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REVIEW ARTICLE

Roods, Screens and Weddings

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The rood in medieval Britain and Ireland, c. *800*–c.*1500*. Edited by Philippa Turner and Jane Hawkes. (Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture.) Pp. xvi + 224 incl. 45 figs and 13 plates. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2020. £60. 978 1 78327 552 6

Chancel screens since the Reformation. Edited by Mark Kirby. (Proceedings of the Ecclesiological Society Conference 2019.) Pp. 186, incl. numerous ills. London: The Ecclesiological Society, 2020. £20 (paper). 978 0 946823 26 0; 1460-4213

These two useful and beautifully-produced sets of conference and associated papers span 1200 years of theology and church archaeology in these islands and beyond. The volumes are complementary, comprising a thematic Venn diagram on the rood, its screen and the Reformation afterlife of screens. The area of Venn intersection around screens points to a missing fourth theme of great importance, which I will add to the rich store of data presented by the sixteen essayists, all of whose contributions are worthwhile in their own right.

As Cynthia Hahn observes (*The rood*, 6), the cross on which Jesus died is 'without question, the preeminent relic of Christianity'. Given its brutally enforced intimacy with the Saviour's body, it is the nearest object feasible in Christian understanding to a physical relic of Christ himself, with the exception of the more spectacular but persistently controversial body-relics of Christ's blood shed in the crucifixion. The cross is the vehicle of salvation, 'sweetest wood, and sweetest iron', in words attributed to

I am grateful to Robin Ward and Lucy Kaufman for stimulating me to further thought on the themes that I raise in this review, and for clarifying conversations with Lyndal Roper, Thomas Kaufmann and Susan Karant-Nunn.

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Venantius Fortunatus amid a shower of other sixth-century metaphors and conceits. Such proliferating imaginative possibilities complement its simple and distinctive outline, which gives it the advantage over any other relic of being instantly recognisable. The cross is at the very foundation of Christian textuality, in the form of the 'staurogram' to be found as an abbreviation freighted with theological meaning in the earliest New Testament Greek manuscripts.[1]

That second- and third-century textual usage predates the concerns of *The rood*; it is noticeable that representations of the cross did not carry over into art or sculpture before the alliance of mainstream Christianity with the imperial machine under Constantine I (306–37). Thereafter, within half a century the cross became universal enough to be found as an everyday motif in coinage or jewellery. Its rapid move into Christian art and architecture coincided with the appearance of what was claimed to be the physical object itself, in the wake of a momentous state visit to Palestine by Constantine's mother Helena in 327. The presence of the 'True Cross' in Jerusalem in close proximity to the Saviour's (sometime) burial place was instrumental in the city becoming effortlessly dominant among Christian holy places, and indeed in its bishop's acquisition of a brand-new patriarchate.

The character of the True Cross as a handily divisible wooden object, plus its chequered history after seventh-century upheavals in the eastern Mediterranean, also afforded opportunities to develop cross relic cults right across Christendom. When the Crusades abruptly projected Western Christianity eastwards from the late eleventh century, souvenir dispersal hugely increased. By the late Middle Ages, even our own remote islands had become well supplied with fragments, some with documented histories of pious theft from the Middle East. Their homes ranged from royal chapels like Holyrood Abbey near Edinburgh, through rural monasteries like Bromholm (Norfolk) with its much-visited 'Good Rood', down to relatively humble village churches such as Haughley (Suffolk). Haughley's Holy Cross relic was particularly interesting, since it was associated with the gift of the crusader Richard, earl of Cornwall, of this church beside his East Anglian castle to his far-off Cistercian monastic foundation in Gloucestershire at Hailes; the abbey itself concentrated on Richard's more spectacular acquisition of a Holy Blood relic. The Rood of Haughley was a satellite to the Blood of Hailes.

The rood comes into its own in discussions by Jane Hawkes and Maggie M. Williams of the innovative monumental crosses of insular Christianity from the eighth and ninth centuries, inside and outside church buildings – there are no real contemporary parallels to them west of Armenia. To

[1] On 'staurograms' see L. W. Hurtado, *The earliest Christian artifacts: manuscripts and Christian origins*, Grand Rapids, MI 2006, esp. pp. 135–6, 139, 151–4.

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begin with, these monuments were very rarely what were later thought of as roods; that is, they were not reproductions of the actual crucifixion with Christ nailed to the Cross (crucifixes). Christ's body in crucified pose was originally a separate strain of iconography separate from the cross itself, and if the crucified image appeared at all in insular free-standing crosses, it was generally set on the shaft rather than occupying the head. Rather than serving as replicas of the gospel event, the monumental designs conflated objects originally seen in the chief pilgrimage centres, Jerusalem and Rome. Jerusalem had a triumphal column in the city's Holy Sepulchre complex, and also from the early fifth century, a famous gem-covered altar cross (*crux gemmata*), given by the Emperor Theodosius II. Rome had an obelisk associated with St Peter's martyrdom – insular high crosses are notable for their tapering shafts. The *crux gemmata* genre was the cue for the monuments to be highly coloured and enhanced with metal fittings, making their finished appearance utterly different from the sculptured stone remnants that we cherish now. All this was a fitting riposte to the iconoclastic impulse running through eastern Christianity and filtering into the West during the eighth and ninth centuries, although one must remember that Greek Iconoclasts were not at all opposed to the naked cross: witness the dramatic surviving example in the apse of Hagia Eirene in Istanbul (Constantinople).

An object so dominant in the landscape became charged with a rich variety of power. Kate Thomas explores how that power could be harnessed in medicine, particularly to cure spiritual rather than physical afflictions. She fascinatingly draws attention to the healing properties of lichen found on crosses: if the cross itself was a contact-relic of Christ at one remove, and reproductions of the cross at another, lichen samples moved the contact one stage further out, in usefully portable form to add to medicinal recipes. Maggie Williams demonstrates how the iconography of new crosses in twelfth-century Ireland featuring representations of bishops reflected changes in political power within the Irish Church; bishops were gaining more systematised control in a diocesan system, reflecting wider changes in the Western Church as a whole. She suggests that, by contrast, two still extant crosses of Tuam and Cong witness to the aspirations of King Toirdelbach Ó Conchobair (d. 1156) for high kingship and control in the Church, in the face of Gregorian-style reform.

From the twelfth century, the West developed a new combination of church furniture as distinctive as the contrasting and slightly later evolution of the iconostasis in the Orthodox world: a devotional grouping around the image of the crucifixion spectacularly displayed at the junction of nave and chancel, accompanied and supported by an increasingly substantial 'rood screen' to demarcate the liturgical spaces either side. John Munns illuminates the origins of this dramatic innovation. It was closely linked to a fundamental shift in images of the crucified Christ from triumph to suffering,

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so that in liturgical provision in late medieval European churches, the universal pattern at the chancel arch becomes a 'rood group' of the dead Christ twisted in agony, flanked by the mourning figures of his mother Mary and of John the Evangelist.

Munns creatively approaches this development through twelfth-century texts that include visions of the rood, arguing that such visions would have been inspired by real images – perhaps all the more stimulating to visionaries because of their iconographical novelty. The most striking argument in his favour is a remarkable coincidence: a Yorkshire teenager called Orm had a vision of the crucified Christ in paradise, which is the same subject as a roughly contemporary painting over the chancel arch at Houghton-on-the-Hill (Norfolk), providentially rediscovered thirty years ago. As Munns observes (*The rood*, 53), an early twelfth-century outing from Howden to rural Norfolk is implausible and unnecessary to explain the nature of the boy's vision; he had seen the same theme somewhere local.

From the thirteenth century there survive throughout England and Wales increasingly elaborate screens at the chancel arch of churches, culminating in examples still being constructed during the opening stages of the Reformation in the 1530s. By then, at their most complex they displayed a base (dado) with painted figures, rising through open screenwork to a gallery or roodloft designed to afford access for maintaining candles in honour of the rood group above; the staircases that gave access to these lofts are often the only surviving witnesses to the whole rood complex. But there was still more: the rood group might be further surrounded or surmounted by paintings, commonly depicting Christ in glory at the Last Judgement, and framing all this would be particular themed elaboration in wall and roof decoration. All this and the consequent deployment of specialist teams of woodcarvers and painters are explored in detail by Lucy J. Wrapson and Sarah Cassell, Wrapson treating us to microscopic spectrum analysis to demonstrate what one might predict, that the closer to the rood figures, the greater the expense of the carving and colour. Cassell directs us up to the 'angel' roofs that are one of the glories of East Anglian churches, to show us how they paid particular honour to the rood. The elaboration, even in what might otherwise seem quite modest church buildings like Norwich St Peter Hungate (*The rood*, 177–82), is remarkable.

The triumph of the rood screen ensemble did not eclipse other displays of the rood. Małgorzata Krasnodębska D'Aughton explores diverse uses of cross iconography in the churches of the flourishing late medieval Irish Franciscan order. Francis, with his stigmata, was after all an *alter Christus*: crosses pointed to him almost as much as to the Saviour. As late as the 1580s comes one lavish crucifixion funerary display in stucco at Quin Greyfriars (Co. Clare) of which tantalising traces survive; it could have

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acted as a replacement for a chancel arch rood already destroyed by English Protestant reformers (*The rood*, 128, 135).

Philippa Turner takes us to Durham Cathedral Priory, which up to the Reformation boasted two contrasting artefacts, both called the Black Rood of Scotland. One was a small reliquary of the True Cross, filched by Edward I from Holyrood Abbey, the other a rood group as monumental as that over any chancel arch, situated near St Cuthbert's shrine. Turner's reconstruction of the relationship between these two objects is a model of forensic analysis, positing the creative adjustment of their history to suit a triumphalist English narrative of victory over the Scots at the battle of Neville's Cross (1346), together with the Neville family's gleefully elaborate reconstruction of the older standing cross on the battle site. Sarah Carreño discusses late medieval free-standing crosses in Galicia, in a very useful comparative piece that likewise deflates loaded earlier historiography. This group of crosses became the subject of interest for romantic early twentieth-century Galician nationalists, who relocated their significance from a wider late medieval devotional European context to link them to Ireland and the much earlier monumental crosses that by then were so central to Irish identity: they were transformed into symbols of a common Celtic culture that would help to extricate Galicia from a modern unitary Spain.

Given such an accumulation of sacred power around the object of the cross and representations of it, it is not surprising that Protestants in the Reformed tradition made a particular point of destroying them, which is a complication for the essayists in *The rood*: they are dealing with objects the vast majority of which have disappeared. Reformed Protestantism characterised the official Reformations throughout these islands. When we look at open-air churchyard or market crosses anywhere in our archipelago, generally we are looking at modern restorations or reconstructions of mutilated originals, and as for the roods that surmounted rood-screens or *pulpita* in churches, their near-universal destruction is an astonishing testimony to the power and thoroughness of righteous indignation. And yet, in a paradox never sufficiently remarked on, in England and Wales (not in Scotland or Ireland), the rood screens themselves survived in large quantities, to provide the theme of the second volume under consideration.

Chancel screens opens with Peter Doll's attempt to synthesise a theology of screens, which does not avoid elision of the chancel screen with the iconostasis. Lucy Wrapson reappears for a crisp introduction to late medieval rood screens; then Trevor Cooper presents the most surprising element in the story. Not merely did truncated pre-Reformation rood screens survive, often with new cresting to give them a decent profile after the removal of their rood groups and lofts, but following an encouraging order of Elizabeth I in 1561 (quoted at *Chancel screens*, 79), a host of brand-new screens appeared to replace medieval predecessors,

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representing lavish and considered fresh expenditure, right up to 1640. No longer, of course, were they rood screens: taking their cue from the queen's letter, they were known with severe functionality as 'partitions'.

Cooper notes that despite much lazy antiquarian conclusion-jumping in the past, there is no necessary connection between 'avant-garde conformity' or Laudianism and the erection of new 'partitions'. Equally tellingly, he points out that with the exception of two very specific cases where a chancel screen was identified with aggressive Laudianism, parish church screens were not targeted for destruction during the Civil War and Interregnum (*Chancel screens*, 59). Indeed there are signs that early Stuart ceremonialists, far from approving of and promoting chancel screens, were unenthusiastic about them. One good witness through silence here is the aspiring poet-priest Christopher Harvey, who was so impressed by George Herbert's poem-cycle *The temple* that he set himself to publish a detailed imitation of it, called with wooden logic *The synagogue*. First published in 1640, and enlarged thereafter up to 1657 in vigorous defence of the then-dormant episcopal Church of England, Harvey's *The synagogue* was invariably published bound up with Herbert's *The temple* well into the Victorian period.[2] Its extended eloquence on the polity and practice of the pre-war Church of England included a painstaking versified perambulation around a typical parish church, starting at the 'Church Stile' and finally arriving at 'the Communion Table'. Yet despite Harvey's successive poetical lingerings around the porch, the font, the pulpit, copies of the Prayer Book and lectern Bible, and even the reading desk, the chancel screen did not figure at all.

All the more unexpected after the golden age of the post-Reformation chancel screen is the twist in the tale presented by Mark Kirby, discussing the churches of Sir Christopher Wren. In the laboratory of Anglican church interior design provided by the rebuildings after the Great Fire of London after 1666, screens hardly figured at all: just two out of fifty-one rebuilds at St Peter Cornhill and All Hallows-the-Great, the latter now in St Margaret Lothbury. The two exceptional parishes had unusually learned High Church incumbents who were noted patristic scholars. William Beveridge of St Peter's went out of his way to defend chancel screens in print, but by detailed reference to the Early Church rather than to any contemporary practical utility. Clearly his arguments were

[2] On Harvey see Judith Maltby, 'From *Temple* to *Synagogue*: "Old" conformity in the 1640s–1650s and the case of Christopher Harvey', in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds), *Conformity and orthodoxy in the English Church*, c. *1560–1660*, Woodbridge 2000, 88–123. My own copy of the eventual form of the Harvey cycle, bound up with Herbert in continuous pagination and edited by the redoubtable George Gilfillan, remarks charitably of *The synagogue* that it 'has less poetic merit than "The Temple", but is very pious and instructive': *The poetical works of George Herbert: with life, critical dissertation, and explanatory notes,* ed. G. Gilfillan, Edinburgh 1853, 216.

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too rarefied even for fellow High Churchmen: emulation was confined to a few other City churches which had the most half-hearted of decorated rails rising discreetly from pews halfway down the north-south axis of the church, demarcating – what?

Effectively after 1660, the flourishing of screens came to a sudden end, so much so that Mark Kirby as editor observes (*Chancel screens,* 8) that his collection has no chapter on the eighteenth century, since so few chancel screens were created. Actually, there is something significant to be said about screens in that period: their widespread destruction began. Wrapson (*The rood,* 146) notes in passing that between 1727 and 1737, seventy-one screens or screen lofts were taken down in Yorkshire alone. It should be further noted that this was the result of a deliberate campaign on the part of an activist archdeacon, Heneage Dering; this is a particular puzzle, since Dering was an antiquarian-minded High Churchman, yet evidently one of those unimpressed by the patristic arguments of William Beveridge on the importance of screens. The eighteenth century was also a period of threat to the fabric of the chancel to the east of the screen; it would be possible to chart how chancels were especially prone to fall into ruin in this period, some to be rebuilt on a much more modest scale.[3]

Further contributions from John Roberts, Andrew Derrick and Clare Price take the story through from the Oxford Movement and the Roman Catholic building campaigns of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, with its Liturgical Movement and all that has happened since: charismatic drum-kits, white screens for the projection of chorus lyrics and all. In summary, Victorian and more recent Catholics (whether Anglican or Roman) have never been quite sure whether they like screens or want to pull them down, and in the end, the Victorians destroyed as many medieval and later screens as were lost in the Reformation. These days, the chief friends of the chancel screen are antiquaries.

How can we explain the trajectory of the narrative from 1550 to 1750? None of the contributors to Kirby's volume tackle this overarching question behind their theme. Trevor Cooper expresses his surprise that a quite patently Puritan squire, Sir Nathaniel Barnadiston, installed an expensive chancel 'partition' with folding doors in his parish church of Kedington (Suffolk) in 1619, and with disarming candour, says that 'we do not know' why he did it (*Chancel screens,* 69). In an essay in a different collection, Cooper has provided a partial answer, building on three decades of research by various scholars on post-Reformation church

[3] Catharine Otton-Goulder demonstrates this in detail for one area of England: 'The impact of the Reformation on the building and repair of churches in the East Riding, 1547–1730', unpubl. DPhil. diss. Oxford 2021. On Dering and his orders for demolition see pp. 238–40, 251–72, 279–81.

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interiors. After 1559, the chancel beyond the partition was customarily reserved for services of holy communion, contrasting with the parts of the church west of the partition which were the preserve of congregations for Prayer Book mattins and evensong.[4] That still begs the question. Parochial holy communions in the Church of England settled down to a very sparse rhythm during the year, maybe three at most, dispersed between Christmas, Easter and Ascension Day, and in practice, most parishioners would have only attended one of these. Although these communions were major events when they happened, it is remarkable that a part of the church building should be so deliberately set aside for them, and with such an emphatic separation from the rest. Moreover, when such an effort was made to restore the pre-Civil War Church of England in all its glory after 1660, why did such a very conspicuous item of pre-Civil War church furniture as the chancel screen fail to find new favour?

In that question is the pointer to the answer: a liturgical fact lying in such plain sight that no recent historian seems fully to have grasped its importance. It is the rubric that ends the marriage service in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer: 'The new maried persones (the same day of their mariage) must receive the holy communion.' The rubric was still there, identically worded, in the Prayer Book of 1552 and in its very light revision of 1559, even though 1552 had ceased to make the couple move from nave to chancel (*via* a putative partition) during the course of the wedding itself. But you will look for it in vain in the present-day Church of England's Prayer Book, definitively and finally revised in 1662.[5]

The rubric's omission, the end of compulsory communions at weddings, was perhaps the most spectacular and far-reaching change in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and one that represented the only major concession by the triumphant bishops of the restored Church to their Presbyterian critics. It also sounded the death-knell of chancel screens as workable functioning furniture within the parish church. Before 1640, far from being used only for the rare event of parochial holy communions, chancels had been the setting for the culmination of every wedding that obeyed the Church of England's rubrics; which is likely to have been the vast majority of weddings in the period. From 1662, that would no longer be the case, and instantly the chancel screen lost much of its century-long Protestant charisma.[6]

[4] Trevor Cooper, 'The interior planning of the English parish church, 1559–*c.*1640', in P. S. Barnwell and T. Cooper (eds), *Places of worship in Britain and Ireland, 1550–1689*, Donington 2019, 52–94, rev. this JOURNAL lxxii (2021), 427–8.

[5] *The Book of Common Prayer: the texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings, Oxford 2011, 71, 164, 714n.

[6] A significant exception to prove the rule is noted at *Chancel screens,* 85–6, at Foremark, Derbyshire. This screen is part of a new build of 1662 that is patently an attempt to recapture the appearance of a pre-Civil War parish church. Those

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Between 1549 and 1640, no communion, no wedding. The national acceptance of that liturgical syllogism in England and Wales without much apparent fuss is why we have generally missed its significance.[7] It was so universal and taken for granted, that very few people commented on what was obvious to all. Even Richard Hooker, in the course of his exhaustive and exhausting defence of the Book of Common Prayer in book v of *The laws of ecclesiastical polity,* did not trouble to construct a sentence of sadistic prolixity in commenting on wedding communions, merely observing that 'To end the public solemnity of marriage with receiving the blessed sacrament is a custom so religious and holy, that if the Church of England be blameable in this respect it is not for suffering it to be so much but rather for not providing that it may be more put in ure.'[8] I am reminded of the practice of excluding menstruating women from communion which has survived at least in certain parts of Christendom over nearly two millennia, without biblical warrant but rarely commented on, simply because it has been such a given.[9]

Just occasionally one can spot a glancing reference to the wedding communion in the practice of ordinary religion. Sometimes it could actually be evidence for the validity of a marriage ceremony: when one Cambridgeshire couple obtained a special licence and marriage in an inn called the Lily Pot, what clinched the validity of what they were doing was the fact that they went to communion afterwards.[10] One incidental reference in a list of Catholic recusants from Surrey in October 1577 is both tellingly casual and has a further resonance. It features John Strangman of Bermondsey, who had actually married the widow of the executed Catholic activist John Felton. Strangman and his wife were excommunicated as habitually absent from their parish church, and moreover 'nether have the saide John and his wife receyved the Comunion *synce they were maried*'.[11] For the Strangmans and the rest of the Catholic

undertaking the work would not yet have appreciated that the 1662 Prayer Book had removed the wedding communion rubric. They were creating the sort of screen that had been built in the previous half-century, expecting more wedding communion.

[7] One of the most sensitive readings of the changes in the English marriage service over the Reformation nevertheless fails to mention the continuing requirement for a eucharist as part of the church service: Christine Peters, 'Gender, sacrament and ritual: the making and meaning of marriage in late medieval and early modern England', *Past & Present* no. 169 (Nov. 2000), 63–96. E. J. Carlson goes some way to discussing the marriage rubric with an understanding of its significance: *Marriage and the English Reformation,* Oxford–Cambridge, MA 1994, 44–9.

[8] *Richard Hooker: Of the laws of ecclesiastical polity: a critical edition with modern spelling,* ed. A. S. McGrade, Oxford 2013, ii. 272 (v.73.7).

[9] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian history,* London 2013, 196.

[10] Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation,* 133, 242 n. 245: a case in Ely diocese.

[11] TNA (PRO), SP 12/117, fo. 32r (my italics): I am grateful to Lucy Kaufman for alerting me to this reference.

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community crystallising out of the conformist majority in Elizabethan England, one can understand what a cruel dilemma the Prayer Book marriage rubric posed; coupled with the official insistence that godparents at baptism should be communicants, it was likely to poison the life events that were the basis of family life.

That problem was hugely magnified in Ireland. Given that the Prayer Book in English or Latin (no Gaelic version for a long time) was supposed to be used in the Church of Ireland too, this single provision for wedding communions may be a major factor that we have all missed in understanding why the Irish refused to conform to the new Reformation dispensation imposed on them by the English. Every wedding would confront them with an existential choice as to whether or not they were prepared to receive a Protestant and English-style communion. The vast majority decided that they were not.

In England and Wales, by contrast, most people did knuckle down to their wedding communion, no doubt because in the early days of its provision, they decided that in this respect the new service-book offered what their elderly relatives would expect on this (ostensibly) happiest day of their lives: something resembling a nuptial mass. That must have been aided by the fact that Cranmer's wedding service overall remained one of the most conservative parts of his liturgical revolution, even after his 1552 revision of it. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere in this JOURNAL that particularly in its 1549 form, with the first half of the service in the nave and the second moving through the screen in the chancel, it largely reflected the actual practice of late medieval English weddings, despite the theoretical requirement that they took place in the church porch. English weather would have encouraged a gradual drift from the porch through the church door, despite the best efforts of any Sarum liturgical theorist.[12] Cranmer's liturgical provision for weddings was the prelude to one of the great success stories of the Elizabethan Church of England: a steady strengthening of the idea that the decisive moment of the process of getting married was a service in church, something that the medieval Church had never fully succeeded in imposing on its laity.[13]

Local compliance with the wedding communion rubric almost certainly explains a peculiarity that many of us studying Elizabethan churchwardens' accounts will have noticed: the memorandum of a number of communion services through the year in addition to those on the great festivals, usually with no sense of regularity to them. Far from being some vague revival of

[12] See my review of Helen F. Lunnon, *East Anglian church porches and their medieval context*, London 2020, this JOURNAL lxxii (2021), 410–11.

[13] This is the theme of Martin Ingram's seminal *Church courts, sex and marriage in England, 1570–1640*, Cambridge 1987 (see his summary at pp. 366–7), though Ingram does not deal with wedding communions.

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eucharistic devotion or sacramental piety in the wake of the Reformation, they are likely to represent a record of a local agreement on paying for bread and wine in marriage communions. It would be a worthwhile exercise to compare such entries with the number of weddings recorded in marriage registers for the same year, where that is possible. It is also worth considering the pastoral nightmare of a situation in which the minister might feel that one or both of the prospective happy couple were unsuitable to approach the holy table in communion, or when they were actually excommunicate for some offence. Christopher Haigh has amply documented the fury that greeted clergy attempts to put into effect the Prayer Book's prohibition on unsuitable communicants in the general parish communions; how much more would weddings be a flash-point? Pity the Tudor parson with raging parents at the parsonage door.[14]

The provision for wedding communion is perhaps the most individual feature of the *Book of Common Prayer* as conceived by Cranmer. Elsewhere, his inclination was towards creative synthesis of earlier Protestant liturgy from mainland Europe; but here, he made a decision with little parallel elsewhere. Lutheran Reformation liturgical practice around weddings varied a great deal between various territories and church ordinances, but there is little if any sign across Lutheran lands that a eucharist was regarded as part of the nuptial package.[15] Still less, of course, was it the custom in European Reformed Churches other than England or (theoretically) Ireland.[16] It is perhaps surprising that that pioneer of Reformed Protestant theology Martin Bucer approved of Cranmer's wedding provision in his comments on the 1549 Prayer Book, in which there was much to which he took exception: he called it 'a very godly ordinance'. Yet on this topic, perhaps Bucer's exaltation of the institution of marriage to a degree exceptional among Reformers, including his special emphasis on its companionate aspect, swayed him towards the English practice; the personal friendship between the Cranmer and Bucer households may have helped.[17]

[14] Christopher Haigh, 'Communion and community: exclusion from communion in post-Reformation England', this JOURNAL li (2000), 721–40.

[15] See the useful summary account of Lutheran practice in Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of ritual: an interpretation of early modern Germany*, London–New York 1997, 13–42.

[16] A good summary of the forms for solemnising matrimony in the Reformation Church of Scotland is Margo Todd, *The culture of Protestantism in early modern Scotland,* New Haven–London 2002, 267–75.

[17] *Martin Bucer and the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. E. C. Whitaker (Alcuin Club Collections lv, 1974), 124–5. An excellent discussion of Bucer's marital theology is H. Selderhuis, *Marriage and divorce in the thought of Martin Bucer*, Kirksville, MO 1999. On the Bucers and the Cranmers see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: a Life*, rev. edn, New Haven–London 2016, 481.

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More predictably, later Reformed Protestants thoroughly disapproved of the wedding communion rubric. Most vocal in opposition were those late Elizabethan separatists whose radicalism in breaking altogether with the state Church made them more clear-sighted than others were about its anomalies. What they realised was that despite Cranmer's careful rejection of the medieval identification of marriage as one of seven sacraments, his rubric on communion inevitably lent a sacramental character to the whole liturgical occasion of the wedding. The separatist leader and future martyr Henry Barrow sneered in 1590 that even clergy of Puritan outlook who rejected the use of a wedding ring as superstitious were still trapped into following up the ceremony with 'an especial litourgie or communion framed to the same'. Barrow and his fellow-travellers roundly rejected the idea that marriage should have any place in church: it was a civil ceremony.[18] They followed through their logic by holding weddings in entirely secular settings, and suffered the consequences at the hands of the church authorities.[19]

More mainstream Puritans would have been loth thus to take matters into their own hands in separatist fashion, and they would mostly have shared Cranmer's determination to keep marriage within the jurisdiction of the Church, while rejecting its character as a sacrament. Yet they too deplored the communion rubric. Two decades before Barrow's comments, Puritans had expressed their disapproval by concentrating on the less dangerous theme of the misbehaviour or superstitious practice associated with a wedding day. Their criticism featured in the first *Admonition to the parliament* in 1572, where their objections to the communion rubric ('bicause in Poperie, no holy action mighte be done without a masse') immediately moved on to other wedding enormities: 'women contrary to the rule of the Apostle, come, and are suffered to come bare headed, with bagpipes and fidlers before them, to disturbe the congregation, and that they must come in at the great dore of the church, or else all is marred'. The second edition of the *Admonition*, warming biliously to this theme, added the 'carying of wheate sheaffes on their heads, and casting of corne, … wherby they make rather a Maie game of marriage, then a holy Institution of God'.[20]

[18] *The writings of Henry Barrow, 1587–90*, ed. L. H. Carlson (Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts iii), London 1962, 453–5: quotation from *A brief discoverie of the false Church*, 453.

[19] *The writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591–1593*, ed. L. H. Carlson (Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts vi), London 1970, 338; *The writings of John Greenwood 1587–1590*, ed. L. H. Carlson (Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts iv), London 1962, 24–5.

[20] *Puritan manifestoes: a study of the origin of the Puritan Revolt*, ed. W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, London 1954, 27. Modern clergy facing the curse of confetti on the

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That deplorable progression from communion to festivity was still in the minds of the Presbyterian divines negotiating with the bishops on Prayer Book revision in 1661, though they expressed it with less picturesque detail. They complained that the rubric 'compels all that marry to come to the Lord's table, though never so unprepared; and therefore we desire it may be omitted, the rather because that marriage festivals are too often accompanied with such divertisements as are unsuitable to those Christian duties, which ought to be before and follow after the receiving of that holy sacrament'.[21] H. L. Mencken, thou shouldst have been living at that hour: the problem for Puritans about weddings in early modern England was that weddings were fun. The hinge of the ceremony, between the wedding proper in the nave (bagpipe accompaniment optional) and the doubtless extended festivities of later hours elsewhere, was holy communion in the chancel according to the Book of Common Prayer. We need to think of the expectant pre-1640 congregation eyeing the chancel screen from their nave seating as they looked forward to processing through the screen entrance for stage two in the proceedings: what they would be looking at would be either a refurbished former rood screen or a brand new 'partition', itself possessing a distinctly festive air.

The contributors to *Chancel screens* remark with some puzzlement on the lack of any ecclesiastical or Christian reference in the decoration of the new screens in all but one or two cases; the crosses with which well-meaning modern clergy have surmounted some of them are complete anachronisms. The iconography of these screens is overwhelmingly secular, with a distinct emphasis on family heraldry or the heraldry of the ultimate patriarch, the king. One screen at Vowchurch (Herefs) even has rather risqué busts of a man and a women flanking its entrance (*Chancel screens,* 67): Adam and Eve, the bride and groom, or both? Another, at Bruton in Somerset (*Chancel screens,* 69–70), includes a cloven-hoofed piper in its iconography – perhaps the carpenter had a copy of the *Admonition to the parliament* to hand. All this reinforces the likelihood that when pre-Restoration English congregations looked on their chancel screens, it was a wedding that they thought of, rather than the parish communions at the great festivals. A further significant detail is that in some cases even in very recent decades, these early Stuart screens have been modified in order to improve sightlines to the high altar for modern congregations in the nave (*Chancel screens,* 75–6). Evidently as originally conceived, they were

church path might encourage modern couples to return to corn as an excellent biodegradable substitute.

[21] *Documents relating to the settlement of the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity of 1662*, ed. [George Gould], London 1862: 'The exceptions against the Book of Common Prayer', 111–45 at pp. 141–2.

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protecting a space that was thought of as fundamentally separate from the nave to their west.

After 1662, all this came to an end. We have no notion as to how far the communion custom had survived through the Interregnum – it is likely that it had drastically fallen away along with the use of the proscribed Prayer Book. In other respects that consideration did not inhibit the bishops in their determination to return to the *status quo ante* of 1640, yet it is noticeable how lame their response was to the Presbyterian critique on wedding communions: their handicap was that they were equally unenthusiastic about fiddles, bagpipes and sheaves of corn. After blustering that 'they that undertake [marriage] in the fear of God will not stick to seal it by receiving the holy communion', they conceded that 'it were more Christian to desire that those licentious festivities might be suppressed, and the communion more generally used by those that marry' – the latter sentiment probably a conscious echo of Richard Hooker's remark.[22] So they gave way, thus (no doubt inadvertently) making life a good deal easier for both Catholic recusants and the developing communities of Protestant dissent. It was a significant stage in ending the near-monopoly of the established Protestant Church in English religious practice.

Nevertheless by the time of Charles II's Restoration, Cranmer's provision for wedding communions had helped to save the chancels of English parish churches from ruin ('the chauncels shall remain, as they have done in tymes past', as the 1552 Prayer Book rubric to mattins and evensong had it, not pausing to explain why).[23] The chancel, after initial Edwardian confusion and the fuss and bother of hauling the holy table through the chancel screen door into the nave when communions were due, had settled down to becoming the eucharistic space of a church, which most frequently meant the eucharistic space for weddings. Where chancels had boasted stalls before the Reformation, they generally retained them afterwards, in order to house communicants. Contrast Reformed Scotland, where the remnants of just one medieval parish church rood screen survive, and that by accident, at Fowlis Easter (Tayside), and where medieval chancels have either been demolished, incorporated in congregational space or drastically repurposed as family pews, burial aisles, session houses etc. All of which proves how essential it is for historians to listen to antiquaries, and for antiquaries to be the best historians that they can be.

[22] 'The answer of the bishops to the exceptions of the ministers', ibid. 146–75 at pp. 172–3.

[23] *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cummings edn), 102.

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