

Brazil, Cuba, and even the USA in so-called “freedom suits”, whilst forms of “gynaecological resistance” (infanticide, abortion) have also been noted. Yet this makes no appearance in this otherwise excellent study.

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GURNEY, JOHN. *Brave Community: The Digger Movement in the English Revolution*. [Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain.] Manchester University Press, Manchester [etc.] 2007. xiii, 236 pp. £55.00; \$84.95; doi:10.1017/S0020859010000088

Ever since Eduard Bernstein wrote his pioneering study of the radical thought of the English Civil War and its aftermath, the figure of Gerrard Winstanley (1609–1676) has loomed large in any treatment of that radical thought. To Bernstein, Winstanley’s magnum opus *The Law of Freedom* was a “communistic utopia” and consequently, as a precursor of communism, Winstanley became a subject of interest to many other scholars with left-wing sympathies. Winstanley’s substantial body of writings, largely preserved among the many contemporary tracts collected by the mid-seventeenth-century London bookseller George Thomason, have naturally led to a great emphasis on Winstanley and his works. Those works have been collected in authoritative scholarly editions, and perhaps more articles and books have been published on him and his thought than on any other radical thinker of that time.¹

Consequently the figure of Winstanley and his literary legacy has largely overshadowed, if not obscured, the fact that he was part of the particular movement of the Diggers. He was its most outspoken and most prominent member, but hitherto very little was known about his associates. In his recent book, *Brave Community*, John Gurney has focused therefore on the Diggers as a group, and on the setting in which they primarily operated – the parishes of Cobham and Walton-on-Thames. Without Winstanley there would have been no Digger movement, as Gurney writes, and his study also sets out to reassess Winstanley’s career and intellectual development. In this book too then, Winstanley is assigned the leading role, but this time the limelight regularly shifts to the other, lesser-known actors in the piece – heroes and villains alike.

In order to establish a clearer picture of who the Diggers and their adversaries were exactly Gurney has undertaken a thorough, and undoubtedly lengthy, study of the primary sources for this particular part of Surrey, and painstakingly reconstructed the local circumstances at the end of the 1640s and who actually lived there at that time. This must have been very time-consuming – indeed Gurney’s first article on this subject dates from 1994 – though Gurney modestly refrains from alluding to what must have been an

1. Leaving literary figures, such as Milton, aside of course. Seminal studies on Winstanley include: the first full-length study of Winstanley by David W. Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War: A Study of the Social Philosophy of Gerrard Winstanley* (London, 1940); the study of Winstanley’s use of language by T. Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger: A Literary Analysis of Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (Cambridge MA, 1979); and the study of his political thought by George Shulman, *Radicalism and Reverence: the Political Thought of Gerrard Winstanley* (Berkeley, CA, 1989). Winstanley’s writings were collected in authoritative editions: George H. Sabine (ed.), *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (Ithaca NY, 1941), and Christopher Hill (ed.), *The Law of Freedom, and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth, 1973).

arduous task. The result is, however, a miniature social history of especially the parish of Cobham, where Winstanley lived between 1643 and 1664.

In the first two chapters Gurney thus sets out the stage in detail, before turning to a reassessment of the main character, Winstanley. The third chapter is devoted to his early biography, with particular focus on the networks of which he formed a part. From this it becomes conclusively clear that Winstanley actually enjoyed considerable status: he was a gentleman, who both in his London and Cobham years was often asked to fill local offices, and even in times of adversity he was active as an independent grazier or farmer. The romantic depiction of his early Cobham years as a period of “abject hardship” with Winstanley reduced to herding cattle for his neighbours thus has no basis in the sources. Winstanley retained his gentlemanly status throughout life, though not without occasional difficulty. Gurney’s research places Winstanley in a “series of surprisingly influential and cosmopolitan networks of kinship and affinity” (p. 63). “He was clearly not the obscure and unworldly individual he is so often presented as being” (p. 66).

The fourth chapter is devoted to a reassessment of Winstanley’s early works, rightly categorizing them as profoundly religious and essentially Christian in inspiration. Gurney emphasizes the importance of the concern among Winstanley and his contemporaries for a Christianity not just in name but also in practice. Throughout the book he seeks to recapture the consistency and change in, and direct context of, Winstanley’s writings. He places Winstanley’s *A New-Yeers Gift* in the context therefore of a campaign by the minister of Cobham to smear the Diggers as unbelievers; shows convincingly that some of Winstanley’s writings directly, if not outspokenly, were a response to the works of other thinkers such as Anthony Ascham and Laurence Clarkson. He shows also that Winstanley’s *The New Law of Righteousness* and his other proposals for communal working of the land can properly be understood only in the context of the many social and economic problems of the time, which were exceptionally acute in Surrey. Thus, he successfully places Winstanley’s writings in the direct local context, though without losing sight of the much wider, national response to Winstanley’s writings. Even Oliver Cromwell appreciated some of Winstanley’s proposals. Gurney shows convincingly that Winstanley clearly adapted his stance if that was suitable. He was, for instance, much less outspoken in the writings he addressed to those whom he hoped might protect him and his Diggers, such as Fairfax and Cromwell.

The fifth and sixth chapters treat the Diggers as a group, and offer a reassessment of the chronology of the Digger experiment, which lasted from 1 April 1649 until it finally petered out in the summer of 1650. The fifth chapter focuses on the famous digging experiment on St George’s Hill and the sixth on the later experiment in Cobham parish. The failure of the first experiment Gurney conclusively attributes to local popular hostility. The inhabitants of Walton-on-Thames, rich and poor alike, feared an encroachment on their common rights and eventually drove out the Diggers. A second attempt to found a Digging colony on the Cobham common itself failed not due to popular hostility, but to the effective resistance of the local gentry and minister, who eventually successfully enlisted the help of the army in driving out the Diggers.

The difference in reception, Gurney points out, was due to the strong local ties of many of the Diggers to Cobham. Most active Diggers were from Cobham and its surroundings, although there were certainly others from further afield. While they were strangers to Walton-on-Thames, in Cobham they belonged to the community. The division between Diggers and their opponents seems to have run between the tenants of the manor, who had common rights, and those who had not – such as Winstanley himself, it turns out. These problems obviously predated the Digging experiments. One future Digger at least was fined for digging and selling turves from the manorial waste, as were many others, including in 1646 Winstanley himself.

As a group, the Diggers were socially heterogeneous. They were not all poor, but most of them had a precarious position of some sort. Many of them shared a radical

Christianity, and often developed from being dissenters from the Anglican Church in the 1640s to becoming Quakers in the later 1650s, as Winstanley himself did, in fact. Gurney shows how digging experiments elsewhere were conducted by Digger groups which were much alike in composition. In each case “the same distinctive convergence of religious radicalism, egalitarianism and concern for the necessitous poor was to be found” (p. 190).

These chapters also show, however, how difficult it has been to identify the Diggers and reconstruct their history before and after the digging experiment. Gurney’s reconstruction is most successful when he can rely on the local sources: Diggers from outside the area are much more difficult to trace back. But that does not detract from the value of Gurney’s study.

There are some minor defects to the book. The absence of a separate bibliography is regrettable, since it forces the reader to search through the many footnotes to retrieve the full title of a particular book or article. Gurney also fails to explain some more abstruse legal terms – such as *mainpernor* – and terms unfamiliar to non-specialists of rural English history. Finally, it is a pity that Gurney, who obviously has a full grasp of the vast literature on Winstanley, rarely explicitly contrasts his findings with those of others. As studies of Winstanley have appeared regularly and are likely to continue to do so, it would have been useful for the reader to know exactly where Gurney stands in the field of Winstanley studies, and what interpretations – old or modern – he opposes or endorses.

These are minor blemishes in a study that successfully blends social and intellectual history in recreating the environment in which one of the most original thinkers of mid-seventeenth-century England originated and acted. As such, this book should be regarded as the starting point for any student of Winstanley and the Diggers.

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LANZA, JANINE M. *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law*. Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington 2007. ; doi:10.1017/S002085901000009X

The recent literature on widowhood in early modern times emphasizes the vulnerability of women without men. The standard of living of women fell after the loss of a spouse. The absence of a well-developed welfare system, the unequal distribution of property, and restrictions on the income-earning capacities of women often led to further impoverishment. In her analysis of the meaning of widowhood for women from artisan ranks in early modern Paris, Janine Lanza seeks to counterbalance this interpretation and emphasizes the possibilities available to widows. Lanza re-evaluates female widowhood and stresses that widows could act independently and occupy positions of authority.

From Wives to Widows is divided into two parts. The first discusses the framework in which widows lived their lives and investigates the norms embedded in law, religious teaching, and guild statutes. The second part, with chapters on the workplace, remarriage, and poverty, addresses the choices widows made within the constraints imposed upon them by society.

In the first chapter Lanza points to the discrepancy between patriarchal norms and practice in which widows used legal regulations to achieve their own ends. But a careful examination also reveals that even though the law reflected a patriarchal notion of the family, it left widows much latitude to manage their own affairs and defend their family interests. The law made a distinction between widows and married and single women; it enabled widows to fulfil their new role as household heads and recognized their need to provide for their families. Moreover, as Lanza rightly points out, legislation, such as the edict on second marriages, applied as much to men as to women. Restrictions on the transmission of property during second marriages should not be interpreted as constraints on a widow’s authority therefore, but rather as instruments to protect the property rights of children.