

“A Pitiful Thing”? The Afterlife of the Dissolution of the English  
Monasteries in Early Modern Chronicles, c. 1540 – c. 1640

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ABSTRACT: Modern scholarship on the dissolution of the monasteries (1536-40) has paid little attention to how it was remembered by those who witnessed it or to the evolution of this memory in subsequent generations. Speaking to a growing interest in the memory of the Reformation, this article explores the afterlife of the dissolution in early modern chronicles, which have too often been themselves neglected as an outdated genre of historical writing. It focuses on three interrelated texts: Charles Wriothesley's manuscript chronicle, John Stow's “Annales of England” (1592), and Edmund Howes's editions of the “Annales” (1615, 1631). Using this case study, the article traces how the cultural memory of the dissolution was transformed according to the proclivities of individual chroniclers and with the changing preoccupations of successive generations. In doing so, it suggests the conventional historiography has fallen victim to Henrician narratives of the expediency and insignificance of the dissolution. Contemporary memorializing practices, it contends, may provide the key to recovering its significance as one of the most controversial events of the Henrician Reformation.

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The dissolution of the monasteries was one of the earliest and most visible manifestations of the Reformation in England. Yet despite its transformative effect on religious, social, and cultural life, historians have paid little attention to how the events of 1536-40 were remembered by those who experienced them or to the evolution of this memory in subsequent generations. Rather, fueled by the numerous reports, grants, leases, and letters now preserved in the State Papers and the Cotton manuscripts, the historiography of the dissolution has concentrated on its origins, course, and immediate consequences.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on these documents, a generation of scholars writing in the 1960s and 1970s characterized the suppression as an efficient and relatively painless episode in what Geoffrey Elton once called the Tudor revolution in government.<sup>2</sup> By privileging its administrative aspects, this literature

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<sup>1</sup> *Miscellanea Relating to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and to the General Surveyors, Henry VIII, 1517-1560*, The National Archives SP 5, Kew Gardens; *Papers Relating to the Dissolution of the Monasteries*, British Library Cotton MS Cleopatra E IV.

<sup>2</sup> G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). On the dissolution see the various approaches of David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); G. W. O. Woodward, *The*

downplayed the significance of the dissolution to the broader processes of Reformation and aligned its historiography with wider views concerning the fundamental vulnerability of monasticism specifically and Roman Catholicism more generally on the eve of the break with Rome.<sup>3</sup> Contesting this pessimistic vision of the pre-Reformation church, revisionist interpretations have sought to rehabilitate the late medieval religious orders as vibrant and relevant communities.<sup>4</sup> They have also

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*Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: Blandford Press, 1966); Joyce Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> See for example A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: The Fontana Library, 1964), esp. chaps 4 and 8; G. R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation: England, 1509-1558* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), chap. 1; G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longman, 1973 edn).

<sup>4</sup> See for example G. W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church: Vitality and Vulnerability Before the Break with Rome* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2012); James G. Clark, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011); Martin Heale, *Monasticism in Late Medieval England, c.1300-1535* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Emilia Jamroziak and Janet Burton, eds., *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Benjamin Thompson, "Monasteries, Society, and Reform in Late Medieval England," in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), 165-96. See also Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, New Haven, CT, and London: Yale

highlighted that the suppression had religious motives as well as religious consequences and intellectual as well as social ramifications.<sup>5</sup> By looking back to the late medieval period, Tudor scholarship has therefore begun to appreciate the complexity of the dissolution. But this increasingly nuanced account also elicits important, and as yet unanswered, questions about the afterlives of the suppression and its place in the mnemonic culture of post-Reformation England.

This article seeks to contribute to a growing interest in what Daniel Woolf has called the “social circulation of the past,” or the shift in historical consciousness brought about by dynamic processes of communication, commemoration, and re-articulation that altered the climate in which knowledge of the past was recalled and transmitted.<sup>6</sup> In particular, it speaks to an emerging concern with the ways in which the Reformation, largely absent from Woolf’s analysis, “fundamentally reconfigured” how people thought about the past in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> It does

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University Press, 2005), whose vision of the vitality of pre-Reformation Catholicism revolves around the unit of the parish rather than the institution of monasticism.

<sup>5</sup> On the religious motives for dissolution see G. W. Bernard, “The Dissolution of the Monasteries,” *History* 96 (2011): 390-409.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12 and passim. For an earlier account see Keith Thomas, *The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England*, The Creighton Trust Lecture, (London: University of London, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Walsham, “History, Memory, and the English Reformation,” *Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 936. These issues are now the subject of investigation as part of

so through an examination of accounts of the dissolution in contemporary chronicles, which have too often been themselves neglected as outdated, impersonal, and formulaic records in an era that witnessed the proliferation of ideologically driven histories inflected by religious upheaval. This essay contributes to the ongoing reassessment of the vitality and polemical potential of the genre, suggesting that far from passively memorializing the dissolution, chronicles functioned actively to shape its afterlife in subtle but significant ways. What follows is a case study of three interrelated early modern chronicles: Charles Wriothesley's manuscript chronicle of Tudor England, John Stow's *Annales, or Generall Chronicle of England* (1592), and Edmund Howes's seventeenth-century editions of Stow's *Annales* (1615 and 1631). It traces the constant evolution of the memory of the suppression across the century after 1540, during which the first-hand recollections that constitute what Jan Assmann has called communicative memory gave way to the cultural memory of communities whose remembrances were not based in experience but rather shaped by texts such as chronicles and inherited orally through local customs, tradition, and folklore.<sup>8</sup> The polyvalent and multivocal processes of remembering and selective forgetting that produced this transformation reveal a very different account of the dissolution to that which has dominated its historiography. Contemporary memorializing practices, this article contends, may provide the key to understanding the persistence of the

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the AHRC "Remembering the Reformation" project, directed by Alexandra Walsham and Brian Cummings and jointly based at the Universities of Cambridge and York.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-33.

conventional narrative of the suppression and help to recover its significance as one of the most controversial events of the Henrician Reformation.

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Chronicling the dissolution began almost from the moment of its implementation, operating in parallel with the government's polemical campaign against the religious. The first chronicle to record the suppression was begun during the 1530s by Charles Wriothesley, herald and probable servant of Thomas Audley, later Lord Chancellor, and continued thereafter until the first year of the reign of Elizabeth I. The original manuscript has since been lost and only an early seventeenth-century transcript produced for the earls of Northumberland enabled its eventual publication under the auspices of the Camden Society in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> That it was transcribed for the Northumberland archives says much about the desirability of preserving a particular vision of the past, though it is impossible to know whether this copy is a true reflection of the original or whether it too has been distorted by the consequences of selective remembering. There is at least one obvious editorial addition – a reference to Stow's *Annales*, published thirty years after Wriothesley's death in 1562, in a passage concerning the shipwreck of the Russian ambassador in 1556.<sup>10</sup> Internal

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Wriothesley's Chronicle, Alnwick Castle DNP: MS 468A, Northumberland; hereafter Alnwick MS 468A. Published as Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors, from A.D. 1485 to 1559*, ed. William Douglas Hamilton, 2 vols. (London, Camden Society, new series II, 1875-7).

<sup>10</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 180r.

evidence is, however, sufficient to attribute the bulk of the chronicle to Wriothesley and the Northumberland text displays substantial evidence of the outlook that might be expected of a minor cog in the machine of Henrician government.<sup>11</sup> The height of Wriothesley's career coincided with the rise of Anne Boleyn and the first stirrings of the Reformation in England.<sup>12</sup> He also witnessed firsthand the gains made by the nobility at the dissolution through the career of his cousin Thomas Wriothesley, first earl of Southampton, who acquired former monastic properties in no fewer than eight counties between 1537 and 1547.<sup>13</sup> In this context, it is little surprise that Charles Wriothesley's chronicle is profoundly inflected by his sympathy for and loyalty to the Henrician regime.

Wriothesley singled out monasticism as a particular evil of the pre-Reformation past. His chronicle is replete with references to what he describes as the fraudulent relic culture of the monasteries, condemning vigorously the veneration of "Reliques in divers places which the[y] used for covetousnes in deceaphing the people".<sup>14</sup> He reserved singular contempt for the infamous deceptions of the Holy Blood of Hailes

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<sup>11</sup> William Douglas Hamilton, "Introduction," in Wriothesley, *Chronicle of England*, 1:iii.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Kipling, "Wriothesley, Charles (1508–1562)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB], ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Michael A. R. Graves, "Wriothesley, Thomas, first earl of Southampton (1505–1550)," *ODNB*.

<sup>14</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 67v.

and the mechanical Rood of Grace at Boxley in Kent, both of which had been prominently and publicly exposed as frauds by the Henrician regime in an episode that Ethan Shagan has used to demonstrate the power and reach of the government's campaign against monastic relics, idols, and shrines.<sup>15</sup> The chronicle clearly demonstrates Wriothesley's awareness of the sermons given by John Hilsey, bishop of Rochester and himself a Dominican prior until 1538, who denounced the Rood of Boxley at Paul's Cross on 24 February 1538 and the Holy Blood on 24 November 1538 after, as Wriothesley claims, hearing the confession of a woman whom the Abbot of Hailes himself had told the relic was the blood of a duck.<sup>16</sup> Reflecting the potency of this polemic, Wriothesley played his own small part in the exposure of such deceptions by perpetuating the story that the Boxley monks had "gotten great riches in deceavinge the people thinckinge that the sayde Image had so moved by the power of God, which now playnlye appeared to the Contrarye".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chap. 5. On the persuasive power of the crown see also G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 81r-v. In his sermon Hilsey actually denounced the Holy Blood as honey colored with saffron, though an alternative interpretation did claim that it was duck's blood. See S. Thompson, "Hilsey, John (d. 1539)," *ODNB*. On the significance of this episode see Peter Marshall, "Forgery and Miracles in the Reign of Henry VIII," *Past & Present* 178 (2003): 39-73.

<sup>17</sup> Alnwick MS 468, fol. 81r.

Another prominent strand in government polemic condemned the worldliness and iniquity of the religious. The correspondence that passed between Cromwell and his agents in the 1530s was saturated with references to the alleged deceitfulness and depravity of English monks, friars, and nuns. Thus Drs Layton and Lee reported that the Abbot of Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire had “gretly dilapidated his howse” through a variety of secular and spiritual crimes, which included “notoriously keypyng vj. hoores,” “thefft and sacrilege,” and “one day denyng thes articles [of religion]” before “the next daye folowyng the same confessyng” and thus perjuring himself.<sup>18</sup> So pervasive was this rhetoric of iniquity that the preamble to the 1536 act for the suppression of the lesser religious houses declared that such “vicious, carnall, and abhomynable lyvyng” was “dayly used” in abbeys and convents across the country.<sup>19</sup> The same narrative of endemic corruption inflects many of the records that preserve first-hand memories of the dissolution. A remarkable manuscript history of the suppression, “The manner of dissolving the Abbeys by K. H. 8.,” apparently authored retrospectively by an eyewitness to the episode, repeatedly emphasized that the religious had been content to surrender quietly after their “vile lives” were exposed by the regime.<sup>20</sup> Wriothesley’s chronicle also bears distinct traces of these highly influential ideas. Describing the pre-dissolution release of those monks and

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<sup>18</sup> Letter from Drs Layton and Lee to Thomas Cromwell, in Thomas Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London, Camden Society, old series 26, 1843), 100.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> “The Manner of Dissolving the Abbeys by K. H. 8.,” British Library Cotton MS Titus F III, fols. 268v-270r.

nuns aged under twenty-four years from their vocation, he recorded that the king's commissioners "shewed them how they shoulde use wilfull povertie," inverting the monastic vow to live an unworldly life. He also made reference to contemporary allegations of monastic sexual impropriety by transcribing the government order that "no men resorte to the places of Nonnes, nor weomen to come into the places of Religious men, but onlie to heere Service and masses in their Churches".<sup>21</sup>

Wriothesley's polemic against the religious went hand in hand with panegyric for the Tudor dynasty. The implication of many of his entries on the dissolution is that Henry VIII's orders regarding the religious houses were followed swiftly and efficiently, and inspired only minimal resistance. Recording the effects of the wholesale dissolution in 1539, Wriothesley offered an account of a seamless and almost overnight transition from a world with monasteries to a world without them: "all the monkes [were] set at large, & chaunged their habits to secular preistes, so that at this day remayned noe fryer in his habit through England."<sup>22</sup> The expediency of the dissolution is also implicit in a longer passage concerning the assent of parliament to the suppression of 1536:

Also this yeare, at a Parliamēt holden at westminster in Februarie last past, and ended the Thursdaie afore Easter, it was granted to the king and his heires, to the augmentation of the Crowne, all religious howses in this Realme of Englande of the value of tow [sic] hundred

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<sup>21</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 67v.

<sup>22</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 85v.

poundes and under, with all landes and goodes belonging to the said howses, in as ample manner as the said Abbottes and Priors held them, the some of the howses amounted to iii<sup>C</sup> lxxvj [367], the value of their landes xxxij [32] thousand poundes and more, and the moveables of their goodes as they were sold amounted above one hundred thousand poundes; and the Religious persons that were in the said howses were clearlie putt out some to [o]their howses, some went abroade in the worlde. Againe it was pitie the great Lamentation that the poore people made for them, for there was great hospitalitie kept amonge them. And as it was reported tenne Thousand persons had lost their living by the putting downe of them, which was great pitie.<sup>23</sup>

Apparently written at some point during the year following the events it describes, there is a reflective tone to Wriothesley's assessment of the dissolution, which telescopes time to offer an account of the longer-term consequences of the suppression, including the dispersal of the persons and goods attached to the dissolved houses. His support for the Henrician regime underpins his approval of the transfer of these properties "to the augmentation of the crowne" and there are undertones of the more vitriolic forms of anti-monastic polemic in his insinuations about the "ample manner" of living enjoyed by the senior ranks of the religious. Most significantly, though Wriothesley expresses pity for those bereft of employment or place of refuge, his account of the "great lamentation" made for the monasteries mourns not the fallen

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<sup>23</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 71r.

religious houses but the very fact that the poorest sorts had grieved the loss of so backward an institution.

The narrative presented in this passage – and across the entries in Wriothesley’s chronicle concerned with the various inadequacies and vices of monasticism – at once echoes and reinforces the tenor of the official campaign to condemn the religious orders. It encapsulates an influential strand of the communicative memory of the dissolution, which has resonated with its modern historiography. It also sits somewhat uncomfortably with conventional accounts of the early modern chronicle genre as devoid of confessional force. A corollary of the tendency in the history of historiography to prioritize the continental influences of humanism and jurisprudence at the expense of religion, the distinction first drawn by Arthur B. Ferguson between the chronicle as a static, outdated form of scholarship and the early modern ecclesiastical histories that employed history in the service of religious controversy has proved highly influential.<sup>24</sup> More recently, however, David Womersley has argued that the genre both contributed to and was shaped by a political culture that

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<sup>24</sup> Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 11. See also F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580-1640* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1962); F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1967). For a more recent example of the tendency to read chronicles as secular texts see D. R. Woolf, “Genre into Artifact: The Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988): 321-45.

“served to saturate English historiography with religious implication” as both reformers and traditionalists looked to history for legitimacy in the wake of the break with Rome.<sup>25</sup> The vision of the dissolution articulated in Wriothesley’s chronicle offers one example of how these texts became ideologically inflected in similar, if sometimes rather more subtle, ways to other forms of historical writing.

In this respect, Wriothesley’s compilation is also emblematic of the transformation wrought by the Reformation – and specifically the dissolution – upon the genre itself. Modelled on the Books of Chronicles in the Old Testament, medieval chronicles were substantially monastic records, developed by the religious orders in their capacity as custodians of memory.<sup>26</sup> These texts were characteristically concise and employed

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<sup>25</sup> David Womersley, “Against the Teleology of Technique,” in *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. Paulina Kewes (San Marino, CA: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 2006), 99. See also Walsham, “History, Memory, and the Reformation,” 902. For a recent overview of religious history writing in this period see Anthony Grafton, “Church History in Early Modern Europe: Tradition and Innovation,” in *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World*, ed. Katherine van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, and Howard Louthan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-26.

<sup>26</sup> Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London and New York, NY: Hambledon and London, 2004), 58; Catherine Cubitt, “Memory and Narrative in the Cult of Early Anglo-Saxon Saints,” in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29-66.

accretive and parasitic practices to further the enduring task of tracing the workings of providence in the world.<sup>27</sup> But though monastic chroniclers refrained from drawing causal connections between events they believed to be enacted by divine design, medieval scholarship has demonstrated that “cogent stories” about both the divine plan for human history and various royal dynasties are nevertheless clearly discernable within and between the lines of these laconic texts.<sup>28</sup> Chronicling, as Patrick Geary has contended, thus involved deliberate and conscious “decisions about what should be remembered and how it should be remembered”.<sup>29</sup> For centuries, these decisions had been taken largely by the inhabitants of the monasteries. It is, therefore, no small irony that after the dissolution the genre was adopted by a new generation of

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<sup>27</sup> On the character of medieval chronicles see Sarah Foot, “Annals and Chronicles in Western Europe,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Volume 2: 400-1400*, ed. Sarah Foot and Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 346-367; Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. chaps 4 and 5.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Foot, “Finding the Meaning of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles,” in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 102. On the absence of causation in chronicle narratives see Alexandra Walsham, “Providentialism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed’s Chronicles*, ed. Paulina Kewes, Ian Archer, and Felicity Heal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 430.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 9.

semi-professional lay chroniclers, including Wriothesley, who used it as a tool for shaping the memory of the Catholic past.

Wriothesley's chronicle was both a product of Henrician polemic and functioned as a vehicle for exposing the corruption of the monastic houses and preserving their fall for posterity, thereby rendering the religious victims of their own traditions of memory making. Divorced from the institutional context of the monasteries, Wriothesley's chronicle became a semi-autobiographical record of his personal experiences.<sup>30</sup> But it was also a near-historical account of the Henrician Reformation. As such, the text became a mine of information for subsequent recollections of the suppression, in which it acquired new meaning and significance. In the course of re-writing Wriothesley's chronicle, the memory of the dissolution was made anew.

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Wriothesley's text may have circulated only in manuscript until the nineteenth century, but his Henrician orthodoxy was – predictably – echoed in many of the chronicles printed in the first half of the sixteenth century. Together with the transfer of the genre out of the religious houses, the advent of print in the late fifteenth century facilitated the production of texts intended for wider consumption than their medieval

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<sup>30</sup> On the autobiographical quality of early modern chronicles see Alexandra Walsham, "Chronicles, memory, and autobiography in Reformation England". I am grateful to Alexandra Walsham for sharing the unpublished typescript of this article with me.

antecedents.<sup>31</sup> Noteworthy Tudor chronicles include Thomas Lanquet's *Epitome of Cronicles* (1549), which stated boldly that during the dissolution "all friars, monks, canons, [and] nuns... were rooted out of this realm for their iniquity and naughtiness".<sup>32</sup> Similarly *Hall's Chronicle*, the project of the Henrician lawyer Edward Hall and continued beyond the 1520s by Richard Grafton, King's Printer under Henry VIII and Edward VI, also invoked images of monastic corruption in the form of "great and fatte abbottes," who "even at that time" of the first visitations had been considered "putrified olde okes".<sup>33</sup> When Grafton, whose press occupied the site of the former Greyfriars near St Paul's Cathedral, published his own *Chronicle at Large* in 1568 this passage was repeated verbatim.<sup>34</sup> Appearing a decade after the accession of Elizabeth I, the *Chronicle at Large* was compiled at a time when the dissolution was still within living memory, but also in the context of a new political imperative to justify the repression of Marian Catholicism. This provided an impetus for the republication of some Henrician and Edwardian chronicles: in 1555 Mary I

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<sup>31</sup> D. R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Lanquet, *Lanquette's Chronicle [An epitome of cronicles]* (London, 1559 edn), sig. Bbbb8v. On Lanquet see Henry Summerson, "Lanquet, Thomas (1520/21–1545)," *ODNB*.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London, 1548), fol. 227v.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Grafton, *A Chronicle at Large and Meere History of the Affayres of Englande and Kinges of the Same* (London, 1569), 1226; Meraud Grant Ferguson, "Grafton, Richard (1506/7–1573)," *ODNB*.

had issued a proclamation calling for the destruction of *Hall's Chronicle*; in repudiation of this order, a new edition appeared in 1560.<sup>35</sup> Lanquet's *Epitome* was also reprinted in 1559. Continuity was further achieved in the form of new Elizabethan chronicles. These included the collaborative project known under the name of one of its compilers, Raphael Holinshed, and first published as *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* in 1577, which, like Wriothesley's chronicle forty years previously, transcribed the injunctions against the religious houses and all that they implied about the condition of monasticism on the eve of the dissolution.<sup>36</sup>

Critical perspectives on the dissolution are difficult to locate amongst this chorus of pro-Henrician voices. One remarkable monastic chronicle, written by an anonymous resident of the Greyfriars that had since become Grafton's workshop, was continued through and beyond the events of 1536-40. The strikingly Henrician outlook exhibited in the chronicler's terse and infrequent references to the dissolution – including to the suppression of his own house, “some tyme the gray freeres” – conceals a continued commitment to Catholicism that re-emerges only in his entries for the reign of Mary

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<sup>35</sup> Peter C. Herman, “Hall, Edward (1497–1547),” *ODNB*.

<sup>36</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande, with their Descriptions*, 2 vols. (London, 1577), 2:1564; Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 67v. On the multivocal nature of Holinshed's *Chronicles* see Felicity Heal and Henry Summerson, “The Genesis of the Two Editions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, ed. Paulina Kewes, Ian Archer, and Felicity Heal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-20.

I.<sup>37</sup> Nor is there much evidence in early sixteenth-century chronicles of the evangelical commonwealth critique of the dissolution, advanced by religious controversialists such as Henry Brinkelow and William Turner, which condemned the use of monastic wealth to line the pockets of the Henrician nobility rather than to support pious or educational projects.<sup>38</sup> Though chronicles could be profoundly polemical texts, they were not the principal vehicles for this strident and explicit critique of the course of the Protestant Reformation. Censorship and self-censorship of chronicles, especially those that made it into print, was perhaps also a factor here, in addition to the constraints imposed on would-be polemicists by the conventions of the chronicle genre. However, read with sensitivity to language, silence, and editorial practices, it is possible to detect the emergence of a subtle but highly significant critique of the dissolution in chronicles from the later sixteenth century onwards. This reflected an increasingly pronounced conservative tradition in English Protestantism, which would come to present a direct challenge to the Henrician orthodoxy.

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<sup>37</sup> “Chronicle of the City of London,” British Library Cotton MS Vitellius F XII, fol. 355r. Published as *The Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, ed. John Gough Nichols (London, Camden Society, old series 53, 1852), 54. See also Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing During the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns, 1530-1558* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 2.

<sup>38</sup> On the evangelical critique see Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 161-4.

In 1592, fifty years after the closure of the last English monasteries, the antiquary John Stow, himself a member of the Holinshed syndicate, published the first edition of his *Annales of England*. Stow's religion was of a more conservative cast than that of either Wriothesley or Grafton. Earlier in his career, he had twice faced controversy for suspected crypto-Catholicism, first over accusations that he had illegally copied and circulated a pamphlet attacking the queen, and then again when Edmund Grindal, future archbishop of Canterbury, ordered that his property be searched for illegal Catholic books and manuscripts. The investigation revealed thirty-nine objectionable items and the report that reached William Cecil claimed that Stow's "bokes declare him to be a great fauver[oure]r of papistry".<sup>39</sup> Current historiography tends to place Stow somewhere between church papist and conservative conformist; Ian Archer has suggested that Stow underwent a "transition to conformity" over the course of his life.<sup>40</sup> At first glance, the *Annales* does not appear to reflect these sensibilities in the

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in David Scott Kastan, "Opening Gates and Stopping Hedges: Grafton, Stow, and the Politics of Elizabethan History Writing," in *The Project of Prose in Early Modern Europe and the New World*, ed. Elizabeth Fowler and Roland Greene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73. On this episode see Janet Wilson, "A Catalogue of the 'Unlawful' Books Found in John Stow's Study on 21 February 1568/9," *Recusant History* 20 (1990): 1-30.

<sup>40</sup> Ian W. Archer, "John Stow: Citizen and Historian," in *John Stow (1525-1605) and the Making of the English Past*, ed. Ian Gadd and Alexandra Gillespie (London: The British Library, 2004), 21-2. See also Patrick Collinson, "John Stow and Nostalgic Antiquarianism," in idem, *This England: Essays on the English Nation and*

way that Wriothesley's chronicle flaunted his support for the Henrician cause. On closer inspection, however, the account of the dissolution contained within its pages reveals that the *Annales* was indeed ideologically inflected. In an entry dated 1536, Stow offers the following account of the suppression of the lesser monasteries. It is an account that is at once both remarkably familiar and profoundly altered from what had gone before:

In a parliament begun in the moneth of Februarie [1536], was granted to the king and his heires all religious houses in the realme of Englande, of the value of two hundred pound and vnder, with al lands and goods to them belonging: the number of these houses then suppressed, were 376. the value of their lands then 32000. pound, and more by yeere, the moouable goodes as they were sold, Robin Hoodes pennywoorthes, amounted to more than one hundred thousand pounds, and the religious persons that were in the saide houses, were clerely put out, some went to other greater houses, some went abroad to the world. It was (sayeth mine author) a pitifull thing to heare the lamentation that the people in the countrie made for them: for there was great hospitalitie kept among them, and as it was thought more than ten thousand persons, masters and

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*Commonwealth in the Sixteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 287-308.

seruants had lost their liuings by the putting downe of those houses at that time.<sup>41</sup>

This passage, which is an expanded version of a previous discussion of the dissolution in Stow's earlier *Chronicles of England* (1580), bears striking resemblance, both structural and linguistic, to its equivalent in Wriothesley's chronicle. The similitude of these entries was underlined by the latter's nineteenth-century editor, William Douglas Hamilton, who suggested that Stow must have had access either to the original manuscript or to a contemporary copy of Wriothesley's chronicle.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it seems that the Henrician herald was in fact the anonymous author behind Stow's account of the suppression of the lesser monasteries. But Hamilton's account of the essential similarity of the two chronicles neglects the notable and important differences that exist between these texts. The *Annales* does not quote verbatim from the Henrician chronicle, despite the implication of the phrase "sayeth mine author"

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<sup>41</sup> John Stow, *The Annales of England, Faithfully Collected out of the Most Authentick Authors, Records, and Other Monuments of Antiquitie* (London, 1592), 966.

<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, "Introduction," in Wriothesley, *Chronicle of England*, 1:xx. See also Barrett L. Beer, "John Stow and the English Reformation, 1547-1559," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985): 258, though Beer does not discuss the passage in question. Note that Wriothesley's chronicle is not listed among the chronicles owned by Stow identified in Alexandra Gillespie, "Stow's 'Owlde' Manuscripts of London Chronicles," in *John Stow (1525-1605) and the Making of the English Past*, ed. Ian Gadd and Alexandra Gillespie (London: The British Library, 2004), 57-68.

that what follows is a faithful rendering of its source. Stow has erased Wriothesley's polemical comments concerning the gains made by the crown and the ample living of the religious. His addition of the contemporary proverb "Robin Hoodes penny woorthes" to characterize the "moveable goodes" taken from the religious houses further implies contempt for the king and his commissioners. In John Ray's early eighteenth-century guide to English proverbs, this phrase is said to have a double meaning, referencing either goods sold at half their worth, as Robin Hood had done with those he plundered, or the legendary outlaw's ability to buy goods at any price because "the owners were glad to get anything of *Robin Hood*, who otherwise would have taken their goods for nothing".<sup>43</sup> As evangelical polemicists had noted since the 1530s, Henry VIII could hardly be said to have stolen from the rich to give to the poor. This phrase thus reveals a profound critique of the Henrician government, which finds further expression in the final lines of the passage. In a subtle but significant misrepresentation of Wriothesley, Stow conveys his pity for the communities – no longer limited solely to the poorest sorts – robbed of the religious houses around which they had been built and upon which they had relied for employment, charity, and hospitality. This passage, then, conceals the irony that a rhetoric intended to assert the expediency of the suppression and the folly of those who had mourned the loss of the monasteries had been transfigured to mold the dissolution itself into the truly "pitifull thing".

A similar brand of subtle polemic also colors other elements of Stow's wider narrative. David Scott Kastan has identified a difference in emphasis between Stow

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<sup>43</sup> John Ray, *A Compleat Collection of English Proverbs* (London, 1737), 208.

and Grafton, who sustained a bitter rivalry across their publishing careers, regarding another politically and religiously charged moment in Tudor history, the accession of Mary I.<sup>44</sup> Peter Marshall has also highlighted Stow's marked conservatism regarding the fatal shooting of Robert Packington, one of John Foxe's earliest Protestant martyrs, in 1536.<sup>45</sup> A third episode that is particularly pertinent to Stow's overarching account of Henrician reform and his subtly sympathetic take on medieval monasticism concerns John Forest, a Franciscan executed for heresy in 1538.<sup>46</sup> Recounting Forest's death, Stow describes how the friar challenged Bishop Latimer's sermon "mooving him to repentaunce" in a "loud voice," declaring that:

if an angell should come downe from heaven and teach him any other doctrine than he had received, and beleved from his youth, hee would not now beleve him, and that if his body shoulde bee cut ioynt after ioynt, or member after member brent [burnt], hanged, or what paine soever mught ben doone to his bodie, hee would never turn from his old profession.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kastan, "Opening Gates and Stopping Hedges," 66-79.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (London: Routledge, 2006), 77.

<sup>46</sup> On this episode see Anne Dillon, "John Forrest and Derfel Gadarn: A Double Execution," *Recusant History* 28 (2006-7): 1-21; Peter Marshall, "Papist as Heretic: The Burning of John Forest, 1538," *Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 351-74.

<sup>47</sup> Stow, *Annales*, 569.

This account of Forest's defiant oration on the pyre is remarkable and unusual because it does not appear in the chronicles of many of Stow's contemporaries. Not only is this speech entirely absent from Grafton's chronicles, but Grafton differs markedly from Stow in claiming that the "obstinate" and unrepentant Forest "neyther would heare nor speake" before his execution.<sup>48</sup> In choosing to include what had elsewhere been omitted, Stow was making a statement about what he believed to be worth remembering – in this case the bravery and piety of a man whose vocation was being vigorously condemned in other contemporary accounts of the dissolution – and Grafton's account of the friar's silence was no less polemical. Moreover, of the two other chronicles to bear witness to Forest's last words, only one – Wriothesley's – is remarkable for its similarity to Stow's account.<sup>49</sup> Wriothesley thus recorded that:

...[Forest] openlie declaring their [there] with a Lowde Voyce to the Bishopp as followeth: That if an Angell should come downe from heaven and shew him any other thing then that he had beleevved all his liffe tyme past he would not beleeeve him. And that if his bodie should be cutt joynt after joynt or membre after membre, brent [burnt],

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<sup>48</sup> Hall, *Union of the Two Noble Famelies*, fol. 233r; Grafton, *Chronicle at Large*, 1237.

<sup>49</sup> The second chronicle is the anonymous "Spanish Chronicle": *The Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England*, ed. and trans. Martin A. Sharp Hume (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889).

hanged or what paine soever might be donne to his bodie, he wold  
neaver turne from his old sect of this Bishopp of Rome.<sup>50</sup>

Once again, the structural and linguistic similarities are too great to be coincidental, whilst the subtle differences between the two passages are equally instructive. Where Stow recorded that the friar had claimed that nothing, including physical pain, could make him renounce his “old profession,” Wriothesley deployed a more potent language of popish error, quoting Forest as saying that he “wold neaver turne from his old sect of this Bishopp of Rome”. Moreover, his conclusion that Forest was “a false traitor to his praynce [prince], an hereticke and a seditious person to the Kinges leighe people” was erased entirely for the *Annales*.<sup>51</sup> What had in Wriothesley’s chronicle been a condemnation of the deceased friar thus became in Stow’s *Annales* the cautious commemoration of a Catholic martyr, in the same way that Wriothesley’s pity for those who misguidedly grieved for the monasteries was subtly transformed into a cautious expression of sympathy for the people’s lament and apparently genuine regret for the social and economic consequences of the dissolution.

The polemic of the *Annales* is both a reflection of Stow’s religious proclivities and the product of a political culture that policed conformity in matters of religion. Nothing came of the charges to which he was subject in 1569, but the *Annales*, among others of Stow’s works, evidences amply the ways in which his religion suffused his sense of history, as well as the necessity of restraint in producing a critique of Henry VIII

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<sup>50</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 83r.

<sup>51</sup> Alnwick MS 468A, fol. 83r.

under the second of his Protestant heirs. Like his topographical writings, Stow's chronicle was born of his particular variety of antiquarianism, described by Patrick Collinson and Ian Archer as a "nostalgic" expression of a worldview that lamented the decline of charity and hospitality from the medieval period and mourned the "disfigurement" of the post-Reformation landscape and cityscape.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, Stow is an archetypal example of what Eamon Duffy has called the "conservative voice," which acquired public expression under Mary I and Elizabeth I and infiltrated a variety of literary forms, including Michael Sherbrook's semi-autobiographical account of the dissolution and William Shakespeare's lament for the "bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang".<sup>53</sup> Stow's chronicle is, then undoubtedly, if cautiously, ideological. Thus when Stow's biographer, Barrett L. Beer, claimed that his subject "did not join the great religious debates of his day and never wrote polemical works to praise or condemn government policy," he mistook the subtle

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<sup>52</sup> Collinson, "John Stow and Nostalgic Antiquarianism"; Ian Archer, "The Nostalgia of John Stow," in *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1576-1649*, ed. David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>53</sup> Eamon Duffy, "The Conservative Voice in the English Reformation," in *Christianity and Community in the West: Essays for John Bossy*, ed. Simon Ditchfield (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 87-105. See also Michael Sherbrook, "The Fall of Religious Houses," in *Tudor Treatises*, ed. A. G. Dickens (Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, CXXV, 1959), 89-142.

polemic of the *Annales* for the laconic and secular history long associated with chronicles.<sup>54</sup>

Stow was not merely a compiler of information, but also an editor, censor, and polemicist of sorts. It is in this context that it becomes possible to understand his approach to Wriothesley's chronicle and the problem of the latter's anonymity, which, the cumulative and parasitic tendencies of the genre notwithstanding, seems particularly unusual. In a prefatory list Stow cites the authority of some three hundred classical, medieval, and contemporary authorities. These include the works of contemporary and near-contemporary chroniclers including Thomas Cooper, Edward Hall, Robert Fabyan, and Polydore Vergil, in addition to a variety of other sources that displayed in abundance their evangelical convictions, including the caustic polemic of John Bale and the profoundly anti-Catholic topography of the Kentish antiquary William Lambarde. Although practices of citation were far from standardized, the margins of the *Annales* are littered with references to these and other texts.<sup>55</sup> But there is no explicit reference to Wriothesley anywhere in any of the extant editions of Stow's chronicle. Instead, he has taken the step of parenthetically citing the oblique figure of "mine author," distancing himself from the very discussion of the dissolution that he had so carefully transfigured. It seems, then, that Wriothesley's obscurity is a product of Stow's intention deliberately to use the chronicle to

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<sup>54</sup> Barrett L. Beer, *Tudor England Observed: The World of John Stow* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 85.

<sup>55</sup> On the history of citation practices see Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

challenge the Henrician orthodoxy by shaping a very particular afterlife for the dissolution, among other episodes of the English Reformation. Stow's work, like that of Wriothesley before him, albeit with a very different character and emphasis, was neither an impartial record of the past nor a vehicle for a moribund tradition of historical writing, but rather a carefully composed narrative saturated with religious and political significance. The careful piece of textual ventriloquism that is his account of the suppression of the monasteries testifies powerfully to the creative potential of the chronicle genre to make and shape historical memory.

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Eventually Stow became himself the subject of a new exercise in memory making. Edmund Howes produced his first continuation of the *Annales* in 1615 and a second followed in 1631. He made no alterations to the original text, except to extend its chronology to cover the reign of the new Stuart king, James VI and I, and the passages on the dissolution and Friar Forest were left untouched, perpetuating Stow's narrative of the events of the 1530s. The specter of Wriothesley lingered on in the reproduction of the phrase "sayeth mine author". But like Stow, Howes had a clear sense of purpose in compiling his chronicle. It had been his duty, he wrote in the historical preface that opened the new edition, to recover those episodes in English history worthy of "lasting memory". Locating the events about which he was writing firmly in the past whilst at the same time emphasizing the importance of their memory to the present, his continuation of the *Annales* was to be a "remembrance to after ages" as well as a "mirroure of the misteries of former tymes". Howes also showed a clear awareness of the power of the polemical rhetoric and the propagandist

tendencies of his predecessors when he claimed not only to preserve the events recorded therein for posterity, but also to recover them from the “wilfull forgetfulnesse” of a people negotiating the consequences of almost a century of Reformation.<sup>56</sup> The result was, of course, itself polemical: a chronicle that addressed the consequences of Henrician religious reform more explicitly and in a more overtly negative light than its cautiously conservative Elizabethan predecessor.

Howes began work on Stow’s material with the encouragement of Archbishop Whitgift in 1602, three years before Stow’s death in 1605, though it would be another decade before the new edition went to press.<sup>57</sup> The years following the turn of the seventeenth century had created new conditions for writing about the dissolution in more ways than one. With eighty years distance on the events of the 1530s, Howes had not experienced the dissolution at first-hand; his remembrances were not the products of communicative memory but rather shaped and informed by texts like the *Annales*. Moreover, the accession of the Stuart dynasty in 1603 had encouraged the adoption of critical perspectives on the reign of Henry VIII.<sup>58</sup> The religious climate too was shifting and this was reflected in changing responses to monastic ruins – once monuments to the initial triumph of the reformers they now inspired a sense of

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<sup>56</sup> Edmund Howes, “An Historicall Preface,” in John Stow, *The Annales, or Generall Chronicle of England* (London, 1615), sig. ¶8r-v.

<sup>57</sup> Christina DeCoursey, “Howes, Edmund (fl. 1602–1631),” *ODNB*.

<sup>58</sup> Mark Rankin, “The Literary Afterlife of Henry VIII, 1558-1625,” in *Henry VIII and his Afterlives: Literature, Politics, and Art*, ed. Mark Rankin, Christopher Highley, and John N. King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105-6.

Protestant embarrassment about the iconoclastic zeal of their forebears.<sup>59</sup> This period witnessed a growing anxiety about the sacrilegious actions of the early Reformers, especially concerning the appropriation of former monastic lands, which, as Anthony Milton has argued, was a concern not only of the Laudians but also of even their most vehement critics.<sup>60</sup> The destruction of monastic libraries and books, which had concerned even early evangelical writers like John Bale, continued to be a particular source of regret, and the publication of Howes's second edition of the *Annales* in 1632 only narrowly preceded Laudian debates about the "beauty of holiness".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Margaret Aston, "English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973): 231-55; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 274, 281-3.

<sup>60</sup> Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 332-4. See also Michael Butler Kelly, "The Invasion of Things Sacred: Church, Property, and Sacrilege in Early Modern England" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> On the dispersal of monastic libraries see James P. Carley, "Monastic Collections and their Dispersal", in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, IV: 1557-1695*, ed. John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie with the assistance of Maureen Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 339-47; Philip Schwyzer, "The Beauties of the Land: Bale's Books, Aske's Abbeys, and the Aesthetics of Nationhood," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57 (2004): 99-125.

Howes was himself profoundly interested in the Jacobean ecclesiastical rebuilding project and an advocate of the beautification of churches and ritual forms of worship. He had been among the Christ Church congregation accused by the mayor and corporation of being “backward in matters of religion” in 1595 and he has more recently been identified by Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke as being among the breed of Protestants characterised by Peter Lake as “avant garde conformists”.<sup>62</sup> Howes’s editions of the *Annales* reflect this sensibility, just as Stow’s had been shaped by his conservative conformism.

The structure of the preface to the *Annales* made it abundantly clear that Howes had particular events in mind when he condemned the “wilfull forgetfulnesse” that had arisen as a result of the Reformation. Adopting a cyclical model of time in which great “revolutions” or “alterations” occurred at five hundred year intervals, Howes charted the history of England from the time of Brutus to his own present day. After the tyrannical reign of Julius Caesar, the Saxon conquest, and the Norman invasion, the most recent of these revolutions, according to Howes, was the dissolution of the monasteries, during which the religious houses had been “utterly ruined, whereat the

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<sup>62</sup> Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 98-100. See also J. F. Merritt, “Puritans, Laudians, and the Phenomenon of Church-Building in Jacobean London,” *Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 937-8, 955; Peter Lake, “Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge and Avant-Garde Conformity at the Court of James I,” in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 113-33.

Clergy, Peeres, and common people were all sore grieved, but could not helpe it". Howes thus articulated the magnitude of the rupture more clearly than in previous editions of the *Annales*. The gutted remnants of abbeys and convents scattered across the landscape appear to have been a touchstone for memory, provoking and shaping Howes's sense of the dissolution, for he also wrote that "many ruins of them remaine a testimony [of the destruction] to this day". In stark contrast to the Tudor chronicles, Howes went on explicitly to condemn Henry VIII as the tyrannical agent of the suppression: "because he would goe the next way to worke overthrew [the religious houses] and rased them... whereat many the Peeres and common people murmured because they expected that the abuses should have bin onely reformed and the rest have still remained".<sup>63</sup> Discourses of reform designed to combat monastic abuses had been prevalent before the dissolution, but this argument had not been a notable feature of chronicles produced under Henry's Protestant heirs.<sup>64</sup> For Howes, however, it underpinned an explicit expression of regret for the charity and hospitality of the

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<sup>63</sup> Howes, "Historicall Preface," sig. ¶15v.

<sup>64</sup> On medieval arguments for reform see Julia Barrow, "Ideas and Applications of Reform," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume 3, Early Medieval Christianities, c.600–c.1100*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble, and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 345-362; Gerald Strauss, "Ideas of *Reformatio* and *Renovatio* from the Middle Ages to the Reformation," in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, 2 vols. (Leiden, New York, NY, and Köln: Brill, 1995), 1:1-30.

monasteries which magnified Stow's lament for what had been lost in the early Reformation.

In remembering and recording the dissolution, Howes was also prompted to ruminate on the social and economic problems of his own time. Thus his pity was not only for the victims of the 1530s but also for the generation still suffering as a consequence of the failure of the dissolution to free the English people from "all former services and taxes" and "neyther... be any more chartered with loans, subsidies, and fifteens". But though the diversion of monastic wealth to pious, charitable, and educational uses had been prominent amongst the Henrician justifications for the dissolution and subsequently subject to the critique of the evangelical commonwealth tradition, the elimination of taxation was not a common feature of early sixteenth-century rhetoric. It was, however, a contested issue by the early seventeenth century, which witnessed repeated and protracted conflicts between James VI and I and his parliaments over the state of the royal finances. It was with palpable bitterness that Howes concluded that since the dissolution "there have been more statute laws, subsidies and fifteenes then in five hundreth yeares before".<sup>65</sup>

Howes's *Annales* thus represents Stow's conservative Tudor chronicle translated for the early Stuart age. Although the original text remained untouched, Howes's preface transfigured its meaning by aligning the older, cautiously critical narrative with a much more censorious take on the events of the 1536-40. Highly aware of his role as a custodian of memory, Howes also made the strongest claim yet about the

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<sup>65</sup> Howes, "Historicall Preface," sig. ¶16v.

importance of remembering the dissolution. No doubt he had been constrained in part by his rigidly episodic structure, but his emphasis on the dissolution as the most significant revolution since the eleventh-century Norman conquest nevertheless demonstrates its mnemonic power and lasting significance as a marker of time. Howes's *Annales* thus evidences the resonance of the dissolution into the seventeenth century and the wide-ranging reasons – social and economic, as well as political and religious – for which it was remembered, and which have been neglected in a historiography that has focused overwhelmingly on its course and pre-history. Even more significantly, Howes's chronicle reveals the centrality of the dissolution to contemporary perceptions of the past. In choosing to write about the suppression specifically as opposed to the wider program of religious reform in the 1530s, 1540s, and 1550s more generally, Howes made it synonymous with the English Reformation. To remember the dissolution was to remember a rupture between past and present, but it was perhaps also true that to remember the reign of Henry VIII was to remember that “pitifull thing”.

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The processes of memory making to which successive editions of the *Annales* bear witness had – and continue to have – important implications for the historiographical afterlife of the dissolution. By the early seventeenth century, Stow's chronicle had become a major reference work for other historical and antiquarian genres. Among the texts that drew on the *Annales* was John Weever's *Ancient funerall monuments* (1631). Weever's writing, like that of his contemporary, Howes, betrayed his regret for the iconoclastic zeal of the early reformers and the losses sustained by the church

in the 1530s. A marginal citation acknowledges Stow in connection with the following account of the fallen religious houses:

It was a pitifull thing to here [sic] the lamentation that the people in the countrey made for them, for there was great hospitalitie kept among them, and as it was thought more then ten thousand persons, masters, and seruants, had lost their liuings, by the putting downe of those houses.<sup>66</sup>

The only significant difference between Weever's text and Stow's original is that the parenthetical clause "(sayeth mine author)" has been erased, condemning Wriothesley wholly to oblivion. Perhaps, then, *Ancient funerall monuments* is evidence that the *Annales* had in some sense succeeded in initiating a kind of textual forgetting: the dissolution had become known as Stow's "pitifull thing" and not as Wriothesley's legitimate act of reform. Yet eventually Stow too became partially dissociated with this account of the events of 1536-40. Seventy years after the publication of *Ancient funerall monuments* and more than a century and a half after Wriothesley had first begun his chronicle, the antiquary Abraham de la Pryme transcribed the "lamentation" of the people for the monasteries into his manuscript survey of Hatfield in Hertfordshire.<sup>67</sup> There is nothing in this passage, copied onto the verso of a page in

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<sup>66</sup> John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments with in the United Monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Ilands Adiacent* (London, 1631), 105.

<sup>67</sup> Abraham de la Pryme's *History of Hatfield, Yorkshire*, c. 1700, British Library MS Landsdowne 897, fol. 118v.

de la Pryme's history in the same ink and hand as the rest of the text, to acknowledge its origins. Like Stow, de la Pryme's failure to cite his source thus engendered a form of forgetting, which has since encouraged historians to attribute the passage to de la Pryme himself.<sup>68</sup> No more than Wriothesley was Stow immune to the efforts – both conscious and unconscious – of successive generations to reshape the afterlife of the dissolution.

Modern historians of the dissolution are the heirs of these traditions of memory making and of what Howes recognized in 1615 as the polemical tendencies and strategic amnesia generated by the religious upheavals of the early sixteenth century. From the very moment of its implementation the dissolution was itself an exercise in making, shaping, and erasing memory. The Henrician apologetic of the 1530s was produced as part of this wider attempt to justify the break with Rome by refashioning the memory of the Catholic past. The subsequent collation and preservation of these materials, as Jennifer Summit has so convincingly argued, further reflected and in turn provoked processes of remembering and forgetting that fed into the formation of a state-sponsored national identity. Summit describes how collections such as the library of Sir Robert Cotton were arranged and their contents organized and even rebound to perpetuate a Protestant vision of the English Reformation. As a result of these archival practices and the new modes of reading they engendered, the very books and manuscripts that had been dispersed from the dissolved monasteries were

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<sup>68</sup> Woolf, *Social Circulation of the Past*, 62.

transformed into the foundation stones of Protestant historiography.<sup>69</sup> The Cotton manuscripts also categorized and conserved the documents that have proved so influential in shaping conventional accounts of the expediency and efficiency of dissolution, including the correspondence between Thomas Cromwell and his commissioners bound in Cleopatra E IV and the account of the depravity of England's religious in "The manner of dissolving the Abbeys by K. H. 8." contained in Titus F III. As the evidence of Wriothesley's chronicle has suggested, the same narratives were preserved in other manuscript genres and subsequently perpetuated in print. The very existence of the Northumberland transcript is also instructive: by preserving a text that would otherwise have been lost, the Alnwick manuscript has contributed to the longevity of a particular vision of Henrician religious reform. It has sometimes been argued that this wealth of extant material has made the dissolution "one of the... best documented events of the Tudor age".<sup>70</sup> This may be the case, but it is vital to interrogate these records as polemical and mnemonic devices and in the context of the circumstances of their production and preservation.

Yet, as Stow and Howes's editions of the *Annales* have demonstrated, the memory of the dissolution was not static but dynamic. By looking beyond the 1530s and 1540s, this article has revealed instances in which the Henrician orthodoxy was subtly transformed according to the proclivities of individual chroniclers and, more broadly,

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<sup>69</sup> Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), chap. 4 and passim.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Cunich, "The Administration and Alienation of Ex-Monastic Lands by the Crown, 1536-47" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1990), 2.

with the changing preoccupations of successive generations. This underlines not only that the chronicle was a polemical, flexible, and creative genre, but also the wider value of an approach that focuses on the afterlives of the suppression as opposed to concentrating narrowly on the years 1536-40. Modern historiographical narratives of monastic corruption and the ease of dissolution have been partly the products of contemporary traditions of discourse designed to effect a break with the Catholic past. This insight in some ways accounts for the success of the recent strand of scholarship that has sought to rehabilitate the reputation of the late medieval and early Tudor religious orders. More importantly, it also invites a reassessment of the significance of the dissolution as a moment of rupture in the religious and social fabric of early modern England, and elicits broader questions about when and why the suppression was remembered variously as a critical event in the English Reformation, a Protestant triumph or embarrassment, an emblem of a lost golden age, and a moment of irrevocable social and economic decline. It demands, in other words, that closer attention be paid to the evolution of the afterlife of the dissolution of the monasteries and to the questions of how, why, and in what forms it came to be worthy of lasting memory.