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To cite this article: Harriet Lyon (2022): Re-thinking nostalgic antiquarianism: time, space, and the English reformation, *The Seventeenth Century*, DOI: [10.1080/0268117X.2022.2074874](https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2022.2074874)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2022.2074874>



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Published online: 24 May 2022.



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# Re-thinking nostalgic antiquarianism: time, space, and the English reformation

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## ABSTRACT

Nostalgia has long been considered central to the development of early modern English antiquarianism. In the wake of a seminal article by Margaret Aston, historians have readily identified “nostalgic” antiquarianism as a response to the iconoclasm wrought during the Protestant Reformation. Rarely, if ever, have scholars interrogated the nature of this nostalgia for the architectural and aesthetic glories of the medieval world. This article reconsiders the nostalgia of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquaries with a view to refining our understanding both of antiquarianism and the workings of nostalgia itself. It argues that, although it has long been characterised as an entirely modern phenomenon, nostalgia *avant la lettre* was an important mode of perceiving the past in early modern England. Inspired by ecclesiastical ruins and shaped by a complex relationship between time and space, nostalgia helped contemporaries to make sense of the divide between past and present, medieval and early modern.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 19 April 2022  
Accepted 4 May 2022

## KEYWORDS

Nostalgia; antiquarianism; reformation; dissolution of the monasteries; ruins; John Aubrey

Travelling in his home county of Wiltshire around the time of the Restoration, the philosopher and antiquary John Aubrey found himself confronted by the remnants of a lost world. “In former daies”, he wrote, “the Churches and great houses hereabout did so abound with monuments and things remarqueable that it would have deterred an Antiquary from undertaking it”. By the 1660s, however, the combined forces of time, iconoclasm, and civil war had reduced this rich topography to little more than a landscape of shadows. For Aubrey, this made the work of the antiquary all the more urgent and necessary. Using the powers of both observation and imagination, he proposed to survey and catalogue the antiquities of Wiltshire. For “as Pythagoras did guesse at the vastnesse of Hercules’ stature by the length of his foot”, he continued, “so among these Ruines are Remaynes enough left for a man to give a guesse what noble buildings, &c. were made by the Piety, Charity, and Magnanimity of our Forefathers”.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, in other words, it was possible to look backwards in time and see the past, and partially to resurrect it in paper and ink, *ex pede Herculem*, as a monument for posterity.

Aubrey’s comments are emblematic of a form of historical enquiry that has been often described as “nostalgic” antiquarianism, marked by regret for the material losses of the Protestant Reformation and British Civil Wars, and by a longing to imagine the revival of

ruined ancient and medieval structures and monuments.<sup>2</sup> It was driven by an emotional engagement with the past, as well as scholarly interest: Aubrey remarked that “the eye and mind is no less affected” by the sight of ruined structures “than they would have been when standing and entire”.<sup>3</sup> In a seminal essay, Margaret Aston identified this blend of sentiment and scholarship as the hallmark of early modern English antiquarianism. Specifically, she argued that the remnants of the physical destruction wrought by the dissolution of the monasteries (1536–40), as well as the Reformation more generally, forged a material and emotional connection between past and present which shaped the emergence and development of antiquarian endeavours. “The very process of casting off the past generated nostalgia for its loss”, Aston concluded, “and with nostalgia came invigorated historical activity”.<sup>4</sup>

The notion that antiquarianism was a product of, and an outlet for, nostalgia has been a defining theme of scholarship on English antiquarianism between the late sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, especially regarding its relationship to the Reformation.<sup>5</sup> Yet rarely, if ever, does this literature engage critically with nostalgia as a concept. Coined in 1688 by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer, the etymology of nostalgia belies its medical origins. Derived from the Greek *nostos* (to return home) and *algos* (pain or suffering), Hofer used the term to describe the acute and sometimes fatal longing for home that afflicted mercenary soldiers from the Alpine region of Switzerland while on expedition in the lowlands of France and Italy.<sup>6</sup> In its original definition, nostalgia therefore described a longing for a lost place – essentially, it described the condition we now know as “homesickness”. The nostalgia of the so-called nostalgic antiquaries, however, resembles more recent definitions of nostalgia as a longing for a lost time.<sup>7</sup> Although nostalgia in this sense has been described as “coeval with modernity”<sup>8</sup> and a “fundamentally modern phenomenon”,<sup>9</sup> recent work by historians and especially by literary scholars has underlined the utility of this conception of nostalgia for early modernists.<sup>10</sup> Taking inspiration from this literature, this article re-examines the concept of nostalgic antiquarianism and, in doing so, seeks to shed light on the workings of early modern nostalgia more generally. It examines the close and complex relationship between time and place that colours texts and images such as those found in Aubrey’s survey of Wiltshire, which occupies a place between Hofer’s medical definition and more modern understandings of nostalgia. This case study therefore allows us to begin to collapse the unhelpful dichotomy between early modern and modern nostalgia, and to reach a better understanding not only of antiquarianism but also more broadly of nostalgia as a mode of perceiving the past in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## Nostalgia and early modern antiquarianism

Nostalgia was the antiquarian condition, or so it has often been suggested. Broadly defined as the study of antiquities – itself a capacious category, which includes objects, relics, monuments, and buildings – antiquarianism described a wide range of historical interests and enquiries. Inspired by the humanist return *ad fontes*, to the records and remnants of classical antiquity, and shaped by the parallel Protestant project to find historical foundations for their movement, antiquarianism flourished in early modern Europe. Once considered the less interesting and imaginative sibling to narrative history, in the last two decades or so, scholars have stressed the vibrancy and diversity of

antiquarian endeavours and their essential role in the development of more specialised disciplines, including archaeology, art history, history, literary criticism, numismatics, and philology.<sup>11</sup> In many ways, the label “antiquarianism” imposes a degree of homogeneity upon these endeavours that obscures a complex reality. Early modern antiquaries produced topographies, chorographies, histories, chronicles, and maps. They surveyed national and local landscapes, and wrote about both the distant and the recent past. They were interested in customs, languages, institutions, laws, and religious practices. They compiled notebooks, made sketches, wrote diaries, and whilst some sought to publish their material, others did not. There was a market for printed antiquarian studies, but information was also circulated around scholarly networks in manuscript form. We ought not, then, to attribute a strict methodology to early modern antiquarianism. Rather, in seeking a common thread that ran through antiquarian activities, contemporaries and modern scholars alike have tended to highlight the emotional quality of many antiquaries’ engagement with the past: their anxiety about the instability of material things, their desire to foster a sense of community or national identity and, perhaps above all, their regret for the passing of a lost world.<sup>12</sup>

This is certainly the tenor of the Elizabethan antiquary John Stow’s monumental *Survey of London* (1598), a text that has been described by more than one historian as “suffused” with nostalgia.<sup>13</sup> Inspired by William Lambarde’s *Perambulation of Kent* (1576) and William Camden’s monumental *Britannia* (1586 and subsequent editions), the *Survey of London* was one of the major printed chorographies of the later sixteenth century. It offered a ward-by-ward tour of the city, incorporating Stow’s observations on its architecture, history, customs, and the processes of urbanisation and reformation that were changing the landscape. Much of this knowledge he drew from his own memory and experience, and the *Survey* was, amongst other things, a vehicle for autobiography. Thus at the site of the old Greyfriars priory of Christ Church, Stow – who was born in around 1525 – recorded his recollections of a world that “I my self have seene in my childhood”, in which the priors had ridden out amongst the alderman of London in their finest livery, and when the friars had maintained a “bountifull house of meate and drinke both for rich and poor”.<sup>14</sup> Like all such religious houses, the Greyfriars had been suppressed during the dissolution of the monasteries conducted by Henry VIII’s government in the late 1530s; it had since become a private property, home initially to Thomas Audley, Lord Chancellor, and then to the dukes of Norfolk.<sup>15</sup> Implicit in Stow’s recollections about the site was the sense that since the dissolution, there had been a decline in ceremony, community spirit, and charitable giving.<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, the same sentiments informed his lament for the “open pastimes” and celebrations of “my youth”, such as public dancing and music on holy days, in streets that had once been hung with garlands but now stood unadorned.<sup>17</sup> Stow’s London was a city viewed through the rose-tinted lens of nostalgia, which gave expression to what Patrick Collinson has described as “the values of an old man ... someone who lived in the past, had no enthusiasm for the present, and no words for the future”.<sup>18</sup>

In this respect, Stow typifies both the classic refrain that (old) age is nostalgic for youth, and the shifting paradigm of “merry England” identified by Keith Thomas wherein each (temporal) age is nostalgic for a past time just out of reach: Elizabethan nostalgia for the medieval, Stuart nostalgia for the “golden age” of Elizabeth, and so on.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, it is impossible to see this nostalgia as anything other than firmly

rooted in space. The *Survey* overlays Stow's past experience onto the London cityscape, revealing a nostalgia forged on a sense of changing times *and* places. The landscape acted as *lieux de mémoire* in ways that fused the selective memory of past experience, a quasi-imaginary rosy vision of youth, and a sense of longing or yearning for a return to that lost world.<sup>20</sup> In turn, the chorographical genre was the ideal vehicle for Stow's nostalgia: a blend of history, topography, and autobiography, inherently concerned with both past places and past times and able to capture past and present simultaneously. As we have seen in Stow's case, the collision between the present and a rose-tinted past tended to tarnish the former with the dull patina of decline and decay. Social and political criticism is often inherent in nostalgia, since a longing for the past implies dissatisfaction with the present.<sup>21</sup> Like other forms of memory, nostalgia is therefore also shaped and informed by the present, and reveals as much about the moment of recall as about the remembered past itself. Stow's recollection of the world of his childhood as a time of plenty, prosperity, and social harmony was thus bound up with his sense of social decline, which was also inextricably bound up with his memory of a time before the break with Rome and the dissolution of the monasteries. In this context, nostalgia was not a harmless longing; rather, it could be politically subversive. If nostalgia was the antiquarian condition, it was also – for some – the antiquarian crime.

Although history was possessed of great authority in early modern England, there was a clear tension between reverence for the past and nostalgia for its more controversial episodes.<sup>22</sup> In particular, there was a sense amongst some Protestants that nostalgic longing for the pre-Reformation past wavered dangerously close to a desire to resurrect a lost world of medieval Catholicism. When Stow's colleague Camden first published the *Britannia* in 1586, he was conscious of the negative reaction it might provoke and thus attempted to pre-empt criticism from those "who take it impatiently that I have mentioned some of the most famous Monasteries and their founders".<sup>23</sup> Camden recognised that he was treading a fine line between admiration for monuments and buildings erected as testaments of medieval lay piety and admiration for the Catholic past outright. He justified his endeavours essentially by making a virtue of the selectivity of nostalgia, allowing him to differentiate between the "zealous devotion" of "our ancestoures" in founding religious houses and the "weeds" of Catholic corruption that had grown up in their gardens.<sup>24</sup> The ability of nostalgia to conjure up a "golden" age in some sense afforded it the power to sanitise the past, simultaneously harking back to bygone glories whilst maintaining a distance from Catholic practices and doctrines. This distinction was not always clear, however, and Camden's fears of censure on religious grounds were not without foundation. Long before he published the *Survey*, in 1569, Stow's home had been raided in search of subversive manuscripts and printed books on the orders of Edmund Grindal, then bishop of London, and there had been other accusations that he was a critic of Elizabeth I and a Roman Catholic sympathiser.<sup>25</sup> These allegations never quite stuck and, as Collinson and Ian Archer have argued, Stow remains best categorised as a conservative conformist, whose distaste for reformist zeal was one aspect of a wider dislike of the tangled religious, social, and economic change that characterised the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Nostalgia was, then, not a hallmark of crypto-Catholicism, but a product of Stow's acute awareness of historical change and the transformations he had witnessed as a child, as well as a generally conservative outlook.

Indeed, in many ways, nostalgia was *the* emotion that underpinned what Eamon Duffy has influentially described as the “conservative voice” in Elizabethan England. It is vitally present in William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73, which laments the “bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang” (4) and in an anonymous lamentation for Walsingham Priory in Norfolk, attributed to Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, in which the author regrets that it was “Bitter, bitter, O, to behold/the grass to grow/where the walls of Walsingham/so stately did show” (17–20).<sup>27</sup> As Aston noted in her exploration of nostalgic antiquarianism, the ruin motif was a powerful emblem in poetry and literature as well as history and topography – and this literature too was underpinned by a nostalgia that had temporal *and* spatial dimensions, which draped wrecked cloisters in the memory of “stately” walls.<sup>28</sup> Nostalgic antiquarianism of the kind evident in Stow’s *Survey* ought to be seen as part of this broader trend. This nostalgia was also of its moment: a generation or so on from the iconoclastic episodes of the 1530s and 1540s, there were still people, like Stow, whose nostalgia for youth and for a time before the Reformation were one and the same. Of course, we ought not to assume that nostalgia was the only mode of Elizabethan antiquarianism. For the Kentish antiquary William Lambarde, for example, writing in the early 1570s, monastic ruins were a symbol of triumph and a sign that things were better in the present. When Lambarde expressed a sense of regret that holy places had “tumbled headlong to ruine & decay”, he was referring to a decay that had undermined the Catholic Church long before the Reformation. “Considering the maine Seas of sinne and iniquitie, wherein the world (at those dayes) was almost whole drenched”, he argued, “I must needs take cause, highly to prayse God, that hath thus mercifully in our age delivered us, disclosed Satan . . . and ra[z]ed to the grounde all Monumentes of building, erected to superstition and ungodlynnesse”.<sup>29</sup> The *Perambulation of Kent* thus evinced a kind of anti-nostalgia (the desire *not to return*) for a world supposedly marked by Catholic corruption and iniquity. That Stow cited Lambarde amongst his inspirations for the *Survey* serves as a reminder that antiquarian networks were flexible, ever-shifting, cross-confessional groupings, which defied broad labels. Nostalgic antiquarianism had its limits.

Yet, by the early seventeenth century, it seems that there was already a widespread perception of antiquaries as conservative (at best) in matters of religion, and as obsessed with the past to the point of having little interest in the present. To some commentators this longing seemed so great as to be unhealthy, even pathological. In his satirical *Micro-cosmographie* (1628), John Earle half-joked that the antiquary, although a person “of our religion, because we say it is most ancient”, would turn “Idolater” at the sight of a “broken statue”. For Earle, nostalgia was the antiquarian sickness, an “unnaturall disease” that caused the sufferer to be excessively “enamored of old age and wrinckles and loves all things (as Dutchmen doe Cheese) the better for being mouldy and worme-eaten”.<sup>30</sup> Earle’s diagnosis was different to Johannes Hofer’s – still some sixty years away – and yet his account of nostalgia *avant la lettre* relied, like Hofer’s, upon an understanding of the individual as situated in both time and place in a way that emphasised the distance between the physical world of the past and that of the present. Unlike Hofer, however, but in keeping with more modern understandings of nostalgia, Earle also demonstrates that this was a mode of engagement that imbued the past with political weight, tangling together an interest in history and senses of loss and yearning with a religious

conservatism that was potentially subversive. Although Earle did not possess the term nostalgia, his work suggests that the stereotype of the antiquary as an incurable nostalgic was firmly established.

Part of the power of this stereotype lay in its persistence. It is striking that, at the time Earle was writing, the pre-Reformation period had fallen into a time out of mind. If Stow has, in many ways, been the poster child for nostalgic antiquarianism, his nostalgia was of a particular sort, related to but also different from the seventeenth-century antiquaries who succeeded him. As we have seen, Stow fits the generational model of nostalgia advanced by many modern theorists,<sup>31</sup> in which age is nostalgic for youth, as well as the paradigm of historical periods described by Thomas, in which the object of nostalgia shifts constantly with the passage of time.<sup>32</sup> Something got stuck, however, around the turn of the seventeenth century. Successive generations continually returned to the eve of the Reformation as a key point of reference and moment of longing, even as it became increasingly distant in time. This is the paradox of nostalgic antiquarianism: most of the nostalgic antiquaries had not themselves known the world which they yearned to behold.<sup>33</sup> In this context, the role of place and space in shaping nostalgia was especially important, because seventeenth-century antiquaries had no direct connection to the pre-Reformation past beyond the physical remnants that littered the landscape. As Aston emphasised, the survival of ruins and other mutilated structures was thus a key reason for the endurance of nostalgia across the early modern period: “the spectacle of physical loss”, she argues, was “a continuous element in the English countryside” from the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s onwards.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the relationship between time and space had been subtly reconfigured to place an even greater emphasis upon the role of the physical and material landscape in keeping alive nostalgia for a past that had slipped out of personal or “communicative” memory and into inherited or “cultural” memory.<sup>35</sup>

This was the case for the antiquary John Weever, who was born in 1576 and for whom the remnants of monasteries and churches were all that he knew of a time before the Reformation. His particular interest was funeral monuments, many of which had been “broken downe, and utterly almost all ruined” as a result of the reconfiguration of the relationship between the living and the dead that accompanied the advance of Protestantism.<sup>36</sup> For reformers in Henrician and Edwardian England, the abolition of purgatory and intercessory prayer, not to mention the complex place of images in the reformed Church of England, rendered funerary monuments akin to idols.<sup>37</sup> Weever published a study of surviving church monuments, the *Ancient funerall monuments* (1631), at a time when funeral monuments had successfully been revived and adapted for the reformed faith, and only slightly anticipating the Laudian movement to restore the “beauty of holiness”.<sup>38</sup> Weever was incensed by what he viewed as the indiscriminate iconoclasm of earlier generations. He described the destruction of the mid-sixteenth century as “the shame of our time”, in a phrase that belies how the material remnants of the Reformation had shaped his sense of history and periodicity.<sup>39</sup> For Weever, the broken monuments he encountered symbolised the rupture in time and space engendered by the Reformation. Like Stow and Camden, he feared that his interest in this lost world “may seeme . . . displeasing” to those who feared a Catholic resurgence, arguing instead that his purpose lay in recovering an age of the “ardent pietie of our forefathers”.<sup>40</sup> Crucially, the act of recovery entailed not only observation but



imagination, which was called upon to stand in for personal memory and experience.<sup>41</sup> Although nostalgia had (and has) always entailed a degree of invention, this was heightened for antiquaries who could not remember the age they were attempting to reconstruct. Weever thus described a “desire . . . to behold the mournfull ruines of . . . religious houses” including those “goodly faire structures [that] bee altogether destroyed, their tombes battered downe”.<sup>42</sup> His *Ancient funerall monuments* was the product of his labours in this regard.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the longing to “behold” the past, to reach back into it and preserve what was left for posterity, acquired a new urgency after the onset of the Civil Wars in the 1640s, which engendered new waves of puritan iconoclasm.<sup>43</sup> It is this moment – together with the idea of inventive, imaginative nostalgia – that brings us back to John Aubrey, and to some of his late-seventeenth-century contemporaries, writing more than a century on from the beginnings of the English Reformation and in the wake of a tumultuous recent past of civil war and interregnum. Thus far, we have seen how nostalgic antiquarianism was forged on a sense of changing times *and* places, in ways that spoke to personal experience but which also eclipsed the generational paradigm so often emphasised by modern scholars. This nostalgia was not neutral, and it was also powerful enough to give rise to a stereotype which portrayed antiquaries as fundamentally backward-looking. Having explored the essential role that physical remains played in shaping contemporary understandings of the past, and in sustaining nostalgia for the pre-Reformation world, we turn now to focus on the complex relationship between past, present, and future inspired by ruins and remains. In doing so, we will continue to explore the character of early modern antiquarianism, but with a shift in emphasis in order to focus more fully on what this kind of historical enquiry reveals about the workings of nostalgia more generally in the seventeenth century.

### The nostalgia of John Aubrey

An interest in ruins was only a small part of John Aubrey’s scholarship, which was extensive and wide-ranging. A member of the Royal Society from the early 1660s, he engaged in studies relating to astronomy, astrology, linguistics, mathematics, natural philosophy, numismatics, and the supernatural, as well as biography, history, and architecture.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Aston has attracted some criticism for positioning Aubrey so centrally in her study of the nostalgic antiquarianism that arose after the dissolution of the monasteries, given the breadth of his interests and the fact that mentions of religious houses in his manuscripts are comparatively few and far between.<sup>45</sup> It is the character of these encounters with the ruins of the Reformation, however, rather than their frequency that chiefly concerns us here. Born in 1626, Aubrey, like others of his generation, had no personal memory of the medieval landscape of chapels, religious houses, and other holy sites, the remnants of which still littered the landscape and which he found so evocative. The comments with which this article began suggest that Aubrey felt keenly a sense of dislocation from the age when chantries and chapels, abbeys and convents had existed “standing and entire”.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, as Michael Hunter has argued, Aubrey possessed a “heightened sense of change” and an “acute awareness of the difference between past and present”, and this was critical in producing nostalgia.<sup>47</sup> In their study of nostalgia in its “modern” sense, Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase have argued that nostalgia



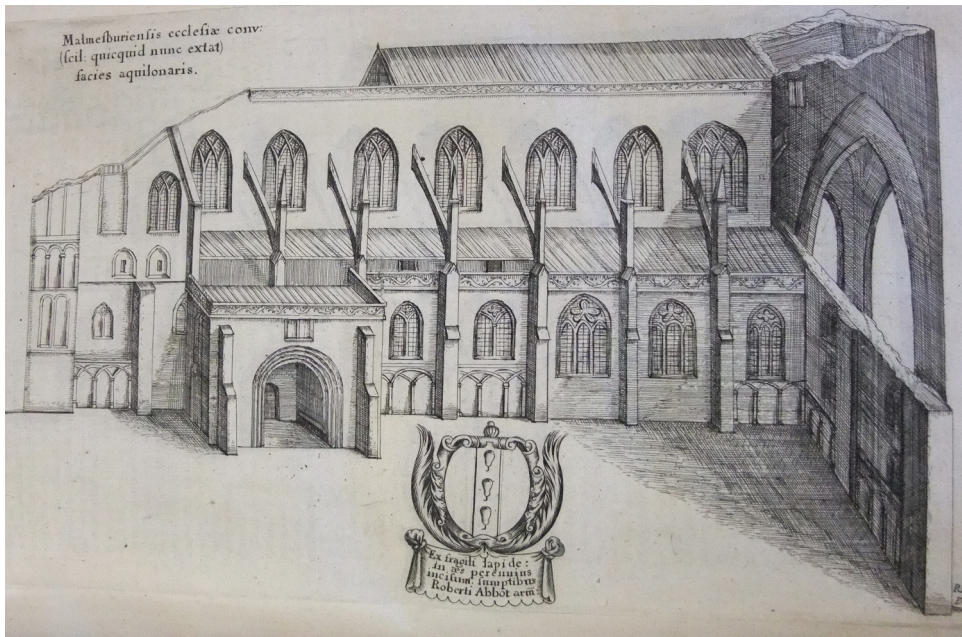
emerges when there is a “perceivable gap” between past and present.<sup>48</sup> As we have already noted, the limits for perceiving change are generally assumed to be set by the lifespan of individuals. Aubrey’s example both underscores the ability of pre-modern people to perceive a gap between past and present, and reinforces the need to re-think nostalgia as something that can endure across generational boundaries.

For Aubrey, the ruins that littered the Wiltshire countryside ensured that the gap between pre-Reformation past and post-Reformation present remained “perceivable” despite the onward march of time and the demise of the generation who had witnessed this transformation. They inspired an engagement with the past that was simultaneously scholarly and emotional. On the one hand, Aubrey’s antiquarianism was informed by the methods of empirical observation favoured by natural philosophers of the period. As recent scholarship has highlighted, in the later seventeenth century, observation – of an experiment, specimen, artefact, or the landscape – recorded in both text and image was critical in the delineation of truth.<sup>49</sup> Observation was also the natural methodology of the antiquary, whose interests in material objects and the physical landscape, concern for aesthetics, and desire to preserve the fragments of the past for posterity lent themselves to creating textual and visual records. On the other hand, Aubrey’s account of monastic ruins was also born of acute feelings of loss and regret. He described the broken remains that he encountered in the Wiltshire countryside as “*tanquam tabulata naufragii*”, “like fragments of a shipwreck” – a lyrical phrase that recalled Francis Bacon’s description of antiquities more generally in the second book of his *De augmentis scientiarum* (1605).<sup>50</sup> Aubrey continued to say that these architectural skeletons “breed in generous mindes a kind of pittie; and sett the thoughts a-worke to make out their magnificence as they were when in perfection”.<sup>51</sup> Nostalgia was, in other words, an emotional response and a call to action: Aubrey’s longing for the past was not simply passive; it inspired activity in the guise of recovering what had been lost.

In this endeavour, both learning and imagination were called upon to fill in the blanks left by time and iconoclasm. There is no clearer example of the process of resurrection at work than in Aubrey’s notes on Malmesbury, a market town in the Cotswolds, and in particular the abbey that had stood at its centre for almost a thousand years. A seventh-century Benedictine foundation, Malmesbury Abbey was famous for, amongst other things, Eilmer of Malmesbury’s early attempt at human flight in the eleventh century and as the home of the twelfth-century scholar William of Malmesbury. Over the centuries, the town had grown up and expanded around the abbey, which stood at the centre of local religious, social, and economic life. The abbey survived the collapse of its spire in high winds, which also destroyed much of the church beneath it, around 1500, but it could not weather the storm of the dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s. Surrendered to Henry VIII’s commissioners in December 1539, the bulk of the abbey and its lands came into the possession of local clothier, William Stumpe. He turned some of the abbey buildings into a workshop for his weavers, but he also gave the church over to the parish so that it could continue to serve the community.<sup>52</sup> The antiquary John Leland witnessed the looms at work in the 1540s, but at some point after Stumpe’s death in 1552 the workshops clearly fell into disuse, although the church did not.<sup>53</sup> When William Camden toured the area a few decades later, he commented that Malmesbury’s church might have fared “no better than the rest” had it not been for “Stumpes a wealthy clothier” who “redeemed and bought it for the townsmen his neighbours, by whom it

was converted to a Parish-church”.<sup>54</sup> Malmesbury is thus a good example of the process of architectural conversion which transformed as many as half of former monastic structures into parish churches, domestic houses, workshops, storehouses, and other secular spaces in the sixteenth century.<sup>55</sup> These sites created a sense of continuity between past and present, and demonstrated how the monastic landscape could be adapted to suit the age of Reformation.

At the same time, Malmesbury was also a site where the past collided with the present: the working church was set within the crumbling ruins of other parts of the abbey. This is visible in an engraving by Daniel King (Figure 1), which was commissioned for another great seventeenth-century antiquarian project: William Dugdale’s monumental history of English religious houses, the *Monasticon anglicanum*.<sup>56</sup> The most comprehensive attempt at a history of the pre- and post-dissolution history of these sites of the period, the *Monasticon* featured a number of plates, some of which depicted ruins but more commonly the working parts of ex-monastic buildings. King’s image, entitled “The North Prospect of the Conventuall Church of Malmesbury, that is to say of that [which] now remaynes”, falls into the latter category, centred on the parish church with the abbey ruins squeezed into the corner of the frame. This was a likely deliberate visual strategy, designed to allay the concerns expressed by the antiquaries’ critics and attest to the Protestant credentials of the gentry community who financed the plates.<sup>57</sup> King’s engraving also helps us to understand the juxtaposition between monastic past and secular present that would have been encountered daily by the residents of Malmesbury and by



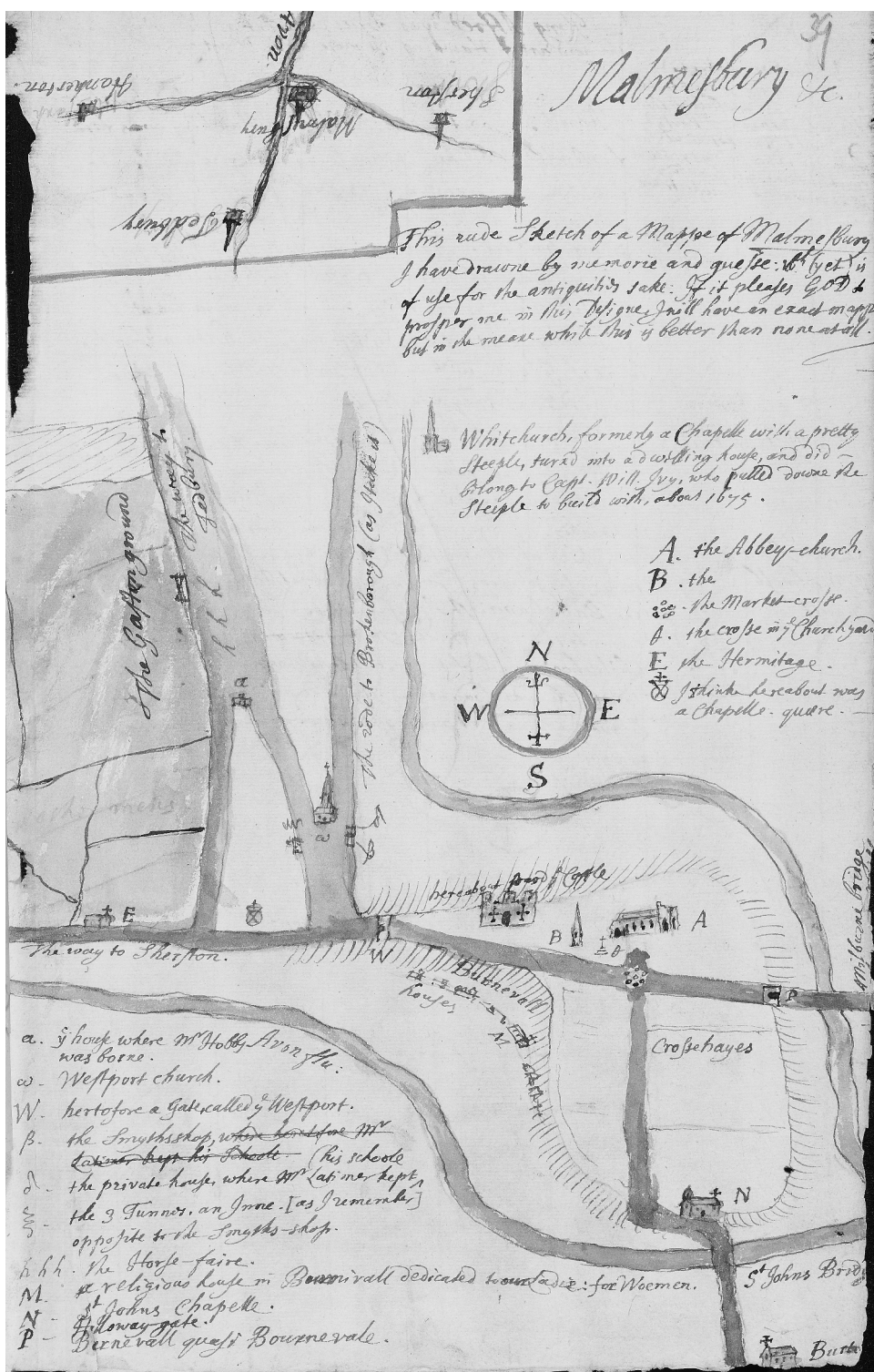
**Figure 1.** Daniel King, “The north prospect of the conventuall church of Malmesbury”, plate from Roger Dodsworth and William Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*. London, 1661 edition. Christ’s College Library, Cambridge, F.16.3. By kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Christ’s College, Cambridge. Photograph courtesy of Caroline Vout.

visitors like Aubrey. Less apparent in King's image, but all too apparent to Aubrey, was the damage wrought by the civil wars. Fiercely contested by both sides, the church still bears the pock-marks left by both Parliamentarian and Royalist bullets; these would certainly have been obvious to Aubrey, who at several points during his travels in Wiltshire had found cause to regret that so much damage had been done by "puritanicall zealots" and "Barbarous soldiers" during the 1640s and 1650s.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps, the damage wrought by this recent iconoclasm was not fit for remembrance by posterity. As Graham Parry and Michiyo Takano have shown, Dugdale's own *History of St Paul's Cathedral* (1658) deliberately depicted St Paul's in its "ideal condition" of 1641, rather than scarred by the violence of the rest of that decade.<sup>59</sup> Images, like texts, could thus be quasi-fictive and cleaned up to represent a particular vision of the past. This is entirely consistent with the selective quality inherent in nostalgia as a mode of recollection, and with the *raison d'être* of early modern antiquarianism. As Aubrey wrote in his survey of Wiltshire, "It is said of Antiquaries, they wipe off the mouldiness they digge, and remove the rubbish".<sup>60</sup>

A rough copy of King's image in Aubrey's hand can be found in his notes, alongside two further sketches that are particularly helpful for exploring the nature of the nostalgia that shaped Aubrey's work. The first is a map of the town of Malmesbury (Figure 2), which depicts the contemporary topography of the mid-seventeenth century blurred with the residues of an earlier monastic landscape. Aubrey had drawn this map "by memorie and guesse", rendering it imperfect, but "(yet) ... of use for the antiquities sake". It marked the abbey church at Malmesbury, the jagged walls of the ruined portion just about apparent, plotted alongside "a religious house ... dedicated to our Ladie: for woemen", a hermitage, and what was "formerly a Chapelle with a pretty steeple" that had been turned into a "dwelling house". Aubrey commented that the steeple had been "pulled downe ... to build with", and yet it is clearly visible entirely intact in the little sketch that marks its position to the north of the main town.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, the convent is represented as a building with a cross, signalling its ecclesiastical function, despite its dissolution long prior. Aubrey's approach to cartography thus recalls John Stow's textual overlay of the past onto present-day London in the mid-sixteenth century, although of course Aubrey's vision of the past was rooted in imagination rather than experience. The map also complicates the passage of time in a new and interesting way: it arranges different historical moments in the same visual space, effectively eroding the distance between past and present. It was, perhaps, a landscape that blended past with present for which the nostalgic antiquaries longed: a post-Reformation topography augmented and enriched by the magnificence of medieval structures.

The second image evidences a similarly complicated relationship between time and space. Whilst Aubrey's map depicts a birds-eye view of the town, "The prospect of Malmesbury" is a landscape sketch of the skyline as it was visible from the hill in nearby Cowbridge – or, rather, as Aubrey imagined it based on what was visible from Cowbridge (Figure 3). Indeed, the purpose of the sketch was to explore what the landscape would have looked like "with the idea of the abbey entire". From the surviving church and the ruined bones of the old structure, a fleshed-out version of the medieval abbey was thus revived in pictorial form, looming over the Wiltshire countryside, and next to it, the resurrected façade of "the castle; which did stand on the neck of land beyond the Abbey kitchin".<sup>62</sup> William West has described the process of reviving such structures as a kind of "artificial memory", in which imagination stood in





**Figure 2.** John Aubrey, map of Malmesbury, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS Aubrey 3, fol. 39r.



**Figure 3.** John Aubrey, “The prospect of Malmesbury”, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS Aubrey 3, fol. 35r.

for experience.<sup>63</sup> This too was central to Aubrey’s understanding of the role of the antiquary, whose work of “retrieving of these forgotten things from oblivion”, he said, “in some sort resembles the Art of a Conjuror who makes those walk and appear that have lain in their graves many hundreds of years”. Such was Aubrey’s longing to see the architectural glories of Malmesbury before the Reformation, he built upwards from the ruins in his mind, creating a landscape that was partly real but partly fiction. He had fulfilled the promise with which this article began, to gaze upon the footprint of the monastic past and revive the “noble buildings . . . made by the Piety, Charity, and Magnanimity of our Forefathers”.<sup>64</sup> The result was an image that combined past and present to forge a landscape that was somehow timeless or out of time, almost of another world.

This is also an image that raises interesting questions about the role of the future in shaping both antiquarian undertakings and nostalgia. The “Prospect of Malmesbury” is a depiction of what the abbey *might* have looked like before the dissolution of the monasteries, and simultaneously an image of what a future landscape *could* look like. Since, as we have seen, a desire to resurrect monastic structures did not necessarily, or even usually, go hand-in-hand with a desire to see a monastic revival, Aubrey’s pictorial revival of the abbey building did not inevitably imply a return to a world before the Reformation, whatever the antiquaries’ critics may have feared. Rather, his delineation of Malmesbury implied a hope that beauty and magnificence akin to that of the medieval religious houses, and the munificence and piety they symbolised, could again be writ upon the landscape. At the same time, as Aubrey knew only too well, earthly and material structures were inherently unstable. As we have noted, his fears about the state of England’s antiquities were shaped by his recent experience of two decades of civil war and interregnum in the 1640s and 1650s. By describing and recording what remained of old buildings and monuments, surveys of the landscape acted as remedies against the instability wrought by previous acts of iconoclasm and those that might be committed in the future. In all of these ways, then, nostalgia was not simply backward looking, and

antiquaries were not simply stuck in the past. Aubrey's example suggests that it was possible to be nostalgic for a future that might yet be lost, as well as a past that was already slipping away.

## Conclusion

At the time of John Aubrey's visit to Malmesbury, it was still nearly thirty years before Johannes Hofer would write the medical dissertation in which he coined the term *nostalgia*, and at least two centuries before the dictionary definition of *nostalgia* shifted from a longing for a lost homeland to a longing for a lost time. The distinction between these definitions, early modern and modern, medical and sentimental, has long been sustained in a theoretical literature that views *nostalgia* as a modern phenomenon. This is in large part the legacy of Reinhart Koselleck's influential argument that the modern age has a distinctive temporality characterised by the quickening of the passage of time.<sup>65</sup> In this context, historical discontinuity – or the “perceivable gap” between past and present – becomes more readily apparent, giving rise to *nostalgia*.<sup>66</sup> However, this argument greatly underestimates the ability of pre-modern people to perceive and respond to historical change. As we have seen, evidence of *nostalgia* in the “modern” sense is everywhere apparent in antiquarian texts and images of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly in response to the destruction wrought by reformers and iconoclasts. Margaret Aston identified as much in 1979, when she argued that the dissolution of the monasteries gave rise to a powerful *nostalgia* that inspired antiquarian endeavours.<sup>67</sup> It is true that not all of the activities that fell under the broad label of antiquarianism were motivated by *nostalgia*.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Aston was clearly correct to argue that there was a very prominent strand of enquiry shaped by this blend of emotion, memory, and scholarship. Of course, a capacity for recognising historical change was not limited to learned or elite communities: as recent scholarship has demonstrated, the same monastic ruins that inspired the antiquaries also formed the basis of powerful and persistent local memories of the transformation wrought in the 1530s and 1540s.<sup>69</sup> Early modern people may not have possessed the vocabulary of *nostalgia*, but they expressed it in other terms: pity, yearning, longing, anxiety, and regret.

By interrogating the *nostalgia* of the nostalgic antiquaries, we have also seen that the supposed distinction between early modern and modern understandings of *nostalgia* – the former concerned principally with space or homeland, and the latter with time or childhood – is a false dichotomy. Both time and place were inseparable forces shaping *nostalgia* for the pre-Reformation world. This was as true for Aubrey, writing in the later seventeenth century about a world he had not experienced, as it was for Stow, whose personal memories collided with present encounters on his tour of Elizabethan London. If anything, the relationship between time and space was even more crucial and complicated for Aubrey and his peers in the late seventeenth century: precisely because he had not been alive to witness Malmesbury Abbey in its full medieval glory or the dissolution in the 1530s, his sense of a lost time was intricately bound up with the architectural vestiges that testified to a lost place. These physical remains were therefore crucial in engendering a *nostalgia* that both conformed to *and* eclipsed the generational model that has long shaped our understanding of how *nostalgia* works. In turn, the longevity of ecclesiastical ruins – fragments stuck in time – enabled successive generations to hark



back to an age increasingly distant from their own present. The effect was the telescoping of time in ways that kept the early Reformation period at the forefront of contemporary historical consciousness, even as time itself marched on.<sup>70</sup>

This has implications for our understanding of contemporary perceptions of the past and historical periods. As we have seen, ecclesiastical ruins encouraged antiquaries to look both backwards and forwards in time from the moment of destruction in the 1530s and 1540s. In doing so, they helped to cement the Reformation as a critical watershed, before and after which the world looked different. In other words, ruins testified to the rupture between periods we have come to know as “medieval” and “early modern”.<sup>71</sup> They encouraged successive generations of observers to gaze back to a time when the religious houses had existed “standing and entire”, to use Aubrey’s phrase, as well as forwards to new landscapes, whether further ravaged by new waves of iconoclasm or having undergone a form of imaginative architectural restoration.<sup>72</sup> The nostalgia that underpinned these endeavours was not simply backward looking; nor was nostalgic antiquarianism an irrelevance to history. Rather, as a kind of proto-history of material culture, the work of antiquaries collectively underscored the significance of the Reformation as a critical rupture in both time and space. As a mode of perceiving the past, nostalgia was not passive or uncritical. We ought to see it instead as a creative phenomenon, which helped to shape contemporary senses of the boundary between the medieval and the early modern.

## Notes

1. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.
2. See for example Stan A. E. Mendyk’s assessment of Aubrey’s scholarship as fundamentally nostalgic in “*Speculum Britanniae*”, 174. The phrase “nostalgic antiquarianism” is borrowed from Collinson, “John Stow and nostalgic antiquarianism”.
3. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.
4. Aston “English ruins and English history”, 255.
5. See especially Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 23; Archer, “Nostalgia of John Stow”; Collinson, “Stow and nostalgic antiquarianism”; Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 338–40; Harris, “The greatest blow to antiquities”.
6. Hofer, *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia*.
7. For both definitions, see “nostalgia, n.” *OED Online*.
8. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.
9. Fritzsche, “Specters of history”, 1589. For other arguments in favour of nostalgia’s modernity, see Atia and Davies, “Nostalgia and the shapes of history”, 181; Shaw and Chase, “The dimensions of nostalgia”, 1.
10. See especially Johanson, ed., “Approaches to early modern nostalgia”. See also Munro, *Archaic Style in English Literature*; Karremann, *Drama of Memory*; Phillips, *Nostalgia in Print and Performance*; Lees-Jeffries, “Nostalgia”.
11. Important studies include Mendyk, “*Speculum Britanniae*”; Parry, *Trophies of Time*; Woolf, *Social Circulation of the Past*, chs. 5–6; Sweet, *Antiquaries*; Broadway, “*No Historie so Meete*”; Vine, *In Defiance of Time*.
12. In his seminal 1950 essay on antiquarianism, Arnaldo Momigliano described an understanding already widespread that “beauty and emotion” lay at the heart of antiquarian endeavours. See “Ancient history and the antiquarian”, 285.



13. Described as such in both Archer, "Nostalgia of John Stow", 21, and Collinson, "Stow and nostalgic antiquarianism", 28.
14. Stow, *Survey of London*, 105.
15. Ibid., 106. On the initial grant to Audley, see Ford, "Audley, Thomas"
16. See also Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution*, 145.
17. Stow, *Survey of London*, 70.
18. Collinson, "Stow and nostalgic antiquarianism", 34.
19. Thomas, *Perception of the Past*, 20–2. There is an especially wide-ranging literature on nostalgia for Elizabeth I, see Barton, "Harking back to Elizabeth", 706–31; Perry, "Citizen politics of nostalgia"; Watkins, "Old Bess in the ruff"; Knowles, "In the purest times of peerless Queen Elizabeth"; Karremann, *Drama of Memory*, 160–4; Tsukada, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Nostalgia*.
20. On *lieux de mémoire* see Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*; Nora, "Between memory and history". On the relationship between space and memory see also Lowenthal, *Past is a Foreign Country*, 238; Schama, *Landscape and Memory*. Two important contributions by early modernists are Whyte, *Inhabiting the Landscape* and Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*.
21. Lowenthal, "Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't", 29. See also Thomas, *Perception of the Past*, 14.
22. There is a wide-ranging literature on early modern historical writing and culture. See especially Fussner, *Historical Revolution*; Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*; Ferguson, *Clio Unbound*; Kelley and Sacks, eds., *Historical Imagination*; Woolf, *Social Circulation*; Kewes, ed., *Uses of History*; Grafton, *What was History*.
23. Camden, *Britain*, "author to the reader".
24. Ibid., "author to the reader" and 6. On Camden's career see Piggott, "William Camden and the *Britannia*"; Herendeen, *William Camden*.
25. See Wilson, "'Unlawful' books found in John Stow's study".
26. On Stow's religion see also Beer, "Stow and the English Reformation"; Archer, "John Stow: citizen and historian", esp. 21–2.
27. Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 64; [Philip Howard], "The Ruins of Walsingham", 550. On the attribution of the lament for Walsingham see Waller, *Walsingham and the English Imagination*, 97–8. Howard converted to Catholicism after witnessing the martyrdom of Edmund Campion in 1581, see Elzinga, "Howard, Philip".
28. Aston, "English ruins", 232 and *passim*. On the literary power of ruins see also Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature*, ch. 3; Hui, *Poetics of Ruins*, ch. 6; Mottram, *Ruin and Reformation*.
29. Lambarde, *Perambulation of Kent*, 235–6.
30. Earle, *Microcosmographie*, sigs. Cv–C2r.
31. See especially Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, ch. 3.
32. Thomas, *Perception of the Past*, 20–2.
33. See also Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution*, 136.
34. Aston, "English ruins", 232.
35. Here I borrow the terminology employed in Assmann, "Collective memory and cultural identity".
36. Weever, *Ancient funerall monuments*, "author to the reader".
37. On changing cultures of remembering the dead see Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*; Harding, "Choices and changes"; Wooding, "Remembrance in the Eucharist". On images and the Reformation see the different approaches in Collinson, *Iconoclasm to Iconophobia*; Hamling and Williams, *Art Re-formed*; Hunter, ed., *Printed Images*, part I; Davis, *Seeing Faith, Printing Pictures*.
38. On monuments and the Reformation see Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory*. On the "beauty of holiness" see Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, ch. 6; Lake, "The Laudian style".
39. Weever, *Ancient funerall monuments*, "author to the reader".
40. Ibid., sig. Ar.
41. On "imaginative antiquarianism" see also Vine, *In Defiance of Time*, 5 and *passim*.
42. Weever, *Ancient funerall monuments*, sig. E3r.

43. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 63; Aston, "Puritans and iconoclasm"; Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*; Simpson, *Under the Hammer*, ch. 3; Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 125–47.
44. On Aubrey's scholarship see Hunter, *Aubrey and the Realm of Learning*; Parry, *Trophies of Time*, ch. 10; Williams, *The Antiquary*, 9–13 and passim; Yale, *Sociable Knowledge*, ch. 4.
45. Hunter, *Aubrey and the Realm of Learning*, 183, n. 2.
46. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.
47. Hunter, *Aubrey and the Realm of Learning*, 165.
48. Shaw and Chase, "Dimensions of nostalgia", 8.
49. See especially Kusakawa, *Picturing the Book of Nature*; da Costa, "The making of extraordinary facts". On Aubrey's engagement with the visual, see also Turner, "The windows of this church are of several fashions".
50. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4; Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, sig. Cc3r.
51. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.
52. Miller, revised, "Stumpe, William".
53. Smith, ed., *Itinerary of John Leland*, 132.
54. Camden, *Britain*, 243.
55. Howard, "Recycling the monastic fabric", 221. On the conversion of monastic properties see also Wilmott, *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, chs. 5–6; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution*, 149–69.
56. Dodsworth and Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*. On Dugdale's career and the *Monasticon* see Dyer and Richardson, eds., *William Dugdale*; Broadway, *William Dugdale*.
57. Walsham, "Like fragments of a shipwreck", 94.
58. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Aubrey 3, fols. 148, 151, quoted in Hunter, *Aubrey and the Realm of Learning*, 166.
59. Parry and Takano, "Dugdale's *History of St Paul's*", 475.
60. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.
61. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Aubrey 3, fol. 39r.
62. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Aubrey 3, fol. 35r.
63. West, "No endlesse monument".
64. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.
65. Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
66. Chase and Shaw, "Dimensions of nostalgia", 8.
67. Aston, "English ruins".
68. There was, for instance, a prominent strand of post-Reformation topography that was rooted firmly in the present, and which served in part to efface the transformations wrought by the combined forces of time, dissolution, iconoclasm, urbanisation, and enclosure in favour of praising the gentry community who occupied former religious houses and carved up the local landscape. See Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution*, 158–69, 187–90.
69. See especially Wood, *Memory of the People*, ch. 1. See also Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, ch. 2; Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution*, ch. 4.
70. For a similar argument relating to uses of the language of "recency" see Schwyzer, "'Late' losses".
71. On the term "early modern", see Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, introduction and chs. 1–2. For different approaches to periodisation see Summit and Wallace, eds., "Medieval/Renaissance", special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (2007).
72. Aubrey, *Wiltshire*, 4.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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