Broken Idols of the English Reformation

Why were so many religious images and objects broken and damaged in the course of the Reformation? Margaret Aston’s magisterial new book charts the conflicting imperatives of destruction and rebuilding throughout the English Reformation from the desecration of images, rails and screens to bells, organs and stained glass windows. She explores the motivations of those who smashed images of the crucifixion in stained glass windows and who pulled down crosses and defaced symbols of the Trinity. She shows that destruction was part of a methodology of religious revolution designed to change people as well as places and to forge in the long term new generations of new believers. Beyond blanked walls and whited windows were beliefs and minds impregnated by new modes of religious learning. Idol-breaking, with its emphasis on the treacheries of images, fundamentally transformed not only Anglican ways of worship but also of seeing, hearing and remembering.

Margaret Aston (1932–2014) was an independent scholar of Medieval History. She formerly taught at Oxford, Cambridge and the Catholic University, Washington, DC. Her work focused on dissent both before and during the Reformation and iconoclasm and her publications include The Fifteenth Century (1968), Faith and Fire (1993), The King’s Bedpost (1993) and England’s Iconoclasts (1988).
Broken Idols of the English Reformation

MARGARET ASTON
In her preface to England’s Iconoclasts my mother Margaret likened the begetting of the two-volume work to an overlong gestation in the womb, like that of Montaigne. She told me that she drafted the outline for both volumes—England’s Iconoclasts: Laws against Images and Broken Idols of the English Reformation—on an A4 sheet while she was pregnant with me, and the completion of this mountain, as she described it, took the rest of her life, as well as all of my sister Hero’s and of mine thus far. Despite the expansive and consuming nature of Margaret’s work, her loved ones were at the centre of her being, as I had been at the gestation of these volumes, and so I take the liberty of dedicating this book on her behalf to her beloved family and friends, all.

Sophie Buxton, 2015
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Preface

Though it would be absurd to claim twinship for issue separated by a gap of more than twenty years, this book is closely related to England’s Iconoclasts, which appeared in 1988. That work set the stage for the events described in the following chapters, by plotting the developments in theology, dogma, and legal enactment that nurtured a church whose believers were bonded to a faith resting above all on fidelity to the word and the primacy of scripture. For those who became Anglican, believing was not seeing. Pure faith was directed away from images with their dangerous temptations. Primacy of the word emphasised the perils of idols and the terrible transgression of idolatry. This book looks at the topic from another angle. The overall concern here is the way in which a freshly reformed church was constructed on the primacy of the word. This supreme priority gave dominance to ear over eye, to word over image, and to text over visual representation. If this seems – and indeed was – a revolutionary process, understanding it is helped by looking at local and individual examples (something that, as all historians will appreciate, is a challenging procedure). Although it is possible to discover a certain amount about contemporary reactions to the radical changes effected in churches and in the visual apparatus of worship, all too many unknowns remain. That does not prevent anyone convinced of the significance of these events from attempting to enter and portray contemporary experience.

I am very grateful for all the help of different kinds I have received over the years, without which this book would never have reached completion. If it is difficult now properly to record all this much appreciated input, it is not for lack of gratitude but rather failure of properly recorded memory. This assistance ranges from my family’s patience with domestic inadequacies to helpful critiques of written pages. My friend of many years, M. E. Batstone, played a role here, while my daughter Sophie Buxton has proved as diligent and helpful a reader as was her father, Paul Buxton. Their kind readiness to assess pages on topics remote from their own interests has provided me with astute comments and done much to improve the text. I thank Venetia Bridges for all the time and help she has given me over the illustrations, which amounts to a big contribution to the whole book.
## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;M</td>
<td>John Foxe’s <em>The Acts and Monuments</em> (various editions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Buildings of England (series)</td>
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<td>BW</td>
<td>Buildings of Wales (series)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bodl. Lib.</td>
<td>Bodleian Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRUC</td>
<td><em>Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge</em>, ed. A. B. Emden (Cambridge, 1963)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCCC</td>
<td>Cambridge, Corpus Christi College</td>
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<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td><em>Commons Journal (Journal of the House of Commons)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Camden Society, London</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSP Dom.</td>
<td><em>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>CSP Sp.</td>
<td><em>Calendar of State Papers</em> (Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP Ven.</td>
<td><em>Calendar of State Papers</em> (Venice)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUL</td>
<td>Cambridge University Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTC</td>
<td><em>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>EETS</td>
<td>Early English Text Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>EHR</td>
<td><em>English Historical Review</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>(Aston), <em>England’s Iconoclasts</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td><em>Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity</em>, by Richard Hooker</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERO</td>
<td>Essex Records Office</td>
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<td>FF</td>
<td>(Aston), <em>Faith and Fire</em></td>
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<td>GRO</td>
<td>Gloucestershire Records Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>HJ</td>
<td><em>Historical Journal</em></td>
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<td>HMC</td>
<td>Historical Manuscripts Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRO</td>
<td>Hertfordshire Record Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUO</td>
<td><em>History of the University of Oxford</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JBS</td>
<td><em>Journal of British Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JEH</td>
<td><em>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JWCI</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>KB</td>
<td>(Aston), King’s Bedpost</td>
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<td>LA</td>
<td>Lincolnshire Archives</td>
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<td>LJ</td>
<td>Lords Journal (Journal of the House of Lords)</td>
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<td>LP</td>
<td>Cranmer’s Liturgical Projects, ed. Wickham Legge</td>
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<td>LR</td>
<td>(Aston), Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion</td>
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<td>MS, MSS</td>
<td>manuscript/s</td>
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<tr>
<td>ns</td>
<td>new series</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODCC</td>
<td>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F. L. Cross</td>
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<td>(Oxford, 1957; 2nd edn 1974; 3rd edn 1997; 3rd edn revised 2005);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2nd edn onwards with E. A. Livingstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<td>OHS</td>
<td>Oxford Historical Society</td>
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<td>os</td>
<td>old series</td>
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<td>PS</td>
<td>Parker Society, Cambridge</td>
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<td>RIBA</td>
<td>Royal Institute of British Architects</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCH</td>
<td>Studies in Church History</td>
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<td>ser.</td>
<td>series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Statutes of the Realm</td>
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<td>TEAS</td>
<td>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBGAS</td>
<td>The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>The National Archives</td>
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<td>TRHS</td>
<td>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</td>
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<td>TRP</td>
<td>Tudor Royal Proclamations, ed. Hughes and Larkin</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAI</td>
<td>Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church, ed. Fincham</td>
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<tr>
<td>VCH</td>
<td>Victoria County History (series)</td>
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