone, *The causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642*, London, 1972, pp.91-94, 98, 100.

32 P. Collinson, 'The Jacobean Religious Settlement', in Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War*; P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, Oxford, 1982; N. Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', in Russell, ed., *Origins*.

Puritan 'high road to Civil War'. Charles, it also appears, was doing an admirable job during the 'Personal Rule' of 1629-40.³³ England was closer to revolution at the end of the sixteenth century than it was in the mid seventeenth century.³⁴ When it came, civil war was 'a most surprising and unintended catastrophe', wanted by no-one. The prevailing sentiment in the provinces in the early 1640s — and in Parliament too, according to Russell³⁵ — was neutralist. Whereas Stone had written of opposition to Charles I in terms of a revolutionary impulse, the theme of Robert Ashton and John Morrill is one of a conservative, provincial gentry, dragged reluctantly into a conflict which few wanted. Opposition to Charles is conservative, 'reacting against the innovative administrative, fiscal, religious and cultural policies' of Charles I.³⁶ Hence the subtitle of Ashton's book: *Conservatism and Revolution*. It is indeed an upside down world: Charles and his Archbishop of Canterbury, it now appears, were the real revolutionaries! There is also a tendency for this current brand of historiography to stress short-term factors when accounting for the English Civil War: 1629-40 (Stone's precipitants), or 1640-2 (Stone's triggers), rather than Stone's longer term structural changes (his preconditions). The accidental is all-important; 'the civil war was essentially "an accidental war"'.³⁷ That is, of course, if revisionists feel the need to explain *causes*. For purists should push those awkward years from 1642 to 1660 out of mind when they research the early Stuart period so that they will not distort the 'true' historical situation: in response to revisionism, the title of the Oxford and Cambridge Board's 'A' level paper 'The Causes of the English Civil War, 1603-42' has become 'Politics, Religion and Society in England, 1603-42'.³⁸

Admittedly what I present is something of a pastiche. Yet it does capture the logic of what is rapidly becoming enshrined as current orthodoxy. We can capture the impulse in the waking dreams of one of revisionism's young Turks, Kevin Sharpe, as he misquotes wildly in the *New York Review of Books*: 'The civil war did not arise, inevitably, from any fundamental social, economic, religious or even political cleavage within local society. It was an artificial insemination of violence into the local community.'³⁹

33 K. Sharpe, 'The Personal Rule of Charles I', in Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War*.

34 J. Morrill, 'Introduction', in Morrill, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.3; another revisionist text, available in paperback.

35 Russell, *Parliaments*, p.430.

36 H. Tomlinson, 'Introduction', in Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War*, p.5; Ashton, *English Civil War*, p.20; Morrill, 'Introduction', p.1.

37 H. Tomlinson, 'The Causes of War', in Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War*, p.24.

38 *ibid.*, 'Preface', and p.1.

39 K. Sharpe, 'An Unwanted Civil War?', *New York Review of Books*, 2 December 1982, p.45, quoting R. Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort, 1642-1646*, London, 1982. Hutton actually said: 'In what were to become the Royalist areas of England and Wales, the Civil War did not arise, inevitably, from. . . .' (p.201) (emphasis is mine).

Revisionism is not without its problems, and critics have been quick on the counter-attack.⁴⁰ They concede that the revisionists have performed a valuable service in dispelling simplistic notions of the historical inevitability of conflict in the seventeenth century, and of the evolution of parliament. They agree that it is important to put parliamentary politics into perspective with reminders about the humdrum nature of most parliamentary business and the fact that being an M.P. was only a part-time occupation. They agree that it is wrong to neglect faction and the role and power of the aristocracy. Most critics of revisionism would acknowledge the importance of war in forcing administrative breakdown in 1626–8 and 1640–2, and the strength of neutralist feeling, even then. But, they argue, revisionism has only revised; it has not overturned. Teachers may have to stock up on red ink: they should not rush off to shred their copies of Stone's *Causes*.

As far as parliamentary history is concerned, the major weakness of revisionism is its denial of ideology. In their rush to wipe the slate clean, many revisionists have ended up with an account of the early seventeenth century which comes close to ignoring matters of constitutional principle, issues of rights and liberties. There were long debates in 1610 and 1614 on constitutional questions. Contemporaries did argue about the royal prerogative. M.P.s were not silent. 'The prerogatives of princes may easily and do daily grow; the privileges of the subject are for the most part at an everlasting stand' (*Apology*, 1604). 'Nay, so do our impositions daily increase in England as it is come to be almost a tyrannical government in England' (Commons Proceedings, 1614). 'The prerogatives of the King grow daily; liberties of the subject are at a stand; and if they be once lost are hardly to be recovered' (John Pym's Diary, 1621).⁴¹ They did not argue about the *locus* of power (J. H. Hexter has explained) but about the 'bounds of political authority'. The issue was whether the royal prerogative was encroaching on the liberties of the king's subjects.⁴²

Nor was the House of Commons the cipher that the revisionists imply. If it was, Theodore Rabb asks, then why did kings bother with it? 'When M.P.s spoke such reverberating words as [Sir John] Eliot's in 1624, "This is the place where the corruptions of judges are punished, and where such sponges of the state are squeezed"', they reflected common assumptions about parliamentary power. . . . The fact that the Commons could vote a subsidy before grievances were heard reflected, not

40 J. H. Hexter, 'Power Struggle, Parliament, and Liberty in Early Stuart England', and D. Hirst, 'Unanimity in the Commons, Aristocratic Intrigues, and the Origins of the English Civil War', *Journal of Modern History*, L (1978); Hexter, 'Early Stuarts and Parliament'; T. K. Rabb, 'The Role of the Commons', D. Hirst, 'The Place of Principle', and C. Hill, 'Parliament and People', *Past and Present*, 92 (1981).

41 D. Hirst, 'Parliament, Law and War in the 1620s', *Historical Journal*, XXIII (1980), p.457; Hexter, 'Power Struggle', pp.37, 40; Hirst, 'Place of Principle', p.89.

42 Hexter, 'Early Stuarts and Parliament', pp.207–8.

their impotence, but their knowledge that that was not the end of their role in national affairs.'⁴³ Sir Richard Grosvenor, Cheshire J.P. and M.P., extolled the power of the monarchy, but he also extolled the powers of parliament, 'the most honourable and highest court of the kingdome, having an absolute jurisdiction and an unlimited power to dispose of the lives, limms, states, goods, honours and liberties of the subject, yea and of their religion too, soe farr forth as concerneth the free publique and outward profession thereof.' The Canterbury M.P. Thomas Scott thought that 'the Parliament, State and subordinate Princes & Magistrates are noe lesse gods ordinance then the Souveraigne Magistrate; if hee will not, they ought to doe Justice'.⁴⁴

There was not *an* opposition in early Stuart parliaments, yet there was certainly opposition to the government of the Stuarts: to monopolies and impositions, to the monarchs' foreign and religious policies, even if it was in the name of opposition to evil councillors and popish advisers.⁴⁵ M.P.s co-ordinated on important issues; they met in 'secret and privy conventicles and conferences, wherein they devised and set down special plots, for the carrying of business in the House according to their own humour and drift'. The Earl of Northampton spoke of an M.P. who 'opposed' James 'so powerfully in the parliament'. According to the historian William Hunt, who has done extensive work on Essex M.P.s, there are signs in 1624 that 'the godly leaders of Parliament were developing into something like a party'. To paraphrase Rabb, is there a better term than 'opposition' to describe all this, provided we use the word with caution?⁴⁶

Finally, we should not assume that a link between a peer and a member of the Lower House automatically denotes control of the latter by the former. The work of Hirst and Russell (and here it is possible to turn revisionist against revisionist) suggests that, on the contrary, M.P.s were increasingly at the mercy of their electorates rather than their patrons.⁴⁷ Farnell and Christianson have got things horribly wrong.

Revisionism is implicitly conservative, explicitly anti-determinist. Revisionists operate as a kind of empiricist hit squad, sniping at reconstructed-Whig and Marxist targets. The result, as their critics have pointed out, is 'an atomization of history', history becomes a list of 'negative

43 Rabb, 'Role of the Commons', p.63.

44 R. Cust and P. Lake, 'Sir Richard Grosvenor and the Rhetoric of Magistracy', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, LIV (1981), p.46; P. Clark, 'Thomas Scott and the Growth of Urban Opposition to the Early Stuart Regime', *Historical Journal*, XXI (1978), pp.18-19.

45 See Clark, 'Thomas Scott'; P. G. Lake, 'Constitutional Consensus and Puritan Opposition in the 1620s', *Historical Journal*, XXV (1982).

46 Hunt, *Puritan Moment*, p.180; Rabb, 'Role of the Commons', pp.65-67.

47 Hill, *Parliament and People*, pp.106-7; Rabb, 'Role of the Commons', pp.72-74; Russell, *Parliaments*, pp.167, 181; D. Hirst, *The Representative of the People?*, Cambridge, 1975, pp.178-88.

assertions'.⁴⁸ As yet, there is no revisionist synthesis capable of replacing older interpretations of early Stuart history. In fact revisionists have been so busy dismissing class and ideological conflict, denying divisions between king and parliament, and 'celebrating the more conservative elements of the seventeenth-century heritage'⁴⁹ — for the 1600s, the 1620s, the 1630s — that they have suddenly found themselves at 1640, having shown that the condition of England in 1640 was far from being pre-revolutionary! So what can they say? Civil war 'came out of a clear sky'? 'If we are seeking explanations of the English Civil War in terms of a clash between crown and parliament we must seek them after 1640'?⁵⁰ For indeed they are not left with much: only the inadequacies of Charles I — for Morrill but not for Sharpe — and religious conflict — but only because of the ascendancy of Laud and Arminianism in the 1630s.

In short, many revisionists have painted themselves into a corner if they wish to explain the origins and causes of the English Revolution. They have either to prove that the episode never happened, or they have to concentrate on the events of 1640–2. Yet Anthony Fletcher's detailed account of 1640–2, acceptable to revisionists because it concentrates on those two years, and acceptable to non-revisionists for reasons which will immediately become clear, shows that civil war began amidst a welter of conflicts and crises. The impact of events in Scotland and Ireland, fear of popery, religious divisions, economic crisis, social conflict, tensions between court, Parliament, City and country, and personality and blunder: all were important. Barring the accidental, and allowing for the fact that events gather their own momentum and distrust breeds distrust, not one of the 'factors', issues, or conflicts just mentioned arose out of thin air in 1640. All need to be set in historical context. To do that we need to go back, beyond 1640 and even before 1625!

This sounds as though we have come full circle, but thankfully this is not the case. Like Christopher Hill, I believe that we are moving towards a new synthesis. In William Hunt's elegant new book *The Puritan Moment* we can catch a glimpse — for one county, Essex — of what this synthesis might look like.⁵¹ Hunt's book is Tudor–Stuart history at its best; a skilful combination of social, local, parliamentary, ecclesiastical and cultural history; a history of a county community's impact on national politics; a history of the gentry which does not ignore those below them in the social scale.

It is now virtually possible to predict the directions which future work will take. Brian Manning has shown the importance of popular agitation in the 1640s, how it forced the tempo of revolution as it would in France

48 Rabb, 'Role of the Commons', p.76; M. Fulbrook, 'The English Revolution and the revisionist revolt', *Social History*, VII (1982), p.261.

49 Fulbrook, 'English Revolution', p.261.

50 Morrill and Sharpe, 'Centre and the Provinces'.

51 Soon to be released in paperback.

a century later, and how it terrified many of England's ruling class, forcing together (in reaction) a royalist party, a party of order which stood for the preservation of hierarchy and stability in church and state.⁵² Popular participation in politics pre-dated the Revolution, however. Hirst has argued persuasively that because of variations in the franchise and the effects of inflation on property qualifications, probably from 27 to 40% of the adult male population had the vote by the middle of the seventeenth century. Elections were increasingly contested in the period up to 1640. 'What we find is an electorate which was gradually coming to think in terms of national issues, and an elite which was prepared to accept this and appeal to it (no doubt for self-interested reasons) in those terms. . . . the gentry and the corporations were not the sole force in politics even before the polarisation and propaganda campaign of 1641-2 took place.'⁵³ There will now be more willingness to look to those below the peerage and gentry for the origins of the conflict of the 1640s.

It is also clear that religion is about to make something of a comeback. Religion was the great issue in contested elections up to 1640. Again and again it was felt that Protestantism was under threat, that the court was leading the nation towards popery. This conviction that there was 'some great design in hand by the papists to subvert and overthrow this kingdom' intensified in the 1630s with the counter-reforming policies of Laud, and mobilized the nation in the early 1640s.⁵⁴ It was the question of the fate of episcopacy, combined with the wider issue of church reform, which helped to polarize the country in 1642. Militant Protestantism, in the words of Hunt, 'gave rebellion its cultural validation': 'Oh, let us set God on work this day, to destroy the implacable enemies of his church. . . . Arise oh Lord and confound antichrist, and build the walls of Jerusalem!'⁵⁵ John Morrill has recently abandoned localism for religion. 'The civil war was not a clash of social groups: it was the result of an incompetent kingship which allowed religious militants to settle their disputes about the nature of the church, and therefore of different concepts of the moral order, to fight it out. It was the last and greatest of Europe's Wars of Religion.'⁵⁶

Finally, David Underdown seems to be on the point of combining the two tendencies which I have just been discussing: 'history from below' and the 'religious factor'. Hunt and Keith Wrightson have argued that population growth and inflation in early modern England produced a polarization of society between the 'better' or 'middling sort' (prosperous yeomen, substantial tradesmen and artisans) and the poor. Puritanism appealed

52 Manning, *English People and the English Revolution*.

53 Hirst, *Representative of the People?*, pp.105, 139, 153.

54 See C. Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot*, Chapel Hill, 1983 (an important book).

55 For the above, see B. Reay, 'Radicalism and Religion in the English Revolution', in McGregor and Reay, eds., *Radical Religion*, pp.1-3.

56 J. Morrill, 'What was the English Revolution?', *History Today*, XXXIV (March 1984), p.15.

below the level of the gentry to these parochial elites, and it did so as an ideology of discipline, hostile to the old festive culture, to the world of Maypoles and alehouses. With its emphasis on order, discipline and godly reformation, its simple division of humankind into the elect few and the reprobate many, Puritanism held attractions for those masters and employers who were busily distancing themselves from the culture of the poor.⁵⁷ Underdown builds on the work of Hunt and Wrightson, and seeks the origins of the English Revolution in this moral and social polarization: 'politics and religion are part of culture, and this was a cultural as well as a political revolution: an attempt by the Puritan gentry and middling sort to impose their conception of godly order on the rest of the nation.'⁵⁸ As Fletcher has pointed out, the main problem with this sort of interpretation is actually establishing links between the activities and actions of village elites and politics at a national level.⁵⁹ Underdown has yet to provide us with detailed argument; but the drift of his thesis is clear enough.

I began this article by discussing the tremendous chasm between university and school. Obviously it is the textbook which must bridge the gap between academic research and teaching in the universities and history as it is taught in schools, and which can also (along with exams and the Examiners' Reports) give a syllabus a nudge in a new direction. Here teachers are surprisingly well served and will be even better served when Derek Hirst's *Authority and Conflict: England 1603-1658* (Edward Arnold, London, paperback) is finally published. I have already referred to Keith Wrightson's *English Society* which, as I said, is essential reading, and will give teachers some idea of the direction in which New Zealand's seventh form English history syllabus should be heading. Then there is D. M. Palliser's *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors 1547-1603* (Longman, London, 1983), and B. Coward's, *The Stuart Age. A history of England 1603-1714* (Longman, London, 1980), two extremely readable and competent texts, both in paperback, which together provide an excellent combination of social, economic and political history for the period covered by the syllabus. These books, combined with P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 1976) and D. C. Coleman, *The Economy of England 1450-1750* (Oxford University Press, 1977, 1982), both also in paperback, could help teachers overcome their weaknesses in the social and economic section of the course, which were noted by the Examiners for 1983. Other recent paperbacks — J. Morrill, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642-1649* (Macmillan, London, 1982), T. Barnard, *The English Republic 1649-1660* (Longman, London, 1982), and A. Sharp, *Political ideas of the*

57 Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*; Wrightson, *English Society*; Hunt, *Puritan Moment*.

58 D. Underdown, 'What was the English Revolution?', *History Today*, XXXIV (March 1984), p.23.

59 A. Fletcher, 'Parliament and People', *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), pp.151-52.

English civil wars 1641-1649 (Longman, London, 1983), a good collection of documents with an excellent introduction — should help to counteract another of the Examiners' criticisms: lack of knowledge of the period 1640-1660. And, hot off the press, there is M. A. R. Graves and R. H. Silcock, *Revolution, Reaction and the Triumph of Conservatism. English History 1558-1700* (Longman Paul, Auckland, 1984) (paperback), sound on religion in Tudor-Stuart England, extremely good on government and parliament.

Triumph of Conservatism has been written specifically for those teaching and sitting the New Zealand University Bursaries and Entrance Scholarships, and, overall, Graves and Silcock have done an admirable job: *Triumph of Conservatism* is bound to be of inestimable value to New Zealand teachers. The book has flaws — it would be unusual if it did not. But they are the flaws of the syllabus. So I want to conclude by using *Triumph of Conservatism* as an entry to a few brief (and necessarily personal) comments on the syllabus.

There are two main weaknesses in the syllabus — one of structure, the other of content — and both are highlighted by *Triumph of Conservatism*. The 'thematic' approach is a major weakness: social and economic structure, problems of government, religion, parliament. At first sight this may seem fine; it is important to isolate and discuss themes. Palliser's *Age of Elizabeth* is thematic, and he carries it off convincingly. However Palliser is writing social and economic history. The problem with Graves and Silcock is that they are writing fairly conventional narrative history which they then break up thematically. So we learn about the 1630s in chapter 3, chapter 5 and chapter 7 (the last chapter); in between, we are told about religion and parliament in the sixteenth century. In other words (to continue with the same example), if we are trying to grasp the background to the English Civil War we are faced with a disjointed, compartmentalized view of history, and no amount of cross-referencing will overcome this problem.⁶⁰ It is one thing for teachers and students to approach the history of sixteenth and seventeenth century England and make thematic connections: it is quite another thing for them to have history served in vertical slices.

The other significant weakness lies with the choice (or rather the omission) of 'themes'. There is little evidence yet of any impact by the secondary sources which contributed to the making of Wrightson's *tour de force*, the kinds of history I touched on at the beginning of this paper.⁶¹ It is not just social history that is absent from the syllabus and *Triumph of Conservatism*. There is also a complete lack of anything on the history of culture or intellectual developments;⁶² nothing, for

60 For a perfect illustration (for the 1620s) of the ways in which such 'themes' were almost inextricably bound together, see Lake, 'Constitutional Consensus'.

61 The examples that I provided in footnotes 6-16 were confined to *recent books*; but I could have provided many other references to articles in scholarly journals.

62 See C. Patrides and R. B. Waddington, eds., *The Age of Milton*, Manchester, 1980:

example, on literacy and education,⁶³ the history of science,⁶⁴ political thought,⁶⁵ or on what the French call *mentalités*.⁶⁶ (All of which find a place in Coward and Palliser, incidentally.) It shocked me last year when I discovered that in New Zealand there were teachers of Tudor–Stuart history who had not heard of Keith Thomas, author of *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, and Penguin, 1971, 1973, 1978 etc.), one of the most respected and influential history books written this century. It would be sad if this state of affairs was to continue for much longer.

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chapters by Woolrych on political theory, Charlton on education, Mintz on the intellectual and philosophical background, Rattansi on science (available in paperback).

63 R. O'Day, *Education and Society 1500–1800*, London, 1982 (paperback); D. Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, Cambridge, 1980.

64 M. Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England*, Cambridge, 1981; P. M. Harman, *The Scientific Revolution*, London, 1983 (both in paperback).

65 See the introduction and reading guide in Andrew Sharp's *Political ideas of the English civil wars*.

66 MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.