

## FATE, FACTION, AND FICTION IN FOXES'S *BOOK OF MARTYRS*\*

THOMAS S. FREEMAN

*University of Sheffield*

**ABSTRACT.** *The tales of divine judgements on sinners which are found throughout John Foxe's famous martyrology, the Acts and monuments, and also collected in a concluding appendix to the work, have often been dismissed as the products of gossip, while Foxe's printing of them has been traditionally regarded as an idiosyncratic, but ultimately insignificant, aberration in his historical writing. After examining the sources for two of these stories of providential punishment, this article will argue that some of the anecdotes of divine retribution printed in Acts and monuments were sent to Foxe in pursuit of local feuds and private grievances, arising from personal hatreds and prospects of material gain as well as religious conflict. After examining the changes made to these stories in the different editions of Acts and monuments, this article will maintain that such providential stories were central, rather than marginal, features of Foxe's work and thought. It is hoped that this article will offer a fresh perspective on Foxe's editorial practices, on the accuracy of Acts and monuments and also on the conflicting objectives of Foxe and his informants.*

---

### I

Sometime around the year 1585, John Prick, the rector of Kettlebaston, Suffolk, preached a sermon denouncing perjury.<sup>1</sup> In the course of his sermon, Prick related a story from John Foxe's *Acts and monuments*, in which William Grimwood of Hitcham (a village about a mile and half north-east of Kettlebaston) had allegedly given perjured testimony which resulted in the execution of John Cooper, one of the Marian martyrs. In this case, however, retribution was not long in coming, for, at the next harvest, while Grimwood was stacking a rick of corn, 'sodenly his bowelles fel out of hys body, and ymmediatly most miserably he died'.<sup>2</sup>

Prick's sermon was probably very edifying, and would have been even more edifying if it were not for the inconvenient fact that Grimwood was not only

\* I would like to thank Patrick Collinson, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Brett Usher, and Alexandra Walsham for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup> This John Prick, rector of Kettlebaston from 1578 until 1613, may be the man of these names who graduated a BA from Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1583. (See John and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses, part I, from the earliest times to 1751* (4 vols., Cambridge, 1922–7).)

<sup>2</sup> John Foxe, *The actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes*, STC 11222 (London, 1563), pp. 1704–5. Hereafter editions of *Acts and monuments* printed during Foxe's lifetime will be designated by the year in which they were printed – i.e., 1563, 1570, 1576, and 1583. All citations of this book will only be of the edition in which the passage, or passages, under discussion first appeared. In quotations from early modern sources, I have modernized punctuation and capitalization but otherwise retained their original spelling.

alive but among the rector's congregation that Sunday. Moreover, despite the supposed loss of his internal organs, Grimwood's spleen seems to have been unaffected, for he sued the unfortunate preacher for slander. The case was heard at the Suffolk assizes, where Grimwood lost; he appealed and the case was heard in the court of Queen's Bench, where Prick again prevailed, the court ruling that he had not acted maliciously and that, without malicious intent, there could be no slander.<sup>3</sup> Yet if Grimwood did not obtain redress from the courts, he would have his revenge on the reputation of John Foxe, the original author of the story.

This revenge was to come posthumously. Despite the unusual aspects of the case, Grimwood's suit does not appear to have aroused contemporary comment and the records of it do not survive.<sup>4</sup> But Edward Coke had been Prick's counsel, and in 1605, when defending a case of slander in King's Bench, he cited his earlier triumph as a precedent and described it at some length. Coke's 1605 case was described in numerous law reports and circulated widely.<sup>5</sup> Anthony à Wood read about Grimwood's suit in Henry Rolle's *Un abridgment des plusieurs cases* and included it in his *Athenae Oxonienses* as an example of Foxe's inaccuracy.<sup>6</sup> John Strype sprang to Foxe's defence, with mixed results, although he made one valuable contribution in drawing attention to two letters about the matter, which survive among Foxe's papers.<sup>7</sup>

Wood's version of the incident and Strype's response ensured that Grimwood's story remained well known and also shaped the confessional reactions to it. Catholic writers repeated Wood while George Townsend, in his hagiography of Foxe which introduced most of the unabridged Victorian editions of *Acts and monuments*, essentially reprinted Strype.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of this century, James Gairdner reviewed the different versions of the story of Grimwood, and the material relating to it, criticizing Foxe sharply and correcting a number of mistakes Strype had made in the process.<sup>9</sup> Just as Wood had spurred Strype to defend Foxe so Gairdner inspired J. F. Mozley, Foxe's biographer, to a vigorous apologia on behalf of the martyrologist. In fact, Mozley was perhaps a little too zealous, as much of his analysis is little more

<sup>3</sup> For a lucid narrative of the case, see J. F. Mozley, *John Foxe and his book* (London, 1940), pp. 194–6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>5</sup> Sir George Croke, *The second part of the reports of George Croke*, trans. Sir Harbottle Grimston, STC (Wing) 7018 (London, 1683), p. 90; Henry Rolle, *Un abridgment des plusieurs cases ... en common ley*, STC (Wing) 1872 (London, 1688), I, p. 87; British Library (BL), Harley MS 1679, fo. 97r–v; BL, Lansdowne MSS 1062 fo. 17v; 1111, fo. 107r–v; 1113, fo. 59v–60r; BL, Additional MSS 24846, fo. 79v; 25209, fos. 79v–80r; 35935, fo. 22v, and 35954, fo. 348r.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. Philip Bliss (4 vols., London, 1813–20), II, cols. 789–90.

<sup>7</sup> John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (4 vols. in 7, Oxford, 1824), I, i, pp. 377–80. The two letters are discussed below.

<sup>8</sup> John Foxe, *The acts and monuments*, ed. S. R. Cattley and George Townsend (8 vols., London, 1837–41), I, pp. 374–6 (hereafter *A & M*).

<sup>9</sup> James Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation in England* (4 vols., London, 1908–13), I, pp. 343–56.

than special pleading, although he usefully pointed out that Foxe, after printing the story of Grimwood in the first (1563) edition of his work, dropped it from the second (1570) only to restore it in the third (1576).<sup>10</sup> Although the episode is often cited in discussions of Foxe's work, there has been no significant analysis of it in the decades since Mozley wrote.

This is surprising for despite the attention it has received several aspects of the case have been insufficiently explored. Yet apart from the interest inherent in what was, at the time, a considerable *cause célèbre*, the apocryphal story of Grimwood's providential punishment provides an opportunity to examine an important aspect of the editorial and investigative practices of John Foxe: his publication of tales of providential reward and punishment in his great martyrology. This topic is of direct relevance both to his credentials as a historian and to the reliability of *Acts and monuments* as a historical source. It has also been, for reasons that will be discussed below, largely unexplored despite increased, and increasingly critical, attention given to examining Foxe's accuracy and integrity as a historian.<sup>11</sup>

By tracing the evolution of the story of Grimwood and Cooper, and of other tales of providential retribution which Foxe related, through the different editions of *Acts and monuments* published in the martyrologist's lifetime, the changes Foxe made to the different versions will become apparent (a process, however, which is obscured in the bowdlerized, hybrid Victorian editions of Foxe's work, which are still, *faute de mieux*, the standard editions of *Acts and monuments*). Once these changes are revealed, the reasons for them will then be investigated. What will be revealed will be an interaction between Foxe and his informants (often acting from motives very different from those of Foxe) which was greatly affected by the changing circumstances in which each edition was written. Yet there was also an underlying consistency in Foxe's treatment of this material, stemming from Foxe's unwavering interest in stories that showed divine providence at work. Although the inclusion of such stories is often treated as an inconsequential aberration in Foxe's book, providentialism was, in fact, a central rather than a peripheral concern of his and, it may be added, of many of his readers.

## II

The original version of the story of Grimwood and Cooper, which appeared in the first (1563) edition of *Acts and monuments*, related that John Cooper, a carpenter dwelling in Wattisham (a village about two miles east of Hitcham) and 'a man of a verye honest reporte ... a harbourer of straungers that travailed for conscience ... of honest conversation and good lyfe, and [one who] hated all popish and papistical trashe', got into a dispute with William Fenning, a serving man who was also a native of Wattisham. As a result, Fenning denounced Cooper to a magistrate, alleging that Cooper had said that

<sup>10</sup> Mozley, *John Foxe*, pp. 196–9.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 69 below.

if God would not take Queen Mary away, he prayed that the devil would. Cooper denied this but was convicted of high treason at the Bury assizes after two witnesses, Richard White, also of Wattisham, and one Grimwood, from Hitcham, testified that Cooper had indeed made the seditious remark. He was hanged, drawn, and quartered while his property, worth 300 marks, was confiscated by Sir Henry Doyle, the sheriff. Cooper's wife and nine children were 'left to the wide world in their clothes, and suffered not to enjoye one peny of that they had sore laboured for, onless they made frendes to buy it with money of the said Sheriff, so cruell and greedy was he and his officers'.

Providential retribution, however, was at hand, with Grimwood suffering the awful fate already described. (It is perhaps worth noting that apart from being a form of divine punishment traditionally visited upon notorious sinners, such as the heresiarch Arius, this is a suspiciously apt revenge for a man who was drawn and quartered). Nevertheless retribution did not fall upon all those involved. Foxe concluded his 1563 account of Cooper by stating that 'Thys foresaid Fenning, who was the procurer of thys tyranny agaynst hym, is yet alyve, and is now a minister, which if he be, I praye God he maye so repente that fact, that he may declare him[self] hereafter such [a] one as may wel answer to his vocation accordingly.'<sup>12</sup>

Despite the controversy which Grimwood's alleged crime and putative punishment would eventually generate, he does not seem to have been the principal target of this story. Apart from providing a general moral lesson on the evils of perjury, the immediate objectives behind it would seem to have been to draw attention to the injuries done to the Cooper family by Sir Henry Doyle and also to censure and embarrass Fenning, now reportedly a minister.

Foxe's account of Cooper, Fenning, and Grimwood quickly drew adverse reactions. The colophon to the first edition of the *Acts and monuments* is dated 20 March 1563 and, as a letter from William Punt to Foxe demonstrates, Foxe had been forced to inquire into the accuracy of the story within a month of its publication.

William Punt, the author of the letter and the man carrying out these inquiries was, by 1563, a veteran campaigner against Antichrist. A native of Colchester, he first comes to attention as the author of *A new dialoge called the enlightenment agaynste mother Messe*.<sup>13</sup> This work bears a considerable similarity in form and content to several works by John Bale, whom Punt certainly knew: sometime between 1549 and December 1552 Punt loaned the great bibliophile two books of Latin poetry.<sup>14</sup> Mary's reign saw Punt prove his devotion to the evangelical cause; in those times which tried men's souls, Punt wore out the soles of his shoes acting as a courier for the imprisoned Protestant leaders in London and Oxford.<sup>15</sup> He seems to have been particularly close to John

<sup>12</sup> 1563, pp. 1704–5.

<sup>13</sup> STC 20499 (London, 1548).

<sup>14</sup> See John Bale, *Index Britanniae Scriptorum*, ed. R. L. Poole and Mary Bateson (Oxford, 1902), p. 207. The dates of this loan are set by Bale's having begun to compile the *Index* in 1549 (Bale, *Index*, pp. xviii–xix) and his departure for Ireland.

<sup>15</sup> Punt's activities are described in surviving letters of the Marian martyrs. See Emmanuel College Library (ECL), MS 260, fo. 144v (printed in *The writings of John Bradford*, ed. Aubrey

Bradford and was almost certainly the 'W. P.' whom Bradford made co-executor of his books and to whom the martyr bequeathed two shirts.<sup>16</sup> Punt was also the son-in-law of Erkenwald Rawlins, an affluent London merchant and correspondent of Bradford's, who went into exile at the beginning of Mary's reign.<sup>17</sup> Sometime after Bradford's execution, Punt seems to have gone abroad himself, probably joining his family.<sup>18</sup> This, however, was only a respite. In 1557, an informant described Punt to Bishop Bonner as one of the 'principal teachers of heretical doctrine in London' and as one of those who 'do most harme in perswading the people'. Most particularly, Bonner's informant reported that Punt 'is and hath ben a great writer of divelische and erroneous bokes of certain mens doenges and causeth them there [i.e., overseas] to be imprinted and brought over, to the great hurt of the ignorant people'. Punt's latest exploit, the letter continued, was smuggling a barrel of books into London, one of which was an attack on the Anabaptists which Punt proceeded to read aloud.<sup>19</sup>

On 23 April 1563, Punt wrote to Foxe from Ipswich reporting that he tried to meet with Roger Kelke<sup>20</sup> and John Walker<sup>21</sup> but that both men had

---

Townsend (Parker Society, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1848–53), II, p. 129); fo. 203v (printed in *Bradford*, II, p. 213); fo. 224r (printed in *Bradford*, II, p. 58); fo. 276r–v (printed in *The works of Nicholas Ridley*, ed. Henry Christmas (Parker Society Cambridge, 1841), pp. 376–7); and 1563, p. 1296.

<sup>16</sup> ECL, MS 262, fo. 71v.

<sup>17</sup> Rawlins left England by 31 July 1554, was in Frankfurt by the autumn of 1555 and settled in Geneva by October 1558. (See C. H. Garrett, *The Marian exiles: a study in the origins of Elizabethan puritanism* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 268.) Diarmaid MacCulloch has described Punt as a relative of Ridley (*Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven, CT, 1996), p. 569) but this is based on nothing more than Ridley having addressed Punt as 'brother'. (See ECL, MS 260, fo. 276r; printed in *Ridley*, p. 376.) This neo-Pauline form of address was, however, common among Marian Protestants and did not necessarily signify a blood relationship: Bradford also hailed Punt as 'brother' (ECL, MS 260, fo. 224r, printed in *Bradford*, II, p. 58, and ECL, MS 260, fo. 144v, printed in *Bradford*, II, p. 129). Erkenwald Rawlins's letter to Punt, indicating that Punt was married to his daughter Dorothy, is ECL, MS 260, fo. 114r–v.

<sup>18</sup> This is based on Bale having, in 1557, listed 'Guilhelmus Punt' among the English exiles 'per Germaniam dispersis' (John Bale, *Scriptorum Illustrum maioris Brytanniae ... Catalogus* (Basle, 1557), p. 742). This probably indicates that Bale (who shared a residence with Foxe in Basle) was in touch with Punt at this time; possibly this was the beginning of Foxe's association with Punt.

<sup>19</sup> 1563, p. 1605. Bonner's informant describes Punt as a bachelor. Either Dorothy had died or, more likely, Punt left her behind on the Continent while he pursued his dangerous activities.

<sup>20</sup> Roger Kelke was a fellow of St John's, Cambridge, who went into exile in Mary's reign, ending up in Basle, where he associated with Bale and Foxe (Garrett, *Marian exiles*, pp. 202–3, and Bale, *Catalogus*, p. 741). On his return to England, Kelke was appointed Lady Margaret preacher at Cambridge and became master of Magdalene College (*DNB*). In 1560, he was engaged as one of the two town preachers of Ipswich. Despite his successful career at Cambridge (he remained master of Magdalene until his death and was twice elected vice-chancellor of the university) Kelke remained resident in Ipswich. In May 1563, Kelke was collated to the archdeaconry of Stow (*DNB*). In 1565 Kelke was one of a number of Cambridge academics who wrote to Cecil urging that Archbishop Parker's vestiarian decrees not be enforced in the university (Patrick Collinson, 'The "Nott Conformytye" of the young John Whitgift', in idem, *Godly people: essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 326–7).

<sup>21</sup> John Walker was a preacher at Ipswich. (Garrett identifies the Ipswich preacher as the Marian exile Thomas Walker (Garrett, *Marian exiles*, pp. 318–19); this, however, is an error:

departed for Cambridge. Punt reported that he then went to a minister named Sutton,<sup>22</sup> who was with Foxe and Punt when the story of Cooper's martyrdom was related to them, and that Sutton verified that the version of the story which Foxe had just printed was identical to that which they had heard. Nevertheless, Punt and Sutton 'with an other honest man' went to the people who had first related the story to them and these informants, both of whom were twenty years old, 'bowlidly affirmed' that the story was true 'and will so confess before any man'. Therefore, Punt informed Foxe, he had brought Cooper's wife and children to Ipswich to make a signed statement attesting to the truth of the story before a 'Mr Candish'<sup>23</sup> who was journeying to Ipswich to take their statement. Punt promised to send this statement to Foxe in London 'with spede'.<sup>24</sup>

As this letter indicates, Punt assisted Foxe in gathering material for *Acts and monuments* and he played a key role in bringing the story of Cooper to Foxe's attention. Punt's background and his intimate knowledge of the networks and members of the Marian Protestant congregations must have made him an invaluable aide to Foxe. His ties to Bale, to say nothing of his ties to such athletes of Christ as Ridley and Bradford, ensured his credibility with Foxe. But the same zeal that put Punt at the service of both the Marian martyrs and their martyrologist powerfully motivated him to ensure that Foxe's book served the proper purposes and taught only the proper lessons.

This letter also reveals a great deal of the specific manner in which Foxe obtained the story of Cooper, Fenning, and Grimwood. Punt presumably wanted to touch base with Kelke and Walker because, at some point, they had

---

Thomas Walker became rector of Chadwell in Essex. (See *The remains of Edmund Grindal*, ed. William Nicholson (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1843), p. 294). I am grateful to Brett Usher for bringing this reference to my attention and for identifying 'Shadwell' in *Grindal remains* as Chadwell.) The Ipswich preacher was John Walker who attended the Convocation of 1563 as proctor for the Suffolk clergy and took the radical side, petitioning for the seven articles (Strype, *Annals*, 1, i, pp. 489 and 502–4). He was also appointed parish chaplain in St Peter's, Norwich, in 1564 and given a prebend at Norwich in 1570 (*DNB*). Walker celebrated by taking part in an egregious display of iconoclasm in Norwich Cathedral in 1570. (See *The letter book of John Parkhurst*, ed. R. A. Houlbrooke (Norfolk Record Society, 43, Norfolk, 1974–5), p. 41). Walker was made archdeacon of Essex in July 1571 and took part in the dispute with Campion in the Tower (*DNB*).

<sup>22</sup> Punt's letter also asked for Foxe's assistance in helping Sutton complete arrangements for acquiring the living of Chelmondiston. In a list of ecclesiastical livings dispensed by Lord Keeper Bacon, an entry appears recording that on 12 April 1563, authorization was given, at the recommendation of Bishop Parkhurst of Norwich, for letters patent presenting Thomas Sutton to the living of Chelmondiston, Suffolk. (BL, Lansdowne MS 443, fo. 126r. I am grateful to Brett Usher bringing both this list and this entry to my attention.)

<sup>23</sup> This was William Cavendish (c. 1530–1572), a JP from Trimley, a town eight miles south-east of Ipswich (Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: politics and religion in an English county, 1500–1600* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 244–56 and Appendix 1). Cavendish's name was often given as 'Candish' by contemporaries; see, for example, *The town finances of Elizabethan Ipswich*, ed. John Webb (Suffolk Records Society, 38, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1996), pp. 97 and 172.

<sup>24</sup> BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 122r–v.

been involved with Foxe's research into the story. (As we shall see, there is additional evidence of Walker's involvement in the matter). Punt also reveals that he, Sutton, and Foxe heard the story related by two youths, who were thus the original sources for Foxe's account. Judging from the indignant recital of the tribulations of the Cooper family, I strongly suspect that at least one of them was a member of that family. Foxe heard about them, very possibly through Kelke and Walker, who as ministers in the county town, would have been well placed to hear the gossip of the godly. At any rate, having been informed that these two youths had a story to tell him, Foxe, with Punt and Sutton in tow, arrived to take it down.<sup>25</sup> This must have happened during Foxe's stay in Norwich, between the autumn of 1560 and the summer of 1562, as Bishop Parkhurst's guest.<sup>26</sup> During this time Foxe appears to have combined preaching tours of the diocese of Norwich with intense research into the oral and archival sources for the history of the Reformation in East Anglia.<sup>27</sup>

Punt's letter also shows, however, that his role in uncovering the story of Cooper and his enemies was not lightly undertaken. On the contrary, once the story was challenged, Punt went to considerable lengths to verify it and ensure that it remained in Foxe's history. First he got Sutton to affirm that the version Foxe printed was what he had heard. Then Punt went back, with witnesses, to re-examine the original informants. Having persuaded his informants to confirm their story and to promise to affirm it before any witnesses, Punt wrote to Foxe that he planned to take the Cooper family before William Cavendish and have them swear, in writing, to their story and to send this written verification to Foxe.

Punt's desire to have a sworn account of the matter authenticated by a magistrate is understandable. But why did he go to the trouble of bringing Cooper's family twenty miles to Ipswich and wait for Cavendish to make the eight mile journey from Trimley to Ipswich? (Punt's impatience at having to wait in Ipswich for the parties to come together is only too apparent in the postscript of his letter: 'This is the iii<sup>d</sup> daie i have lyne in Ypswich about this matter, the Lord give me to end yt, as I trust he will.')<sup>28</sup> There were any number of magistrates who could have been employed with much greater convenience. Punt, however, wanted a magistrate who shared his religious sympathies; one who could be relied on to ask the right questions and not ask

<sup>25</sup> Tudor orthography is an unstable foundation on which to build any conclusions, but the spelling of names in the 1563 account of Cooper (e.g., 'Hinckelsham' for 'Hintelsham' and 'Lawshaw' for 'Lawshall') does suggest that Foxe made a transcription of an account delivered to him orally.

<sup>26</sup> Letters addressed to Foxe in Norwich are dated 18 November 1560 and 29 January 1561 (BL, Harley MS 416, fos. 106v and 171v). A letter dated 24 August 1562 was sent to Foxe at John Day's printshop; the letter was urgent, so Foxe must have been back in London at this time. (See BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 173r-v.)

<sup>27</sup> One of the letters sent to Foxe in Norwich began by wishing for 'your prosperous successe in the Lordes harvest and that many laborers maye, by your meanes, be sent forthe in that good worke to call the younglings to the greate supper of the Lambe' (BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 106r).

<sup>28</sup> BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 122v.

the wrong ones. That Cavendish was such a magistrate is demonstrated by his recommendation, in 1559, of no less a figure than John MacBriar (or Makebray), a Scots religious refugee who became a Protestant preacher in London during Edward VI's reign and an exile in the next, for the living of his home parish of Trimley St Mary.<sup>29</sup> In 1567, Cavendish gave further evidence of his godly sympathies when he signed a petition to the Privy Council on behalf of John Lawrence, an itinerant puritan preacher.<sup>30</sup> In short, while Punt cannot be accused of manufacturing evidence, he undeniably went to a great deal of trouble to ensure that his version of events was enshrined in *Acts and monuments*.

By 23 April, the date of Punt's letter, Foxe must have already received criticism of his account of Cooper's martyrdom, since Punt had been sent to investigate it. A week later, one William Rushbrook wrote to John Walker, voicing his own objections to Punt's version. Unfortunately, it is unclear from the letter whether Rushbrook was responding to a request by Walker to look into the matter or whether he was following up earlier criticisms he had made to Walker. (Rushbrook does state that he objected to Punt's account when it was first drawn up.)

Rushbrook is a rather shadowy figure. He was an ex-Franciscan who in 1560 became rector of Norton, Suffolk, a living which he held until his death in 1585.<sup>31</sup> Although his age and background suggest a certain religious conservatism he seems to have been on good terms with Walker and close enough to godly circles to be well informed of what Punt and Foxe were up to. Rushbrook wrote to Walker on 30 April 1563, from Bildeston, a village about one and a half miles south of Hitcham and two miles south-west of Wattisham. Rushbrook stated that he had spoken 'with those which, as I judge, can best sertyfy the truth of the matter which is reported [and] pertayneth to Coup[er]; of which ... I wold yt had never bene wrytten'. Rushbrook went on to claim that he had warned Punt over two years ago that the report which he had obtained about Cooper, and which Foxe had subsequently printed, was untrue.<sup>32</sup> Rushbrook listed a number of specific objections to Foxe's account of Cooper: that Cooper was undeserving of commendation, that Richard White's testimony against Cooper was truthful and that Grimwood did not testify against Cooper at all and that the story of Grimwood's providential death was false. Rushbrook's major objection, however, was that Foxe had placed too high a valuation on Cooper's confiscated property; in a detailed and lengthy inventory of Cooper's property, Rushbrook assessed its total value at £61 7s 4d.

<sup>29</sup> BL, Lansdowne MS 443, fo. 79r. (I am indebted to Brett Usher for this reference.) For MacBriar's career see Garrett, *Marian exiles*, pp. 223–4.

<sup>30</sup> See P. W. Hasler, *The House of Commons 1558–1603* (3 vols., London, 1981), s.v., 'Cavendish, William'.

<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Baskerville, 'Married clergy and pensioned religious in Norwich diocese, 1555' *English Historical Review*, 48(1933), p. 201 n. 1.

<sup>32</sup> If accurate, Rushbrook's assertion would mean that Foxe obtained the story of Cooper in the early months of 1561.



He also claimed that he had spoken to Cooper's wife and that she had verified the accuracy of this assessment. Rushbrook concluded: 'I understand that my frende Punt hath wylled the late wyfe of the sayd Couper to come to hym to Ippswich. I pray you move hym to be sylent in this case or ells requyre Mr Foxe not to geve credyt to his wryting or reporte in this behalfe and tell hym that I requyred you to do so.'<sup>33</sup>

Just as Punt took pains to affirm Cooper's story, so Rushbrook went to a lot of trouble to refute it. Rushbrook's parish of Norton was about ten miles north of Wattisham, so his interview with Cooper's widow cost him time and effort. Why was Rushbrook so interested in undermining Punt's version of events?

The answer may lie in Rushbrook's obvious zeal to reduce the valuation of the property the Cooper family had lost. Were Rushbrook or his family or friends beneficiaries of Cooper's misfortune? Was Rushbrook trying to limit the reparations that might have to be paid to Cooper's heirs? Certainly his list of the martyr's property looks as if it was compiled from some sort of official inventory, which suggests a degree of collusion with the officials who seized Cooper's property.<sup>34</sup> If Foxe's account of Cooper's sufferings was intended (as it may well have been) to pave the way for the Cooper family to recover what they had lost, then it may very well have been in Rushbrook's interest to discredit that account or even to induce Foxe to suppress it.

If this was Rushbrook's objective, he was temporarily successful. The story of Cooper and his persecutors was completely excised from the second (1570) edition of the *Acts and monuments*. In the third edition, however, published six years later, the narrative of Cooper's martyrdom was not only restored, it was expanded. A concluding paragraph was added just after the earlier injunction for Fenning to amend his life in which Foxe declared that Cooper's accuser 'continueth still in his wickednes' and reported that Fenning had been forced to do public penance in the parish church of Wenhaston, where he was vicar, for defaming the women in his parish. 'And, more over, the above sayd Fennyng is reported to bee more like a shifter than a minister.'<sup>35</sup>

The addition of this anecdote indicates that Foxe, reluctant to abandon the story of Cooper's martyrdom and its consequences, made further inquiries between the publication of the second and third editions of his book. It also indicates that at least some of Foxe's sources for the story of Cooper were motivated by a desire to discredit Fenning. (A good sign of the priorities of

<sup>33</sup> BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 174r.

<sup>34</sup> This may also be indicated by Rushbrook's writing his letter from Bildeston. Since Rushbrook lived to the north of Wattisham where the widow Cooper resided, why did he travel further south to Bildeston? One possibility is that he was on his way to or from Pond Hall, Hadleigh, the home of Sir Henry Doyle, which was about seven miles south of Wattisham. Perhaps Rushbrook obtained the inventory from Doyle and, having had it verified by Cooper's widow, he journeyed south to return it to Cooper's persecutor.

<sup>35</sup> 1576, p. 1990. This version of the story of Cooper, Grimwood, and Fenning was reprinted, without change, in the fourth edition of *Acts and monuments*, the last edition of the work published during Foxe's lifetime. (See 1583, pp. 2099–100.)

Foxe's informants is the fact that they managed to overlook the fact that Grimwood was alive, but they were nevertheless able to ferret out the details of a scandal in Wenhaston, a parish about forty miles north-east of Wattisham). I suggested earlier that Fenning and the officials who seized the Cooper property were the principal targets of Foxe's account. I would further suggest that these were the separate targets of two distinct groups of informants, each with its own divergent objectives. The first, consisting of members of the Cooper family and their friends, wished to emphasize the wrongs done to them and the losses which they had suffered, probably in order to secure compensation. The second group, consisting of an assortment of Marian confessors and godly clergy, wished to embarrass and discredit Fenning. This animus must have been inspired by more than anger at Fenning's role in Cooper's death but whether it was fuelled by personal conflicts, indignation at perceived venality, religious differences, or, more probably, some combination of these, is now, and may remain, unknown. Nevertheless, the hostility towards Fenning is clear (Rushbrook defends White and Grimwood but says nothing about Fenning) and it is equally clear that the story of Cooper was being used as a weapon against him.

### III

A similar intertwining of Foxe's text with a campaign of defamation is apparent in the story of another providential punishment visited upon the 'betrayed' of a Marian martyr. In this case, the act of betrayal consisted of climbing up a tree to spot the fugitive, a peripatetic Protestant preacher, George Eagles, hiding in a cornfield. Eagles was arrested, taken to Colchester, convicted of treason, and in July 1557, hanged, drawn, and quartered at Chelmsford. His 'betrayed' was, however, denied most of the money promised to him as a reward for Eagles's capture. At the conclusion of the narrative of Eagles's martyrdom in the first edition of *Acts and monuments*, Foxe identified this 'betrayed' as 'Rafe Lardyn dwelling in the towne of Colchester' and went on to relate, with ill-concealed satisfaction, that in 1561 Larden was convicted of felony at Chelmsford sessions and sentenced to death. According to this account, Larden thereupon addressed the people in the courtroom, declaring that 'This is moste justly fallen upon me ... for that I betrayed the innocent blood of a good and iust man, George Eagles, who was condemned in the tyme of Quene Maries reigne, through my procurement, who sold his blood for a little money.'<sup>36</sup> To make sure that his readers did not miss this edifying story, Foxe also stated, in a section at the end of his book describing notable punishments providence had inflicted on the wicked, that the man who betrayed Eagles was himself arrested and hanged.<sup>37</sup>

Yet despite the obvious ways in which this story appealed to Foxe's freeze-

<sup>36</sup> 1563, p. 1615.

<sup>37</sup> 1563, p. 1704.

dried morality, the martyrologist retreated from his certitude about it in the next edition of the *Acts and monuments*. In the second edition Foxe repeated the story of the 'betrayal' of Eagles but he removed all mention of Larden and his repentent speech from the account of Eagles's martyrdom.<sup>38</sup> The description of Larden's doom was retained in Foxe's section of tales of providential punishment but it was significantly altered. It now read: 'Likewise touching Rafe Lardin the betrayer of George Eagles, *it is thought of some* that the said Rafe was attached him self, arraigned and hanged. Herof read more in our former edition, pag. 1615.'<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that, as with the story of Cooper, Foxe had received information that cast doubt on the credibility of his earlier story. (It is also clear that, as with the Cooper story, Foxe, while forced into relative circumspection, was unwilling to abandon entirely his example of crime and divine punishment.) Yet, paradoxically, there is some evidence to suggest that the story of Larden contained more than a few grains of truth. Larden is listed among the prisoners before a commission of gaol delivery in Colchester on 19 March 1562; he could very well have been sent to Chelmsford from Colchester to meet his fate.<sup>40</sup> Another detail of Foxe's original story, the claim that Larden was fobbed off with a paltry sum of money instead of the £20 reward he had been promised, also has a measure of corroboration; a witness would later testify that he had seen a warrant directing that Larden be paid 4s 4d for his services in apprehending Eagles.<sup>41</sup>

In this case, Foxe's reluctant revision of a story of providential retribution seems to have had less to do with the accuracy of the tale than with Colchester politics. For one thing, the informant or informants Foxe used for his account of events in Marian Colchester in the 1563 edition were, judging by these accounts, markedly hostile to Benjamin Clere, a leading merchant and magistrate of the town. Although Clere was, by 1563, a staunch ally of Thomas Upcher, a godly minister imposing a new moral order on Colchester, the magistrate had been an equally zealous champion of Marian orthodoxy and his enemies were ready to exploit this vulnerability.<sup>42</sup>

The 1563 edition of Foxe's *magnum opus* contains a scathing story of Clere's refusal to allow six martyrs, condemned and executed at Colchester, to pray before they were burned. In a marginal note, Foxe underscored Clere's

<sup>38</sup> 1570, pp. 2203–4.

<sup>39</sup> 1570, p. 2299.

<sup>40</sup> See Mark Byford, 'The price of Protestantism: assessing the impact of religious change in Elizabethan Essex: the cases of Heydon and Colchester, 1558–1594' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1988), p. 293 n. 6. This also matches Foxe's date of 1561 (1562 new style).

<sup>41</sup> 1563, p. 1614, and Byford, 'Price of Protestantism', p. 230.

<sup>42</sup> For the careers of Upcher and Clere, and their alliance, see Byford, 'Price of Protestantism', pp. 123 and 192–258. Byford's account of these two leading citizens of Elizabethan Colchester focuses on a libel, circulating in the summer of 1575, which castigated Clere for his role in the arrest and execution of Eagles. It is possible that the authors of the libel were among Foxe's sources for events in Marian Colchester. Christopher Johnson, one of those responsible for the libel, defended his composition in Star Chamber by maintaining that it was merely an attempt to 'revyve' Foxe's history (Byford, 'Price of Protestantism', pp. 225–6).

iniquity: ‘M. Clere a cruell en[e]my’.<sup>43</sup> Clere was Rafe Larden’s uncle and the story of Larden’s providential and ignominious death was yet another jab at Clere, particularly since it was the latter who paid his nephew for Eagles’s capture and, as JP, condemned Eagles.<sup>44</sup> The stories of uncle and nephew were also linked by their similar treatment in the second edition of *Acts and monuments*; whilst Larden’s story was qualified but not removed, the story of Clere’s cruelty to the Colchester martyrs remained, but the marginal note drawing attention to it was permanently excised.<sup>45</sup>

If it was Clere’s enemies who were behind the damning account of his Marian activities in the 1563 edition, then, in all probability, it was Clere’s ally Upcher who persuaded Foxe to tone down the stories about Clere and Larden in the 1570 edition. Not only was Upcher a godly minister with impeccable credentials as an exile for the gospel, he also had strong ties to the martyrologist himself. Upcher enjoyed the approbation of Foxe’s friend Edmund Grindal, and another of the martyrologist’s close friends, William Winthrop, sent greetings to Foxe in 1561 from ‘owr brother T. Upcher’.<sup>46</sup> Hearing that Dr Henry Bull intended to print the letters of the Marian martyrs (a project that was intertwined with, and eventually incorporated into, *Acts and monuments*), Upcher rounded up a number of these letters and sent them to Bull.<sup>47</sup> Upcher then had good reason for wishing to see the passages in *Acts and monuments* damaging to Clere toned down, if not entirely eliminated, and was in a strong position to ask Foxe to pull his punches.

The accounts of the ‘betrayal’ and execution of Eagles and of the providential punishment of Larden were reprinted in the third edition of *Acts and monuments* unchanged from the versions printed six years before.<sup>48</sup> In the fourth edition of Foxe’s work, however, the story of Larden underwent a final metamorphosis. The account of Eagles’s apprehension and martyrdom was reprinted without change.<sup>49</sup> The tentative description of Larden’s providential punishment was also reprinted, unaltered, from the last two editions but the account of Larden’s repentant speech was exhumed from the first edition and inconsistently added to the revised account of Larden’s doom.<sup>50</sup> And, at the

<sup>43</sup> See 1563, p. 1610, and Byford, ‘Price of Protestantism’, p. 123. Pace Byford, Foxe’s exhortation to Clere to repent was not an indication that Foxe knew of Clere’s post-Marian godliness. Such exhortations are scattered throughout *Acts and monuments* and directed at the most egregious sinners. Thus, for example, after describing Sir Edmund Tyrell’s burning the hand of Rose Allin (an act of brutality depicted in a striking woodcut in *Acts and monuments*), Foxe continued: ‘God graunt that he that was the doer and cause therof, as he hath lyfe and fayre warning geven of him of God to repente, may have lyke grace withal to lament and repente’ (1563, p. 1707). Also remember Foxe’s similar call to Fenning to repent (see n. 12 above).

<sup>44</sup> Byford, ‘Price of Protestantism’, p. 229.

<sup>45</sup> 1570, p. 2202.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal 1519–1583: the struggle for a Reformed Church* (London, 1974), p. 114, and BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 106r. For Upcher’s exile in Mary’s reign, see Garrett, *Marian exiles*, p. 355.

<sup>47</sup> Upcher’s letter to Bull is now BL, Additional MS 19400, fo. 71v. Among the letters Bull marked for return to Upcher are BL, Additional MS 19400, fos. 66r, 71r–v; ECL, MS 260, fos. 132r–v, 213r, 236r, 238r, and 241v–2v; also see ECL, MS 262, fos. 127r–35r.

<sup>48</sup> 1576, pp. 1901–2 and 1991.

<sup>49</sup> 1583, pp. 2009–10.

<sup>50</sup> 1583, p. 2100.

very end of the 1583 edition, a final note appeared describing a man spying the fugitive Eagles from a tree and adding that

This persecutor, named Ralph Lurdane (as we have since learned), a lewd felowe of life for theft and whoredome, was, within a few yeares after he had apprehended the foresaid George Eagles for gayne of money, attached of felony for stealing [a] horse, condemned and hanged in the same place and towne of Chelmsford, where George Eagles before suffered martyrdome.<sup>51</sup>

A number of separate developments lay behind this last version of the story. First, Foxe must have made further inquiries about it (among his original informants?), just as he had done with the story of Cooper, Fenning, and Grimwood. The result was the concluding note about Larden, with its nuggets of new information, such as the exact felony for which Larden was executed. Yet even before his new questions had been answered, Foxe had already resolved to revive the story of Larden's providential punishment from the first edition. (If Foxe had already had the corroborative information that he would print in his final note on Larden, he would surely have incorporated it into the story of Larden's execution reprinted from the first edition rather than insert it into his narrative some fifty pages further on. It must be assumed that Foxe reprinted the story of Larden before he had received the evidence to confirm it).

It was also the changed political situation in Colchester which allowed the final resurrection of the story of Larden's doom. As has been stated, a libel relating Clere's activities in Mary's reign was printed and circulated in the summer of 1575.<sup>52</sup> Clere had those responsible for it, and for previous libels denouncing Upcher, arrested and imprisoned. Although the libellers were tried in Star Chamber the verdict is unknown. Among its results, however, was a backlash against Clere, who lost his place on the common council in 1575 and then decisively lost an attempt to secure re-election as an alderman in 1576: losses which ended his political career and emasculated his influence.<sup>53</sup> In this new political climate, Clere's enemies would not only have felt even less constrained in denouncing Clere (and Larden) but Upcher would have been less able, and perhaps less willing, to intervene with Foxe on behalf of his old ally.

Dr Alexandra Walsham, in her erudite study of providential thought in early modern England, has described the sources of many of Foxe's stories of divine judgement as 'otherwise anonymous individuals who relied upon such untrustworthy sources as childhood memory, local folklore and alehouse gossip'.<sup>54</sup> In fact, some of Foxe's providential anecdotes are clearly rooted in such sources. For example, on the testimony of an old man, who had heard the

<sup>51</sup> 1583, p. 2152.

<sup>52</sup> See n. 42 above.

<sup>53</sup> See Byford, 'Price of Protestantism', pp. 225–58, and Laquita M. Higgs, *Godliness and governance in Tudor Colchester* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998), pp. 233–4.

<sup>54</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in early modern England* (Oxford, 1999), p. 102. But cf. *ibid.*, p. 108.

story from his father, Foxe related the tale of a spectacular judgement visited upon the chancellor of the diocese of Worcester, one 'Whittington', who in the reign of Henry VII had condemned a woman to death for heresy and presided over her burning at Chipping Sodbury. When the execution was over, a bull, awaiting his own violent end at the hands of a butcher, broke loose, and made a beeline for the chancellor and gored him fatally. Yet, in fact, Dr Thomas Wodyngton, the chancellor of the diocese of Worcester from 1487 to 1503, far from being dispatched into the next world by a maddened bull, was promoted and transferred to London by an appreciative government, where he survived until 1522.<sup>55</sup> In this case, oral sources over several generations had embellished actual events to create an edifying and dramatic, but entirely fictitious, tale of divine retribution.

The stories of Cooper and Eagles, however, and of the providential punishments of their persecutors, were far from being the casual products of ale-house gossip. The story of Cooper was compiled, moulded, and disseminated by a network of godly laity and clerics, including some of the leading ecclesiastical figures in East Anglia, while the story of Eagles was shaped by factional politics in Colchester. Rather than being the time-honoured products of oral culture, both stories were designed from the outset to be circulated in print; in fact, the story of Eagles may well have been one element of a sustained campaign of vituperation against Benjamin Clere which was conducted in print and by means of the written word. Above all there was nothing casual or disinterested in the way these stories were conveyed to Foxe; these stories may not have been the products of local folklore but they were the products of local hatreds, grievances, and vendettas, related in order to serve the purposes of his informants.

#### IV

Yet while Foxe's informants could determine which stories reached him and the content of those that did reach him, they could not shape the final version of these stories when they were printed in *Acts and monuments*, nor were they able to decide if their stories would be printed in Foxe's book at all. Only Foxe had this power. In the stories of Cooper and Eagles, Foxe's editorial policies were quite consistent. In both cases, he clung stubbornly to stories of providential retribution despite vigorous objections to their accuracy. Compelled by the force of these objections, and the influence of those who articulated them to omit these tales, Foxe reprinted them with alacrity as soon as he could obtain sufficient corroboration for them. And to ensure that he obtained such corroboration, he launched his own investigations of these stories; if necessary (as with the story of Cooper), he made repeated inquiries until he obtained the desired result.

<sup>55</sup> Mozley, *John Foxe*, p. 164.

Why was Foxe so anxious to retain these stories of providential judgement? One of the most impressive features of Walsham's work has been her analysis of the divergent motives and ideologies, including, in various degrees, crass commercialism, careerism, and evangelical fervour, of the authors of collections of *exempla* of providential justice.<sup>56</sup> Compared with the motivations of such later imitators as Philip Stubbes, Anthony Munday, and Thomas Beard, the reasons for Foxe's addiction to the genre are both relatively straightforward and unusually compelling.

One of the most powerful of these reasons was that God's vengeance for the death of His martyrs proved beyond all doubt (provided it could be convincingly demonstrated) that they really were His martyrs. As Foxe demanded, in an 'Admonition to the Reader', which followed the section of his book devoted to tales of persecutors smitten by the hand of providence:

If these Papistes, which make so much of their paynted antiquitie, do thinke their proceedings to be so catholike. and [their] service to be so acceptable to God, let them ... tell us, how commeth then their proceedings to be so accursed of God and theyr end so miserably plagued, as by these examples, above specified, is here notoriously to be seene? Agayne, if the doctrine of them be such heresie, whom they have hitherto persecuted for heretikes unto death, how then is Almighty God become a maynteyner of heretikes, who hath revenged their bloud so grevously upon their enemies and persecutors?<sup>57</sup>

Each story of providential judgement was fire from heaven, God's own hand distinguishing His Elijahs from the priests of Baal. Since a major argument of Reformation confessional polemic (and one which was deployed against Foxe with exceptional vigour) was that the victims of persecution by a given writer's co-religionists were not martyrs, but pseudo-martyrs; God's seal of approval on these sufferers was invaluable propaganda.<sup>58</sup> The clearest testimony to the importance of the appeal to providence's verdict was the fact that, driven by the force of the same polemical logic, Catholics created their own flourishing sub-genre of tales of divine retribution on the Elizabethan and Jacobean officials who persecuted them.<sup>59</sup>

The other compelling reason for Foxe's zeal in recounting stories of the workings of providence was that such stories served to encourage rectitude and maintain faith in justice in a manifestly unjust world. In the first edition of *Acts and monuments* all the victims of providential justice were persecutors of the

<sup>56</sup> See Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 41–51 and 65–115.

<sup>57</sup> 1570, p. 2300.

<sup>58</sup> Miles Hogarde had already employed this argument against the Marian martyrs before Foxe had even returned to England. (See Miles Hogarde, *The displaying of the Protestants*, STC 13557 (London, 1556), fos. 34v–48v.) After the publication of Foxe's first edition, the assertion that Foxe commemorated pseudo-martyrs was a crucial part of Catholic attacks on his book. The most impressive of these assaults on the legitimacy of Foxe's martyrs was Nicholas Harspsfield's *Dialogi sex contra summi pontificatus, monasticae vitae, sanctorum Sacrarum imaginum oppugnatores et pseudomartyres* (Antwerp, 1566), pp. 638 (recte 738)–1002. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Robert Parsons would devote almost two-thirds of his multi-volume polemic, *A treatise of three conversions*, STC 19416 (St Omer, 1604) to a detailed exposition of this argument.

<sup>59</sup> See Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 234–6 and 238–40.

gospel; beginning with the second edition their ranks were swelled with drunkards, adulterers, blasphemers, and sinners of every variety. (This, by the way, is one sign of a crucial and increasing shift in the editions of the *Acts and monuments* from its being a work of confessional propaganda to a work of pastoral guidance; a transition, as it were, from the world of John Bale to the world of William Perkins.) In the dedication of the second edition to Elizabeth, Foxe described one of the great benefits to be gained from reading his book:

wherin is to be sene idolatry punished, blasphemy plagued, contempt of God's holy name and religion revenged, murder with murder rewarded, adulterers and wedlock breakers, perjuries, extortions, covetous oppressions, and fraudulent counsels come to naught, with other excellent workes of the Lord: the observyng and notyng whereof in historyes, minister to the readers thereof wholesome admonitions of lyfe, with experience and wisdom, both to knowe God in his workes and to worke the thyng that is godly.<sup>60</sup>

At the conclusion of the same edition Foxe declared that he had included a story of the sudden death, at God's hand, of a twelve-year-old-girl who had called the Almighty 'an old doting fool' so that:

all blynd atheistes, epicures, mammonistes, belly-gods of this world, and sonnes of Belial, hypocrites, infidels, and mockers of religion, which say in their hartes, 'There is no God', learne also hereby not onely what God is, and what he is able to do, but also in this miserable creature here punished in this world, to behold what shall likewise fall upon them in the world to come.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of providence as the ultimate bridle on evil lusts and desires was a pillar of Foxe's thought and outlook on life. In a letter to his neighbours, who had built an extension on to their house and blocked the light coming into his study, Foxe appealed to their consciences and sense of 'neighborely charitie' to tear down at least part of the offending structure. Perhaps conscious that these considerations were not powerful enough to sway those whose hearts had been hardened by the Hobbesian struggle for space in London, Foxe warned his neighbours:

yf this my moone [i.e., moan] unto yow shal not move yow, than shall I be dryven to seek further especially to mak my complaynt unto Hym, which commandeth us, saying: 'Geave revenge over to me and I wyll revenge them, sayeth the Lord.' Wherfor I desyre yow fyrst to ponder with yourselfes, how both yow, and all we together poor subjectes are placed here in this world, not to lyve after the unordinate desires of own affections, without order or justice, catchyng and pluckyng, oppressyng or circumventyng one another, by fraude and injurie, but God our creator have sett us a lawe here to rule us, a conscience to admonishe us, and also punyshmentes if we wil not be ruled to correct us.

Foxe's comments at the end of this letter show that the punishments he was warning his correspondents of included material sanctions inflicted in this world: 'This much I thought, well beloved, to write ... unto yow in thys

<sup>60</sup> 1570, sig. \*2v.

<sup>61</sup> 1570, pp. 2302–3.



behalf, not upon any rashe heat of blynd affection but by your occasion constrained agaynst my wyll and fearyng lest some stroke of God's punishment comme upon yow, wherof I would be very sorry.<sup>62</sup> If the concept of the Almighty as the enforcement arm of the local planning authority seems rather far-fetched, it must be emphasized that this aspect of Foxe's thought struck a resonant chord with his contemporaries. As Patrick Collinson has observed:

Foxe's appendix of cautionary tales was not the end of a lingering and outmoded tradition, but rather the harbinger of a new wave of morally correct credulity, which for more than a century to come would be fostered by sensational broadsheets and pamphlets, and by such substantial and ambitious albums as Thomas Beard's *Theatre of Gods Judgements* (editions in 1597, 1612, 1631) and Samuel Clarke's *Mirror or looking-glasse for saints, and sinners, held forth in some thousands of examples* (1657).<sup>63</sup>

Yet while Foxe's zeal in collecting and printing his tales of supernatural retribution may have been appreciated by early modern readers, it has puzzled and embarrassed modern scholars otherwise impressed by the equal zeal Foxe displayed in researching and reprinting archival sources.<sup>64</sup>

For the most part, modern scholars have dealt with the problem by treating these aspects of Foxe's work in isolation, effectively transforming him, like the unfortunate Dr Jekyll, into two diametrically opposed entities living within the same skin. On the one hand, there is 'good Foxe' who, in A. G. Dickens's phrase, 'discovered the Public Record Office'.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, there is 'bad Foxe', who related stories of homicidal bulls, suicidal horses, defecating crows, swarming lice, bolts of lightning, and well-timed whirlwinds which smote sinners in what Collinson has aptly called the 'providential fantasies of God's violent theme park'.<sup>66</sup>

An influential example of this tendency to divorce Foxe's providential stories from the rest of his history occurs in Michael McKeon's *The origins of the English novel*. McKeon begins with a generous (in my opinion, over-generous) assessment of Foxe the historian:

Equally remarkable in Foxe's work, however, is the way in which the Protestant reliance on the documentary objectivity of God's Book is internalized within Foxe's own editorial procedures. It is not just that he consults an extraordinary range of documents, but that he brings to this a critical and comparative rigor, a self-conscious devotion to the pursuit of truth in all its exhaustive contingency and detail, that is worthy of a sceptical new philosopher.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 136r-v.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'Truth, lies and fiction in sixteenth-century Protestant historiography', in Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks, eds., *The historical imagination in early modern Britain: history, rhetoric and fiction, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 57.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Warren W. Wooden, *John Foxe* (Boston, 1983), pp. 22-3, and Mozley, *John Foxe*, pp. 163-4.

<sup>65</sup> For Dickens's use of this phrase see Collinson, 'Truth, lies and fiction', p. 49 n. 34.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Michael McKeon, *The origins of the English novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore and London, 1988), pp. 91-2.

As part of Foxe's 'impulse towards exhaustive documentation', McKeon claims that Foxe includes but 'relegates to an appendix an eyewitness account of one who escapes Marian incarceration when a voice instructs him to depart and his prison walls crumble around him'.<sup>68</sup> McKeon's implicit assumption – that Foxe included this story only because he felt obliged to include everything that was relevant – does not do justice to Foxe's rigorous selectivity in printing the material uncovered by his research; a selectivity based not on considerations of relevance or accuracy, but rather on didactic or polemical utility.<sup>69</sup>

The story McKeon refers to, that of William Laremouth, a Scottish Protestant imprisoned in Mary's reign, deserves closer scrutiny. Foxe introduced the story on a defensive note:

Albeit [that] I am loth to insert any thing in this booke which may seme incredible or straunge to ordinary working, for [i.e., because of] quarreling adversaries which do nothing but spie what they may cavail: yet forsomuch as, besides other reporters, the person is yet alive, called Thorne, a godly minister, which heard it out of the partie himself, I thought therefore ... for the incredible strangenes therof, neither to place this story in the body of these Acts and Monumentes, and yet in some outcorner of the boke not utterly to passe it untouched.

Foxe then relates that Laremouth, while in prison, heard a voice tell him three times to 'Arise and go thy ways.' Obeying the voice, Laremouth arose, upon which a section of the prison wall collapsed and Laremouth leaped over a ditch and escaped.<sup>70</sup> The fact that this story is placed at the conclusion of the Victorian editions of Foxe's work, which were the only editions McKeon consulted, coupled with Foxe's dismissive statement about placing the story in 'some outcorner' of the book, apparently misled McKeon.<sup>71</sup> Foxe's handling of this story was, however, far more complex than he believed.

Laremouth's story originally appeared in the second edition of *Acts and monuments*, along with an account of the martyrdom of Richard Snell, in Yorkshire, as part of 'Certaine Cautions of the Author to the Reader' inserted at the *front* of the first volume of this edition, between the errata and the first page of the text.<sup>72</sup> The obvious reason for placing these two stories there (especially since Snell's martyrdom contained nothing miraculous or indeed exceptional) was that Foxe received these stories on the eve of publication and

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> See especially Patrick Collinson, 'Truth and legend: the veracity of John Foxe's *Book of martyrs*', in idem, *Elizabethan Essays* (London, 1994), pp. 159–70. For examples of Foxe's selectivity in printing source material see Susan Wabuda, 'Henry Bull, Miles Coverdale and the making of Foxe's *Book of martyrs*', in Diana Wood, ed., *Martyrs and martyrologies* (Studies in Church History, 30, Oxford, 1993), pp. 255–6, and Thomas S. Freeman, 'The importance of dying earnestly: the metamorphosis of the account of James Bainham in Foxe's "Book of martyrs"', in R. N. Swanson, ed., *The church retrospective* (Studies in Church History, 33, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1997), pp. 267–88.

<sup>70</sup> 1570, sig. 1r.

<sup>71</sup> *A & M*, viii, pp. 739–40.

<sup>72</sup> The fact that there is no indication in any of the Victorian editions of where in Foxe's book this story originally appeared is a reminder of how misleading these editions can be and how badly the electronic edition, being prepared under the auspices of the British Academy, is needed.

there was nowhere else to insert them. In the third edition (printed in 1576) Foxe transferred the entire section of 'Certaine Cautions' to the final pages of the book.<sup>73</sup>

Thus the literal marginalization of the story of Laremouth at the extreme ends of the *Acts and monuments* had nothing to do with its credibility or miraculous content (otherwise why was the account of Snell treated in exactly the same way?) and everything to do with when Foxe received it, and with the subsequent unwillingness of Foxe and John Day to go to the trouble of integrating these stories into the main body of the text. (As Foxe blithely remarked when he inserted an oration of King Edgar's into his history between the reigns of Harold II and William the Conqueror, 'better I judge it out of order, then out of the booke'.)<sup>74</sup> I shall return to Foxe's defensive introduction to his account of Laremouth's escape and to his 'quarreling adversaries' but clearly Foxe's handling of Laremouth's story does not support McKeon's picture of Foxe as a critical scholar who recognized that the tales of providential reward and punishment were of a different level of authenticity from the other episodes he recounted in his history.

Yet no less an authority than Patrick Collinson has not only cited McKeon's separation of Foxe's providential stories from his proper history but elaborated on it. Collinson queries:

Do all of Foxe's stories enjoy, or even lay claim to an equal status? Are they all meant to attract the same amount of credence? I would suggest not. In the main body of the text, consisting of great slabs of cumulative, chronological narrative, rolled along on their supporting documentation. Foxe expects and for the most part deserves to be believed. He is not inventing material in the sense of making it up. But the tail end of the book consists of a kind of delta of wandering, inconsequential, anecdotal streams. These stories of divine judgement and mercy may be largely fictional and may have been so understood by both Foxe and his readers ... Foxe could make use of a story of 'incredible strangeness', but only in what he calls 'some out-corner of the book', not in the 'body of these Acts and Monuments'.<sup>75</sup>

As we have seen, Foxe's reference to some 'out-corner' of his book was *not* a reference to the providential judgements at the end of it. In fact it is curious that while the conclusion of a book is usually regarded as its climax and apex, the conclusion to Foxe's book is usually dismissed as an authorial afterthought. Yet in the 1570 edition, the entire pageant of Christian history, from the apostles to Queen Elizabeth, ends with a collection of tales of providence punishing sinners, followed by the 'Admonition to the Reader' already mentioned.<sup>76</sup> The influx of new material forced Foxe to abandon this scheme in later editions, yet that of 1583, the capstone of Foxe's martyrological labours, still ends with a narrative of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, culminating in the

<sup>73</sup> 1576, pp. 2207–8. The story would be reprinted in this location in all subsequent unabridged editions of Foxe's book.

<sup>74</sup> 1570, p. 220.

<sup>75</sup> Collinson, 'Truth, lies and fictions', pp. 61–2.

<sup>76</sup> 1570, pp. 2300–2.

providential and agonizing death of Charles IX, ‘a spectacle to all persecuting kinges and princes polluted with the blood of Christian martyrs’.<sup>77</sup>

Apart from a modern distaste for its subject matter, much of the dismissal of the sections of *Acts and monuments* devoted to the works of providence stems from its chaotic appearance as (to elaborate on Collinson’s metaphor) the broad river of chronological narrative breaks down into a swampy maze of isolated anecdotes connected only by a stream-of-consciousness narrative which shifts course from edition to edition. Yet all of this disorganization is the result of Foxe’s continual addition, deletion, or rearrangement of his material. This constant process of emendation can be traced to several causes. For one thing, Foxe’s providential stories (at least those dealing with events in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth) were based almost entirely on information submitted by informants scattered across England. This inevitably meant that these stories reached him throughout the printing process and often (as we have seen with the stories of Larden and Laremouth) had to be inserted haphazardly into the text.

Another factor was that no other section of the *Acts and monuments* involved as much checking and rechecking of facts as did Foxe’s stories of providential retribution. One reason for this was that, as in the cases of Grimwood and Larden, such stories were often controversial, not to say bitterly contentious, and those close to the case were liable to take offence. After relating an account of the providential death of a blasphemous Cornish gentleman, Foxe stated that the story was told to him by a minister named Heynes, but added that: ‘The name of the gentleman I could by no meanes obteyne of the partie and witnes aforesayd for dread of those (as he saith) which yet remain of his affinitie and kyndred in the sayd countrey.’<sup>78</sup> Investigation of tales of divine justice not only reduced (although as Grimwood’s experience shows, did not eliminate) the dangers of false accusation, it also provided a shield against recriminations and reprisals.

Yet the anger of those who felt that they, their friends, or family had been slandered by Foxe was anaemic in comparison to the outraged reaction of Catholic writers towards the first edition of *Acts and monuments*. Foxe eloquently testified to the ubiquity of Catholic attacks, and the impression they made on him:

A man would have thought Christ to have bene new borne agayne, and that Herode with all the Citie of Jerusalem had bene in an uprore. Such blustryng and styrring was then against that poore booke through all quarters of England, even to the gates of Louvaine, so that no English papist almost in all the realme thoght him selfe a perfect Catholike, unlesse he had cast out some word or other, to geve that booke a blow.<sup>79</sup>

A favourite target of these attacks were the stories of miracles and marvels, both punitive and beneficial, which pervaded Foxe’s narrative. The two most effective contemporary critics of *Acts and monuments*, Nicholas Harpsfield and

<sup>77</sup> 1583, pp. 2152–4.

<sup>78</sup> 1570, p. 2304.

<sup>79</sup> 1570, sig. \*1r.

Thomas Stapleton, concentrated much of their fire on battering them down.<sup>80</sup> These were the 'quarelling adversaries' who had Foxe relating the story of Laremouth in such a defensive tone, and their criticisms did indeed compel Foxe to abandon edifying tales of miracles which he could not verify.<sup>81</sup> Since Foxe's stories of providential justice, by definition, involved the supernatural, they were vulnerable to his Catholic critics. The best defence against these critics was to investigate each story, and, above all, secure witnesses who would confirm it.

In fact (proving that 'good Foxe' and 'bad Foxe' cannot be separated), much of the sceptical rigour and meticulous sifting of the evidence so admired by McKeon was devoted to the stories of providential retribution. A glance at the section of *Acts and monuments* devoted to providential punishments shows that here Foxe almost invariably listed sources for his stories and witnesses to the events he described. (Even the story of Burton, a papist chastised through the improbable agency of a defecating crow, was, we are assured, 'reported and testified for a certentie by divers of his neighbors, both honest and credible persons'.)<sup>82</sup> Of course, as Walsham has pointed out, this was a common tactic among the authors and publishers of all types of sensational stories, from the murderous to the miraculous.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, in Foxe's case it can be demonstrated, as it cannot in the cases of other purveyors of providential anecdotes, that he would not print such stories unless he had a credible (at least by his standards) witness to verify it. Among Foxe's surviving papers is a letter from one Francis Hall to John Field, dated 13 September 1569. (Field would soon emerge as the great propagandist of nascent presbyterianism, but at this time he was the sorcerer's apprentice, learning the dark arts of rhetoric and research while acting as an assistant to that master magician, John Foxe).<sup>84</sup> Hall, responding to what must have been a request from Field for information on the providential death of a Catholic named Runse during Mary's reign, wrote: 'of the manner of his death certainly to wryte as yet I cannenot *because I am not able to get any that will or are able perfectly to reporte it ... Thus tyll I am better able to certifie you of.*'<sup>85</sup>

Hall was presumably unable to find someone who would vouch for a suitable account of Runse's death; the story was never printed by Foxe. In this case, as in those of Cooper and Eagles, Foxe (and Field) carefully sifted the evidence on

<sup>80</sup> See Bede, *The history of the Church of England*, trans. Thomas Stapleton, STC 1778 (Antwerp, 1556), pp. 4 and 9, together with Harpsfield, *Dialogi sex*, pp. 919–22, 933, 939–40, 949–58, and 962. Harpsfield also contrasted the genuine miracles of the Catholic martyrs with the counterfeit miracles of the Protestant 'pseudo-martyrs' (*Dialogi sex*, pp. 995–6).

<sup>81</sup> E.g., the story of a white cross appearing on the chest of six martyrs burnt at Brentford in July 1558, which appeared in the first edition of the *Acts and monuments* (1563, p. 1670), was sharply criticized by both Harpsfield (*Dialogi sex*, p. 962) and Stapleton (*Bede*, p. 9). It was quietly dropped from all subsequent early modern editions of Foxe's book.

<sup>83</sup> Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 40–1 and 45–7.

<sup>84</sup> Field's career, including this portion of it, is described in Patrick Collinson, 'John Field and Elizabethan puritanism', in *Godly people*, pp. 335–70.

<sup>85</sup> BL, Harley MS 416, fo. 188r (my emphasis).

which the providential stories in *Acts and monuments* were based, not in the pursuit of objective truth, but for the same reason that a barrister interrogates a client: to ensure that his or her story will stand up to cross-examination.

This careful checking and rechecking made the section on providential punishments the most textually unstable of Foxe's entire book. Adding to this instability was Foxe's deep-seated reluctance to drop such stories and his ready restoration of them to his text as soon as he could get a witness to vouch for them. For despite the fact that tales of providential justice were lightning rods for criticism, recriminations, and even litigation, Foxe continually added such tales to each new edition of his book. Out of the mass of chatty and rather unreliable anecdotes which John Lowthe, archdeacon of Nottingham, sent to Foxe in 1579, the only items Foxe printed were those relating to the crimes and providential punishment of Dr John Williams, the chancellor of the diocese of Gloucester during Mary's reign. (In fact, Foxe emphasized the providential aspects of Lowthe's account of Williams's sudden death. Lowthe had headed this story: 'The straunge and hasty dethe of the same Doctor Wyllyams.' Foxe crossed out the word 'hasty' and wrote 'fearful' above it, which was how this heading was printed in *Acts and monuments*. And Foxe deleted Lowthe's speculation that Williams's death might have been suicide; the martyrologist did not want any other explanation for the sinner's death beyond the providential one).<sup>86</sup>

Thus the chaotic appearance of the final section of *Acts and monuments* devoted to stories of providential retribution was not due to their being authorial afterthoughts but was, on the contrary, due to the considerable importance attached to them by Foxe, his sources, and his readers. No other section of Foxe's book received such care and attention, reflected in frequent revisions, additions, and deletions.

Apart from the problems caused by the deficiencies of the Victorian editions of *Acts and monuments*, the biggest obstacles to our understanding of the importance of the providential stories in Foxe's book have been the preconceptions and biases that modern scholars have brought to the study of Foxe and his work. Products of a culture where one of the hallmarks of an educated person is scepticism about any supernatural interference with the natural order, modern scholars have tended to dismiss the providential stories related to Foxe as casual byproducts of gossip, exaggeration, and faulty memory. Yet some of these stories, such as those about Grimwood and Larden, were anything but casual in their inception, composition, or dissemination. They were instead often related and circulated by people in the premeditated furtherance of well-considered goals, either altruistic or pragmatic. The providential stories often represent, in an acute form, the converging of

<sup>86</sup> Lowthe's account of Williams's crimes and his dramatic death, with Foxe's emendations of it, is now BL, Harley MS 425, fos. 135v–6v; this is reprinted in John Gough Nichols, ed., *Narratives of the days of the Reformation* (Camden Society, 1st ser., 77, London, 1859), pp. 18–22. Foxe printed this material in 1583, pp. 1911–12 and 2105.

interests between Foxe and his informants which furnished much of the material in *Acts and monuments*.

For Foxe had his own agenda in collecting and printing these tales of providential justice; only the strength of our preconceptions of what history should be can lead us to divorce these stories from the rest of Foxe's history. There was no 'good Foxe' and no 'bad Foxe'. He was neither a Ranke *avant la lettre*, pioneering scientific archival research, nor a credulous compiler of whatever information came his way. He was instead an early modern historian who used what sometimes approximate twentieth-century methods in pursuit of decidedly sixteenth-century goals. The stories of providential wonders which Foxe printed demonstrate what these goals were: the conversion of unbelievers to the gospel, the correction by example of sinners, and the edification of the godly. The gathering and printing of providential stories were of great importance to Foxe's success in attaining these goals and as such central, rather than peripheral, to his activities as a historian. To impose our own priorities on Foxe and to minimize the importance of the providentialism in the *Acts and monuments* is to misunderstand him, his work, and the influence his work had on English life and thought for several generations.