**Church and People in Interregnum Britain**. Edited by Fiona McCall. London, University of London Press/Royal Historical Society, 2021. xvi, + 300 pp. ISBN Hardback 978-1-912702-64-0 (hardback) £40. 978-1-912702-65-7 (paperback) £25. 978-1-912702-68-8 (epub) £5. 978-1-912702-67-1 (Kindle) £5; 978-1-912702-66-4 (pdf).

As is well known, key features of the established Church of England were dismantled during the English Revolution of the 1640s: its service book was banned in 1645; episcopacy abolished in 1646; cathedrals in 1649; many of its festivals, most notably Christmas, outlawed; and around 3,000 of its clergy ousted from their livings. What remained, after attempts at a national Presbyterian church akin to the Scottish kirk faltered, was a loose established church structure commonly known by historians as the Cromwellian Church (or churches, to emphasise its diversity) but which contemporaries thought of as ‘the public profession of these nations’.[[1]](#footnote-1) The ‘Church’ of the title of this collection of essays is both the continuing elements of the pre-1640 Church of England (which resurfaced in 1660-2 at the Restoration), and its Cromwellian replacement, what the Victorian historian William Shaw called ‘all the confusion in religious affairs during the years 1648-60’.[[2]](#footnote-2) Not covered here is the multiplicity of gathered congregations (Baptists, Quakers, Seekers, Ranters, Muggletonians, and the like) that flourished in England in the 1640s and ’50s. The ‘People’ of the title are predominantly (though by no means exclusively) the clergy. And ‘Britain’ is overwhelmingly represented by southern England (two of the ten chapters focus on Sussex, one on Dorset, and one on a slice of the South from Bristol to the Isle of Wight) as the volume shows its roots in a 2016 conference at the University of Portsmouth. One contribution examines Wales (principally its north east), while Scotland is represented by Alfred Johnson’s essay on the kirk sessions of Ayr. Readers of *Midland History* may note the final essay on the clergy of Warwickshire, by Maureen Harris.

While the volume’s key aim, as outlined by Bernard Capp in the introduction, is ‘to shed light on the still shadowy world of the interregnum church, primarily the established Church in its 1650s incarnation’ (p. 1), much of its attention will be familiar to students of episcopalian Anglicanism for whom that 1650s incarnation is usually seen as a cul-de-sac if not a monstrous birth, or the time of trial from which ‘Anglicanism’ was born. Hence the recurrent theme in several chapters on the sufferings of ejected clergy, though Harris widens that focus to suggest the similarities of experience between clergy ejected in the 1640s and ’50s for Royalism and episcopalianism, and those cast out in 1660-2 for Parliamentarianism and dissent, as well as the common tribulations of those who remained in their livings throughout the period and those put into newly vacated ones at the Restoration.

This volume extends and deepens rather than challenges the existing picture of religion in the 1650s, mostly by offering detailed local case studies of particular places. Hence the depiction of some successes but many failures of godly reformation established by Bernard Capp’s standard work,[[3]](#footnote-3) which he summarises in his introduction to this volume, is emphasised in a number of these essays, while the experience of episcopalian and ejected clergy, known at a national level from a number of studies including Fiona McCall’s work,[[4]](#footnote-4) is given local colour and depth in essays by Trixie Gadd, Helen Whittle, Maureen Harris, and Sarah Ward Clavier on, respectively, Dorset, Sussex, Warwickshire, and Wales. A second way in which the volume adds to the current picture is through the exploration of little used sources. Ecclesiastical change in the 1640s meant the disappearance of or change to the standard range of sources used by historians of the local church: bishops’ transcripts and glebe terriers were no longer compiled; visitation and its records ceased; consistory courts were abolished; parish registers often exhibit notable gaps, and their format was meant to change from 1653. One theme of these essays, therefore, is how new sources and those little exploited for the religious history of the 1650s, can be used to explore church history. Alex Craven examines the church surveys of the 1650s (found in Lambeth Palace Library and among the Chancery papers of the National Archives). Fiona McCall looks at quarter sessions records to analyse how the policing of many religious offences such as pew disputes, swearing, and Sabbath observance, was taken on by justices of the peace. Rosalind Johnson uses churchwardens’ accounts to consider continuities from pre-1640 customs such as festal communion. Rebecca Warren analyses Oliver Cromwell’s ecclesiastical patronage from the records of the Triers, finding that not only was he the ‘single most powerful ecclesiastical patron in the history of the post-Reformation English Church’ (p. 65), he also promoted a broad range of godly ministers, two-thirds of whom continued to serve in parishes after 1660, thereby helping to shape the character of the Restoration Church of England. If an overall picture of 1650s religion emerges from these ten essays, it is of diversity, what Capp here calls a ‘bewildering patchwork’ (p. 14).

In exploring new and little-used sources, and in modelling local, regional, or county-based studies of 1650s religion, the volume offers inspiration to regional and local historians of the Midlands. That is particularly the case for Andrew Foster’s essay, a self-conscious call to arms to local historians, with a series of questions from what happened to parish records (including parish registers and churchwardens’ accounts), to the fate of parish clergy and officials, and how disruptive the institutional, liturgical, and personnel changes were for ordinary parishioners. It is a challenge that could be further explored across the Midlands.

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1. Ann Hughes, ‘The Cromwellian Church’, in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I: Reformation and Identity, c.1520-1662* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 444-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. W.A. Shaw, A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth, 1640-1660 (2 vols, London, 1900), ii, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bernard Capp, *England’s Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649-1660* (Oxford, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fiona McCall, *Baal’s Priests: The Loyalist Clergy and the English Revolution* (Farnham, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)