The Long Dissolution

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James G. Clark, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021, pp. x + 689, £ 29.00. ISBN: 978-0-300-11572-7. £75.00; Harriet Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. xvi, 285, £75.00. ISBN: 978-316-51640-9

> 'That time of year thou mayest in me behold …
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.'

Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, with its allusions to twilight, night and death, has often been interpreted by historians as an oblique, grieving comment about the closure of England's religious houses during the Reformation. The standard account of events was established more than sixty years ago by David Knowles (1896-1974), Benedictine monk and Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge, in his evocative and indispensable work, *The Religious Orders in England*.[1] In more recent years, the overwhelming success of Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* has led scholars to concentrate not on the abbeys, but rather on life in English parishes in the sixteenth century.[2] Now however, two fresh studies about the closure of the religious houses, with dramatically different approaches, have emerged almost at once: James G. Clark's *The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History*, and Harriet Lyon's *Memory and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Early Modern England*.

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[1] The third volume of David Knowles's *The Religious Orders in England*: *The Tudor Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) was reprinted as *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). See also Eamon Duffy, 'The Conservative Voice in the English Reformation' and 'Bare Ruin'd Choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare's England' in *Saints, Sacrilege and Sedition: Religion and Conflict in the Tudor Reformations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 211-54.
[2] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

The religious houses were closed by the government under King Henry VIII between 1536 to 1540. The dissolution marked a dramatic repudiation of a way of life that had gradually developed in England since the end of the sixth century, when Pope Gregory the Great sent a mission of Benedictine monks to Canterbury. Over time, the religious houses had become defining features in the landscape and in daily life in England and Wales. From Normandy, new religious orders were introduced in the wake of William the Conqueror's invasion of 1066. Franciscan and Dominican friars began to arrive in the British Isles soon after their mendicant orders were created by Pope Innocent III in the 1200s. Eventually, the friars had convents in London and in every sizeable town. Dominican nuns had a prestigious house at Dartford in Kent. Syon Abbey in Middlesex was a mixed community of Bridgettine nuns and monks, led by an abbess.[3] The population of the religious fluctuated over time, but in the 1530s, estimates suggest that there were nearly two thousand nuns, and just under nine thousand monks and friars in England.[4]

The members of each religious order lived according to a common rule, in emulation of the Apostles of the primitive Church. The religious shared their resources with each other inside their own communities and with many beyond their cloisters. Their work consisted of elaborate routines of prayer that were set to the time of day, the week, and the course of the year. The daily offices of Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext and Nones, with the sacrifice of the Mass, enabled the religious to perform the *opus Dei,* the work of God, and thereby to pray for all Christian people, living and dead. The Books of Hours that came pouring from printing presses from the mid-fifteenth century were the devotional prayer books of the laity, who imitated the regulars' routine of prayer.[5] Friars were a familiar presence in London and across the countryside as they delivered sermons to save souls. Many English houses were famous across Europe as destinations for pilgrimage. They included the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Walsingham in Norfolk (which was revered by King Henry VII); the relic of the Holy Blood at Hailes Abbey in Gloucestershire; and the celebrated shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury.[6] Generation by generation, donors ceded land to the abbeys and

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[3] J. T. Rhodes, 'Syon Abbey and its Religious Publications in the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 44 (1993), 11-25.
[4] See the estimates given in Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 44.
[5] In addition to chapter 7 of *The Stripping of the Altars,* see Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven and London; Yale University Press, 2006), especially 4-5.
[6] As a recent contribution to a huge literature, see Eamon Duffy, 'Cathedral Pilgrimage: The Late Middle Ages', in *A People's Tragedy: Studies in Reformation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 7-30.

priories, whose revenues sustained their life of prayer. Estimates vary, but by the year 1530, as much as one third or one quarter of the total productive land in England and Wales had been transferred to more than eight hundred religious houses.[7] The abbeys acquired tenants and servants, as well as clients and patrons. The influence of many smaller religious houses may have been purely local in nature, but some of the greatest abbeys had an income in keeping with members of the aristocracy.[8] Several mitered abbots exercised their right to sit in the House of Lords in Parliament alongside the bishops. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the religious orders dominated and defined life for many, if not most people, in the years before the Reformation.

Great bishops occasionally intervened to suppress a weak or failing house to reassign its endowments for other purposes. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, papal legate and archbishop of York, suppressed nearly thirty houses to create Cardinal College (now Christ Church) at the University of Oxford.[9] But no one thought to throw over the entire system of monasticism anywhere until the 1520s, after Martin Luther and his followers challenged the power of the papacy and the efficacy of prayers for souls departed. On the continent, some cities, like Strasbourg, confiscated abbeys and friaries, and put their houses to new civic uses.[10]

At first, King Henry VIII and Wolsey opposed Luther strenuously, but then in a shocking reversal, in the 1530s, Parliament severed the legal ties that bound the English Church to the papacy. In policies that were designed to enhance the king's powers as Supreme Head of the Church of England, nearly a millennium of monastic life in England and Wales was brought to an end in only four years, from 1536 to 1540.[11]

Parliament's legislation was drafted by Thomas Cromwell, who had overseen for Wolsey the suppression of the houses that endowed

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[7] Still valuable for its annotated listings is David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock's *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales* (London: Longman, 1971). See also Clark, *Dissolution*, 3; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 1, 15

[8] For one notable example of a wealthy house, see *The Letter Book of Robert Joseph Monk-scholar of Evesham and Gloucester College, Oxford 1530-3,* eds. Hugh Aveling and W. A. Pantin, Oxford Historical Society, ns, vol. 19 (1967).

[9] Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (London, 1990), 342-4, 349-50; Susan Wabuda, 'Cardinal Wolsey and Cambridge', *British Catholic History,* vol. 32 (2015), 280-292. See also Clark's perceptive comments, *Dissolution,* 179-86.

[10] See Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: a Reformer and His Times*, trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter (London, 2004), 52-4, 61-64].

[11] The Act of Supremacy: 26 Henry VIII, c. 1; Stanford Lehmberg, *The Reformation Parliament, 1529-1536* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 64-73; Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: a History of the English Reformation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 203-43.

Cardinal College.[12] Cromwell's skills in creating policies that favoured the king led Henry to make him his vicegerent in spirituals in early 1535. From July 1536, Cromwell was also Henry's vicar general, and he was given broad powers over the English Church in all parts of the realm, that exceeded those of the archbishops of Canterbury and York.[13] Cromwell launched the largest tax survey conducted in England since William the Conqueror's Doomsday Book of 1086. Its purpose was to assess the income for each parish and religious house, a herculean effort which resulted in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535. It was used to identify the abbeys and priories that had less than £200 in annual income, and they were targeted for suppression.

The Act of Supremacy of 1534 recognized that the king possessed the spiritual authority to repress, correct and amend all offenses and abuses in the realm, and the regime moved relentlessly to subdue anyone who refused to repudiate papal authority or to embrace the royal supremacy.[14] Bishop John Fisher of Rochester, an energetic defender of the seven sacraments and the papacy, was executed on 22 June 1535. Sir Thomas More followed him to the block on 6 July. Monks of the Carthusian order were killed with particular brutality in public executions in London in 1535 and 1537, and many more were starved to death in prison.[15]

As the Reformation Parliament drew toward its close, in February 1536 new legislation blamed the smaller houses for the manifest sins and abominable living that the government said was practiced in them. Their lands and goods were confiscated.[16] Subsequently, the Crown began to parcel out monastic properties as rewards to the members of the gentry and nobility who were willing to support royal policy. Cromwell received many letters from eager gentlemen who wished to establish their evangelical credentials as the means to receive a royal grant to lands.

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[12] Howard Leithead, 'Cromwell, Thomas, earl of Essex (b. in or before 1485, d. 1540), royal minister." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 16 Dec. 2022. https://www-oxforddnb-com.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6769; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell: a Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 54-74.

[13] F. D. Logan, 'Thomas Cromwell and the Vicegerency in Spirituals', *English Historical Review,*103 (1988), 658-67.

[14] The Act of Supremacy: 26 Henry VIII, c. 1; Stanford Lehmberg, *The Reformation Parliament, 1529-1536* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 64-73; G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 203-43.

[15] Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) and the same author's *Michelangelo and the English Martyrs* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[16] 27 Hen. VIII, c. 28; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 4.

To the regime, the friars were particularly suspect for their potential to preach resistance or dissent, and their houses were suppressed in 1538. The Observant Franciscans were specially targeted, and in May, Friar John Forest was savagely executed in London on a charge of treason.[17]

Those members of the smaller houses who wished to continue in religion were transferred to the larger houses, but by mid-1539, the Henrician regime decided that all of the monasteries, even the wealthier abbeys, must be suppressed. The last major house, closed in 1540, was a royal foundation, the Augustinian abbey of Holy Cross at Waltham in Essex.[18] A defining aspect of the way that life had been lived in England and Wales was broken, never to be fully recovered.

In *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, many of James G. Clark's sources and illustrations are fresh, like the story of the Cluniac priory at St Pancras at Lewes in Sussex, which was blown up, on Cromwell's orders, in March 1538, by an Italian engineer who was an expert in military explosives.[19]

Clark's fourth chapter, 'The Tudor Reformation', makes the persuasive case that royal intervention in the life of the religious houses had entered an important new phase not just with Henry VIII, but much earlier, with his father and his grandmother, Lady Margaret Beaufort.[20] Clark notes that King Henry VII had 'a taste for regular religion that was more sincere and sustained' than that of many of his immediate predecessors. Lady Margaret and Henry VII went on pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin at Walsingham as often as their heavy responsibilities allowed.[21] Coupled with a desire to consolidate the victory he gained on the battlefield in 1485, Henry expressed 'a proprietorial impulse' toward monasteries and friaries that resulted in his involvement in Westminster Abbey, and the building of his peerless chantry chapel, which faces the Houses of Parliament. Henry also took

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[17] Clark, *Dissolution,* 220, 294, 354; Anne Dillon, 'John Forest and Derfel Gadarn: a double execution', *Recusant History* [now *British Catholic History*], 28 (2006), 1-21; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution*, 32-3; MacCulloch, *Cromwell*, 459-65; Peter Marshall, 'Papist as Heretic: the Burning of John Forest', *The Historical Journal,* 41 (1998), 351-74; and for the friars in general, Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 107-146.

[18] Clark notes that a few suppressions of smaller houses on the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands occurred in summer 1540, *Dissolution*, 1-3, 9-10; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 4, 39.

[19] Clark, *Dissolution*, 379-81. A letter to Cromwell by the Italian engineer, Giovanni Portinari is reproduced as fig. 24. For background, see also MacCulloch, *Cromwell*, 431-441.

[20] Clark, *Dissolution*, 155, 157, 187. For her considerable patronage, see also Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[21] Susan Wabuda, 'Receiving the King: Henry VIII at Cambridge', in *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics and Performance*, eds. Thomas Betteridge and Suzannah Lipscomb (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 163-178, especially 164-8.

deep interest in Syon Abbey, the Observant Franciscan convent at Greenwich, as well as many other houses across the realm.[22]

Clark raises an important question: why did the Benedictine monks permit Henry VII to intrude so substantially into their lives at Westminster Abbey? The king's chapel was built close to the abbey's holiest site: the shrine of St Edmund the Confessor, which attracted thousands of pilgrimage-goers every year. Clark suggests that the monks did not think that they were making a major concession to the king. Instead, the nature of their relation to the Crown had changed under the pressure of Henry's incessant attentions. Ever since he gained the throne, royal participation in the lives of the regular orders had become a 'transaction'. The monks recognized that the bargains they made with their kings could bring them desirable benefits.[23] Without the complicity of Abbot William Benson (a close friend of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer), Anne Boleyn could not have been crowned queen in 1533 at Westminster Abbey.[24]

The example that the Tudors set in their new relationship with the religious houses, Clark writes, was enthusiastically emulated by the aristocracy. The members of the nobility, like the king, wished to associate themselves with the reputation for sacredness that the religious houses represented. On a scale that was almost unprecedented, great nobles raised chantry chapels and elaborate family tombs in their local religious houses, and they were eager to gain stewardship over them as the means to achieve 'regional dominance'.[25] Eventually, intrusions by the king, Wolsey, Cromwell, or the local nobility became so habitual that that the regular orders merely recognized 'interference as customary practice.'[26] By increasing royal authority, and by placing the regular clergy within the 'proprietary control' and 'pastoral care' of the English Crown, Henry VII created precedents and vulnerabilities that were later exploited by his son.[27]

At 544 pages of text, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* is a long book, but its general aims are surprisingly modest. Clark's study is meant to provide a new survey of the dissolution that traces the end of the religious houses 'from their own point of view', and to 'recover their people'. He wishes to extend 'the field of vision' as he follows 'the imprint of the regulars in the archives and material record of regional England and Wales.'[28] His goals are worthy, although difficult to

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[22] Clark, *Dissolution,* quotations at 151-2.

[23] Clark, *Dissolution,* 188. Duffy notes that the shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury drew over 8000 pilgrims in 1530s, 'Cathedral Pilgrimage', 26-7.

[24] Clark, *Dissolution,* 205; Susan Wabuda, *Thomas Cranmer* (London: Routledge, 2017), 16-17, 202.

[25] Clark, *Dissolution,* 166.

[26] Clark, *Dissolution,* 204.

[27] Clark, *Dissolution,* 160.

[28] Clark, *Dissolution*, 18-19.

achieve. The nature of pursuing a vocation tends to erase individuality, both inside a religious order, and in the documentary records. In Tudor England, most men in religion were known not by their own surnames, but by their birthplaces, like Abbot Benson (alias Boston). Clark is successful in representing the complicated concerns of the numerous religious orders, whose identities and purposes were quite distinct from each other.

However, there is no argument or strong narrative line through *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* that would provide a coherent account of what happened. This is a deliberate choice, because Clark wants to explore how 'the course and consequences of the process' of bringing the religious houses to their end 'were far less certain' than has sometimes been recognized. Tudor England 'in many respects was a monastic society.'[29]

In stressing uncertainty, perhaps Clark wishes to provide a corrective to George Bernard's unconvincing assertions in his studies of the king's Reformation that Henry VIII was 'the dominant force in the politics of his reign', and that he had probably planned to dissolve all the monasteries 'from the moment he broke with Rome'.[30] However, Clark covers both sides of many issues so evenly that he does not provide adequate guidance or any real resolution about which side carried real weight.

The results can be inadvertently disorienting. To cite one example, the eighth chapter begins with the dramatic story of the explosion that toppled the spire and Romanesque pillars of the Cluniac Priory at Lewes. It is titled 'Nothing Endid'. This is a curious choice. It raises the unworthy expectation that the life of the monasteries somehow survived, just as an uninformed tourist today may go to Bury Saint Edmund's to explore the aisles of its famous abbey. The Bridgittine nuns of Syon Abbey were unique in moving to the Continent with their library and other goods, and they were poised to return to England when more promising days arrived.[31] As Clark notes, nuns of other religious orders clubbed together to eke out the inadequate pensions they received from their former lands. But not until the end of chapter eight does Clark reveal that 'nothing endid' refers not to the valiant efforts of many religious to continue their lives together as members of a hidden or exiled community of

[29] Clark, *Dissolution*, 19.
[30] G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), and the same author's 'Reflecting on the King's Reformation', in *Henry VIII and the Court*, 9-26, quotations at 14 and 23. Cf. Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
[31] E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing, and Religion, c. 1400-1700* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2010).

faith, but instead to the difficulties involved in converting a small priory in Hertfordshire into a manor house.[32]

Examples of this sort could be multiplied. A helpful chronological list or a summary of events has not been supplied at the beginning of the volume. *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* assumes that readers are already so familiar with the story that important terms are not introduced where they first appear. Cromwell's role as vicegerent is not adequately explained.[33] Confusing too are vague references in the fifth chapter to the commissioners who carried out the visitations that produced the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535. At almost the same time, there were several competing visitations that followed one upon the next: the administration of the oath of succession, Archbishop Cranmer's metropolitical visitation, the royal visitation of 1536, and subsidy commissions. Together, they generated tensions which led to the dangerous risings in the north of England that threatened Henry VIII's throne in late 1536.[34] In his epilogue, Clark glances at what happened to the former religious in later years, but his account does not really extend in detail beyond 1540. A stronger sense of direction in *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* would have been welcome in the first general study to appear in more than a generation.

Harriet Lyon's *Memory and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Early Modern England* is an important book. Her focus is not the kind of saddened nostalgia that pervades the pages of *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries* by Knowles, but rather the shared and dynamic process of remembering (or trying to remember) the dissolution, which she argues fits into the *longue durée* of the Reformation as a whole. At the start of the process, complete suppression 'was entirely inconceivable' for many people, and Cromwell's agents twisted the evidence about the state of the monasteries 'to conform to the Henrician regime's particular vision of the dissolution'.[35] Uncertainty in the government's plans is also one of her themes, but she demonstrates that there was a spectrum of competing opinions and disagreements about how, or whether, the religious houses should be closed. Under the ascendancy of evangelicals like Cromwell and Cranmer, the Reformation in England was 'piecemeal' and 'seemingly

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[32] Clark, *Dissolution*, 420.
[33] Clark, *Dissolution*, 1, 247.
[34] Paul Ayris, 'Thomas Cranmer and the Metropolitical Visitation of Canterbury Province 1533-1535', in *From Cranmer to Davidson: a Church of England Miscellany,* ed. S. Taylor, Church of England Record Society, 7 (1999), 1-46; M. E. James, 'Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: the Lincolnshire Rebellion 1536', *Past and Present,* 48 (1970), 1-78; Jonathan Michael Gray, *Oaths and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Marshall, *Heretics and Believers,* 244-53; Wabuda, *Cranmer,* 85-6.
[35] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* quotations at 30, 32.

theologically ambiguous'. Regret took a variety of forms. Many evangelicals did not want all of the religious houses to close, because they wanted their resources to be reassigned to new charitable purposes. The English Catholic community lost heavily, and then lost again when the houses that had been restored by Queen Mary I were closed after her death in 1558. New generations of English Protestants feared that the Reformation had not been complete. Lyon's study goes well beyond 1540. She notes that it is difficult to establish when the word 'dissolution' entered the lexicon with reference to the fall of the religious houses, but historical events tend to be fashioned, understood, or redefined in hindsight.[36]

Among her helpful observations in *Memory and the Dissolution* concern the documents that were compiled by the visitors who were commissioned to carry out the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 and the subsequent closures. They were eager to satisfy Cromwell as they compiled accusations of monastic corruption, fraud, and sexual improprieties. Between 1535 and 1540, vast quantities of documents about the religious houses were generated by the government. Confiscated when Cromwell fell in mid-1540, they survive in the State Papers collection in The National Archives, as well as in the Harley and Cotton collections of manuscripts in the British Library. Lyon notes that the corpus of documents that Cromwell managed was shaped 'insidiously' by distortions and erasures that have not always been readily apparent. The religious were 'largely written out of the wider history of the suppression', or they were cast as complicit victims. The smaller houses were blamed for their own destruction, and Lyon notes that some heads incriminated themselves or 'inadvertently perpetuated' the regime's 'rhetoric of corruption'. Desperate to protect their houses, many heads pleaded with Cromwell for exemptions from closure. They offered him rewards or other inducements,[37] which fits into Clark's suggestion that the religious understood interventions by the regime as a type of bargaining or transaction. The difference, from 1536, was that the king was no longer interested in making any bargains. Lyon suggests that previous generations of scholars too often accepted uncritically the regime's contentions that monasticism in England was already in steep decline, and that the religious orders were so corrupt that they deserved to be suppressed.[38]

Hindsight has had odd effects. The dissolution was such a profound rupture with the past, and carried with it so many immense long-lasting

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[36] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 4-7, 25-75, 94, 119-120, quotations at 15. For the *longue durée* of the Reformation, see Nicholas Tyacke, ed., *England's Long Reformation, 1500-1800* (London: Routledge, 1998) and John Bossy's *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
[37] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 48.
[38] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 6-7, quotations at 17, 49.

implications, that it was not commemorated as other great events were. Chroniclers helped to perpetuate Henrician orthodoxy as they suggested that the dissolution was over even before the last house closed.[39] Lyon notes that Elizabeth's dissolution of the houses that her sister Mary restored has not left much mark on the historiography.[40] The transmission of memory was fraught with difficulties, as successive generations struggled to remember, and also to forget.[41] Monuments that the aristocracy had built to perpetuate their memories, and to elicit prayers for their souls, were lost when religious houses were demolished. Lyon observes that this was a type of 'material violence' that the Henrician regime inflicted on its local rivals, analogous to the type of physical violence that it inflicted on the Carthusians and other perceived enemies.[42] For many Henrician Catholics, to remember the dissolution was to recall the share that they had had in the spoils. For others, it was the rueful acknowledgement that they now inhabited 'a rather less munificent world'.[43]

The sites of the former monastic houses offer their own complexities which, Lyon argues, have been obscured by the nostalgic antiquarianism that once dominated writings about the dissolution. In her chapter 'Nostalgia and Amnesia', Lyon demonstrates how the former religious houses became centres for both memory and oblivion. Ruins served as perpetual admonitions that were warnings about the strength of royal power.[44] Shakespeare's lament in Sonnet 73 is evocative, but he was born in 1564, a quarter century too late to remember life in the religious houses as it had been led.[45]

Lyon suggests that insufficient attention has been paid to the creative aspects of the dissolution, to the new purposes to which the former houses were put, as parish churches, cathedrals, private houses, warehouses and workshops. Paradoxically, conversion to fresh uses succeeded in effacing the memory of the past.[46] The Civil Wars and the Interregnum of the seventeenth century inflicted fresh assaults on sacred spaces. The memory of the earlier iconoclasms that had

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[39] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 88-95.
[40] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 54.
[41] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 15, 18.
[42] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 39.
[43] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 56. See also Ethan H. Shagan, 'Selling the sacred: Reformation and dissolution at the Abbey of Hailes', in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 162-196.
[44] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 127-142. See also Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[45] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 107, 135, 188.
[46] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 142-58. See also Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape.*

occurred in the 1530s as shrines, like Becket's, were destroyed, became 'muddled and entangled' with 'subsequent waves of destruction and obliteration'. At Walsingham, fields of saffron crocuses replaced the shrine of the Virgin.[47]

Rather surprisingly, neither of the books under review here mention an important episode that supports their themes. The successful coup that Cromwell carried out against Anne Boleyn illustrates the difficulties for the Henrician regime in establishing a clear policy for the fate of the religious houses. As the statute to suppress the smaller houses came under consideration by Parliament in early 1536, the queen tried to persuade Henry to convert them to better uses. She received a delegation of heads of houses who offered her a bargain. If she prevented their houses from being closed, they pledged to give her large sums every year that she could spend on her favourite causes, such as exhibitions for poor university students, and preachers who could promote essential messages for the regime. In his final article, the late Eric Ives argued that Anne opposed the fullest extent of Cromwell's great schemes. She wished to retain at least a few religious houses, especially in towns, to relieve the poor, as was happening on the continent. The chaplain who wrote to Queen Elizabeth with his memory of her mother noted that Anne had agreed to help them, motivated only for the 'glory of God'. Had she prevailed, less monastic wealth would have reached royal coffers. The dissolution would have proceeded on far different lines. But in a Pyrrhic victory, Cromwell tripped the queen 'ere half the race were run'.[48] In his turn, he was discarded in 1540, just as Waltham's Abbey of Holy Cross came down. Thereafter, Cranmer and other bishops were able to retrieve some limited programs when the monastic cathedrals were refounded.

The Reformation that began in England and Wales under King Henry VIII enjoys its perennial hold on the historical imagination, in part, because the political Establishment continues to employ what was created from the destruction of the religious houses in the sixteenth century: a national Church with the monarch as its Supreme Governor. The bishops, the cathedrals, and the parishes continue to be essential attributes in society. In many localities to the present day, the rural landscape and the great houses that were built from abbey stone and lead still contribute to the illusion of stability and changelessness. The Church

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[47] Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution,* 211.
[48] 'William Latymer's Cronickille of Anne Bulleyne' ed. Maria Dowling, in *Camden Miscellany XXX,* Camden Fourth Series, 39 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1990), 23-65, quotations (in modernized spellings) at 59, 64. Eric Ives, 'Anne Boleyn on Trial Again', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62 (2011), 763-77. See also the same author's *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn, 'the most happy',* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation,* 129-135.

survived the Tudors. It was restored after the Interregnum in 1660. The English Church has been reinvented in a similar mould, time and again, as the essential meeting place between the government and the governed, in a process that continues, as we can readily observe, in our own day.