

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-36877-3 - Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern
England
Mervyn James
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Introduction

There are two reasons which could be given for putting together a collection of this sort. The first is that some of these studies, while still in demand, are out of print or not easily accessible; the second, that there may be some interest in placing an author's writings side by side, so that the connections between them, and the way in which his views have developed, may be more easily traced. The first requires no further explanation. But, in the case of the second, some guidance to the various themes discussed, with some comment on their development, and to the cross-references between them from one chapter to another may be helpful; the more so because the items included in the collection are printed in their historical sequence, and not in the order of composition. If the latter were adopted, Chapter 1 would take the place of Chapter 8 as the penultimate in the book; and Chapters 2 and 3 would be transposed. The Introduction aims therefore to provide a preliminary guiding commentary, easily dispensed with by anyone who does not find such a thing at all necessary. With the exception of Chapter 9, which has not been previously published, the various items are printed here more or less as they first appeared, with no attempt at significant revision.

The studies in the Tudor north in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 come first in the order of composition. These were based to a significant extent on local archive collections; and, like many of his protagonists, the author tended to see events from a localized vantage-point: through the eyes of a regional society (or several such societies) for whom the distant authority in London was something which, while legitimate, was also liable to be regarded as intrusive and largely alien. This approach tended to concentrate attention on the regional society: the institutions which articulated political and social power within it, and the attitudes in terms of which it saw itself. As a result, an emphasis emerged on the role of the households of the northern

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nobility as centres of patronage, sources of office and profit in terms of which clienteles formed themselves amongst the gentry of the northern communities; and which might also give access to office under the crown. At the same time, the many mesne tenures by knight service which survived on such great aristocratic estates as those of the Cliffords and Percies¹ meant that the ties of patronage were reinforced by those of feudal service based on the exaction of homage, with knights' courts at such centres as Alnwick and Skipton, which in their hey-day early in the sixteenth century still helped to express and sustain the solidarity of a clientele.²

At the same time a characteristic ethos tended to maintain itself in connection with these organizational forms. In northern society the stress on ties of kinship, blood and lineage found their most tenacious and binding forms amongst the Border clans, with their gavelkind tenures and extended family organization;³ but also generally permeated the society, particularly at its upper levels. Aristocratic clienteles were frequently characterized by ties of hereditary dependence on great aristocratic houses, although admittedly from the early sixteenth century these were increasingly subject to stresses and strains which often weakened their importance. What I called an "ethos of 'service'" stressed the qualities implicit in "good lordship" as the ideal conjunctive and solidarity-promoting influences in the society; these both evoked, and were evoked by, loyalties which had an ancestral, accustomed, and "natural" resonance, sanctioned by time, and unconditional.⁴ Thus a pattern of social relationships and attitudes emerged, which will be found visually projected in the colourful and characteristic funerary ritual used at the burial of William, Lord Dacre, as described in Chapter 5. In order to characterize the ethos of service, I made use of Percy estate correspondence of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and the terminology used at least partly reflects the sixteenth-century cultural developments described in Chapters 7 and 8. However, the stress on good lordship and faithfulness, and on kinship, lineage, and ancestral connection marks these northern aristocratic dependencies as essentially "communities of honour" of the sort described in Chapter 8.⁵

It will be seen that by and large I took a positive view of the role

¹ See below, pp. 68 ff., 153 ff., 295 ff., 330 ff.

² *Ibid.*

³ Pp. 95 ff.

⁴ Pp. 52 ff.

⁵ Pp. 327 ff.

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of Thomas Lord Wharton as an agent of “the Tudor revolution in the north”,⁶ so conforming to a dominant historical convention with regard to the Tudor achievement which had been developed and deepened by G. R. Elton and A. G. Dickens. Both these authorities on the Tudor age placed the development of the Tudor state and its successful deployment in the struggle against “overmighty subjects”, feudal liberties, and the abuses of retainers, affinity, and maintenance as a prime Tudor contribution to the advancement of civilizing frontiers; to be set in this respect side by side with the achievement of the Reformation.⁷ But, while accepting this approach, I also felt dissatisfied with it, was inclined to question the idea, or at least to look for some sort of reformulation. Doing this kind of history, I could not but be aware that the old order in the north had its good qualities as well as bad. The violence and competitiveness endemic in the northern communities of honour were in a measure offset by the protective and integrative influence of kinship and family loyalties; and also by the areas of relative stability and order which centred on the aristocratic connections and great households – the latter focal points not only of orderliness, but of a culture which, although not always accordant with the tendencies approved at the court and in London, nevertheless had its own validity.⁸ In addition, there was an awareness of the negative, disruptive effects of Tudor policies north of the Trent. These often had the effect of destabilizing the accepted local balance of interest and power, producing reactions of violence and revolt. At the same time the agents of the government frequently showed a greed and aggressivity offensive to the northern communities which were supposedly the beneficiaries of Tudor order.⁹

The material studied tended to project, often with great vividness, the kind of conflict generated by the competing claims of local loyalties and those claimed by the crown. There was, for example, the case of the unfortunate sixth earl of Northumberland’s decision, taken after much hesitation and pressure from London, to execute the family ally and former Percy officer, Sir William Lisle of

⁶ P. 102.⁷ See for example G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution* (1st edn, Cambridge, 1960, p. 195 ff.; A. G. Dickens, *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London, 1959), pp. 97 ff., and *The English Reformation* (London, 1964), pp. 112 ff.⁸ See pp. 49 ff., 274 ff.⁹ See for example pp. 282, 292.

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Felton, then an outlaw.¹⁰ In the eyes of the regional society in which the Percies had traditionally played a leading role, what would be seen in London as a proper and loyal enforcement of the law would be construed as the dishonourable betrayal of a dependant. I had also already encountered, although not yet written about, the same conflict as resolved by Lord Darcy during the Pilgrimage of Grace, who opted for the connectional and local loyalty, at the expense of his loyalties to Henry VIII.¹¹ But at this stage I was only peripherally aware of the concept of honour, and how this might be used to arrange the components of the picture in a more satisfying pattern. My earlier inclination was to wonder whether Henry VIII might not have crossed the margin separating tyranny from what was proper to a royal leadership of the nobility; and to stress that, at least in the north, the power of the great aristocratic houses, properly exercised, complemented rather than contradicted that of the crown.¹² In the background there was the ineluctability of dissent in any political society, and the problem of the appropriate mode for its expression.

In a study of the Lincolnshire rebellion (Chapter 6), I attempted to restate the problem. It seemed that this particular regional dissident movement did not conform to the model of the “neo-feudal” revolt, led by a regionally orientated nobility and aiming, through the mobilization of aristocratic connectional power, at a change effected by force in the existing distribution of political power at court, so initiating armed rebellion or civil war. A better precedent was to be found in such broadly based popular protests against misgovernment of the late fourteenth or fifteenth century as the Peasants’ Revolt or Cade’s Rebellion. These had aimed to bring home to government that the very ideology of “obedience” on which its authority rested could be brought into question by policies which threatened the material and moral disruption of the regional societies over which it presided.¹³ The methods used involved the weapons of riot, armed mobilization, the occupation of local centres and regional capitals, together with the promulgation of programmes of political and socio-economic demands. But at the same time the movement sought (not necessarily with success) to contain itself within a context of “obedience”. The actual resort to violence, as distinct from demonstrative gesture and threat, was minimal, and

¹⁰ Pp. 56 ff.

¹¹ Pp. 339 ff.

¹² P. 50.

¹³ Pp. 260 ff.

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casualties were few. The “rebels” did not question the authority of the crown, but rather the abuses of its agents; and the intention was one of peaceful petition to the king’s person. Upon confrontation with the royal forces, a negotiated settlement was sought, and the option of surrender more often taken than that of battle. I suggested that these modes of political mobilization and action, assuming the ostensible form of political pressure exercised from below upwards (so reversing the accepted and proper direction of political initiative), were rooted in the stock of conventional political wisdom which was presented in such widely circulated collections as Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*;¹⁴ and which was reinforced by the deeper penetration of the language and thought-forms of the common law into lower levels of the social structure, with an attendant awareness of the boundary separating “treason” from other forms of quasi-violent disorder, such as riot, and of the limits of toleration this might encounter.¹⁵

By and large, I still hold to this model for a dissident movement, and think it can be quite widely applied to the Pilgrimage of Grace, and to other revolts and rebellions of the Tudor period; and it is interesting to see that a similar approach can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to such related forms of disorder as grain riots during the seventeenth century.¹⁶ However it gave rise to two criticisms: firstly, that, as applied to the Lincolnshire revolt, the model excluded a truly popular initiative, the real leadership being that of the nobility and gentry exercised under a cloak of popular coercion; secondly, that this implied a “conspiracy” theory of the movement, leaving no room for any ideological motivation, in the sense of the unfavourable popular reaction to the religious changes implied by the Ten Articles and royal Injunction of 1536.¹⁷

¹⁴ Pp. 260 ff.

¹⁵ See also Chapters 7, pp. 283 ff., and 8, pp. 32 ff.

¹⁶ See J. Walter and K. Wrightson, “Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England”, *Past and Present*, lxxi (May 1976), pp. 22 ff.; J. Walter, “Grain Riots and Popular Attitudes to the Law: Maldon and the Crisis of 1629”, in *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. J. Brewer and J. Styles (London, 1980), pp. 47 ff.; K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London, 1982), pp. 173 ff.

¹⁷ See C. S. L. Davies, “Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace”, shortly to appear in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (Cambridge). In the same place Dr Davies also discusses Prof. G. R. Elton’s article, “Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace”, in which the interpretation of the politics of the Lincolnshire revolt advanced in Chapter 6 is taken up

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As far as the notion of conspiracy is concerned, the disaffection of such leading Lincolnshire families as the Husseys, Willoughbies, Dymokes, and others, together with the likely affiliation of the Dymokes and Husseys with oppositional elements at court, make it difficult to believe that some of these did not have a hand in the disorders from the start.¹⁸ But the part played by the shire magnates was conveniently obscured by the far more obvious and visible role of a network of insurrectionary activists, “promoters” and “stirrers” of the rising, who came from a lower social level: of local lawyers, petty officials, “new” or marginal gentry, and yeomen.¹⁹ “Hard facts” are unlikely to be found establishing the involvement of these men with others of their like in Yorkshire and elsewhere in some kind of organization and prior planning connected with the outbreak of the Pilgrimage of Grace; for all trace of such an organization would have been carefully concealed, and transmitted by credence and word of mouth rather than by written communication. Nevertheless, the meeting between their leader in Lincolnshire, Thomas Moigne, and Robert Aske, soon to emerge as captain-general of the Pilgrimage, is significant; and the existence of prior planning and organization a reasonable hypothesis.²⁰ However, such an organization, working through popular leaders, and exploiting popular discontents, could scarcely have been enough in itself to indicate a viable dissident movement with a clear prospect of success. The activists could not hope, out of their own resources, and without contacts with great men at court within the royal circle, to achieve much more than a series of local riots, whose fate sooner or later could not but be repression. Discontented magnates with court affiliations and popular leaders could therefore be expected to come together sooner or later; and sooner rather than later, since the need each had of the other was so obvious. Again, prior understandings and consultations were to be expected, extending to the encouragement or contrivance of initial disturbances which pre-

and more widely applied, and which Davies thinks open to much the same criticisms as my own. For Elton’s article, see *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J. H. Hexter*, ed. Barbara Malament (Pennsylvania, 1980), pp. 25 ff.; reprinted in G. R. Elton, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*, iii (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 183 ff.

¹⁸ See below, pp. 226 ff., 221 ff.

¹⁹ Pp. 209 ff.

²⁰ On the traces of organization and planning in Lincolnshire, see pp. 206 ff.

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sented the possibility of exploitation with a view to the broadening of the movement.

To that extent, therefore, a “conspiracy” involving the harnessing of popular discontents to the designs of the great, and plans to exploit the latter by an active “stirring” of the people, was certainly very much a part of such a movement as the Lincolnshire revolt. But on the other hand, while magnates and activists certainly needed each other, their roles in the movement being complementary, a continuing tension between them was also inherent in the situation. For the popular leaders were more exposed than the great men, who, because of the ostensible popular initiative with which the rising had originated, could present themselves as the victims of the popular hatred of authority. As a result, fear of compromises and surrender settlements entered into at their expense made the popular leaders prone to extremist policies. As a result, at critical points the movement was liable to disintegrate into moderates and extremists, with “the people” turning against “the gentry”, charging them with a betrayal of the cause.²¹ In addition, the factors of distance, slow communications, and the need for secrecy multiplied misunderstandings, misinformation, hesitations, and changes in attitude. Such contingencies limited what any conspiratorial pre-arrangements could achieve, and made a revolt what it was generally recognized to be: a gamble with Fortune of a particularly hazardous and uncertain kind. Many found that their nerve and courage failed them when the decisive moment came. Conspiracy could play its part in the initiation of such a movement; but thereafter the outcome depended both on the skilful manipulation of local discontents and of successive changing situations as they arose.²²

As far as religion is concerned, no one can doubt that the Reformation, with its defacement of powerfully protective and socially integrative religious symbols, caused a painful lesion in the popular consciousness. A sense of religious shock and outrage may well have been a major factor enhancing support for the Lincolnshire

²¹ Pp. 256 ff.

²² The margin of difference (which is not a wide one) between my own view, as here expressed, and that of Dr Davies emerges in the conclusion to the Appendix of his article: “‘Conspiracy’ undoubtedly shaped the form the Pilgrimage took; it is far from providing a complete examination of how it broke out, let alone its subsequent extent and force.”

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rising, and later for the Pilgrimage of Grace. Yet the evidence for the nature and direction of popular religious preferences, as far as Lincolnshire is concerned, tends to be sparse. We know little beyond that the common people “grudged” at the new opinions concerning Our Lady and Purgatory, two themes towards which much popular piety was certainly directed. I probably placed too much emphasis, to the exclusion of religious commitment, on the popular outcry at the prospect of the plunder of the parish treasures of Louth church by the royal commissioners, with the implication that the cause was rooted in material interest, not religious sentiment.²³ I would certainly accept C. S. L. Davies’s more sensitive and balanced view that, in this case as in others, “the sense of communal proprietorship strengthened the natural conservative commitment to familiar [religious] forms, and was in fact an integral part of it”.²⁴

I may also have been unfair to the religious point of view of the Lincolnshire parish priests, whose political importance (with that of the monastic clergy) as “stirrers” and leaders of their parishes into the revolt I emphasized, but whose reaction to the religious changes I described as “that of a conservative professional group which wished to pursue undisturbed its established habits and bucolic routines”.²⁵ Yet, as Mrs Bowker has pointed out, the material available from which to judge the religious opinions of the priesthood is limited. We know that some feared for the mass, as well as for the traditional teaching concerning Purgatory and Our Lady; and some “saw the source of the trouble in the change in the precise location of authority in the Church”. Nevertheless, “For the rest the protest was against religious legislation which had far-reaching economic consequences”, and “against a prince who saw the Church as a milch cow”.²⁶ It required a mind trained in theological subtleties to detect that a fundamental threat to traditional religion was already implicit in the king’s doings, and only Thomas Kendall, vicar of Louth, the university theologian, was equal to the task.²⁷ There was also the disquieting development that, whereas traditional belief had always

²³ See pp. 202–3.²⁴ Davies, “Popular Religion”. ²⁵ See below, p. 202.²⁶ Margaret Bowker, “Lincolnshire 1536: Heresy, Schism, or Religious Discontent”, in *Studies in Church History*, ix: *Schism, Heresy, and Religious Protest*, ed. Derek Baker (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 195 ff., 200, 207, 210–11, 212.²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209. Cf. below, p. 202.

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rested on its unquestioned legitimization by both ecclesiastical and secular authority, now the role of authority in relation to religion as commonly understood had assumed an ambiguous, even hostile, character. Priests and people could grasp the danger of a raid on parish treasures by a greedy king, but could not yet clearly conceive of an alliance between the crown and heresy. Yet the sense of this unbelievable possibility had at least begun to dawn, and would eventually compel a reevaluation of the implications of heresy itself, which would gradually establish itself as an orthodoxy. Thus the religious motif, while present, was liable to be muted and confused by comparison with the less complex material issues; and this in spite of the probable informed conservative commitment of such leaders as the Dymokes and Lord Hussey.

In a book called *Family, Lineage and Civil Society*²⁸ I had aimed to analyse the evolution of the Durham region between 1500 and 1640 in terms of a development from a “lineage society” to a “civil society”. The former was bonded by kinship and the ties of the extended family, its socio-political pattern determined by loyalties which centred on the aristocratic great household. In the latter, the family had become more privatized, and loyalties centred more on the state, with the local society conforming to the generalized pattern of the body of the realm, bonded by law, humanistic wisdom, and Protestant religion. In Chapter 7 this pattern will be found applied to a similar evolution in Northumberland, during the generation before the Northern Rising of 1569. This chapter develops the theme of the penetration of the Percy estate community and its organization (itself an instance of a typical northern “lineage” socio-political grouping) by concepts of legality and rationality, with accompanying changes in socio-political attitudes and political practice. This development, and others associated with it, both accompanied and furthered a decline in the effectiveness of the aristocratic leadership of the region traditionally exercised by the Percy earls of Northumberland, whose weakness showed itself during the rising, the outcome of which in effect ended their power in its traditional form. In this study, the culture of the lineage society is characterized as centred on lineage and lordship, faithfulness and service, its standards of acceptable behaviour on the code of honour; its thinking pre-conceptualized and particularized, typi-

²⁸ Oxford, 1974.

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cally taking the form of the exemplary myth and tale, rather than more discursive, generalizing modes of expression.

This approach is given a wider scope in Chapter 8, which applies these ideas to the general development of political attitudes and practice during the Tudor and earlier Stuart period, with particular reference to the problem of order, and its antithesis: the politics of violence whose typical expression consisted in armed revolt or rebellion. An interest in the concept of honour arose partly out of the concern with the typical structure of Tudor revolt, and with the motivation of Tudor dissidence, which finds expression in Chapter 6. But, in addition, involvement with the history of the decline of the Percy power in the north under the Tudors had raised the issue of the changes in aristocratic mentality, and particularly in the aristocratic attitude to the crown and political dissidence, of which the cases of the fifth and sixth earls of Northumberland, and the first earl of Cumberland, discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, illustrate. What seemed to be happening was characterized by the late K. B. McFarlane as the emergence, with the Tudor advent, of a "chastened, indeed craven, mood" amongst the old nobility, who had become "more self-effacing, less sure of their mission to coerce high-handed rulers, congenitally wary, convinced of the benefits of passive obedience",²⁹ states of mind whose operation may be seen in the weak and uncertain reaction of the northern lords to the Pilgrimage of Grace.³⁰ Macfarlane qualifies his characterization by pointing out that the aristocracy had, in all probability, already learnt the lesson of obedience by 1450;³¹ and it is indeed the case that the processes which broke the will of aristocratic dissidence, and changed the character of aristocratic influence, have their roots far back in the fifteenth century, and beyond.

Nevertheless, these were decisively reinforced and carried to their conclusion by the developments of the Tudor period. In the first place, there was the political practice of the first two Tudor kings. This aimed at disciplining the great nobility, while at the same time encouraging the re-emergence of local articulations of royal

²⁹ K. B. McFarlane, "The Wars of the Roses", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1 (1964), pp. 87–119; reprinted in K. B. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays*, intro. by G. L. Harriss (London, 1981), from which it is here cited.

³⁰ See below, p. 353 ff.

³¹ *England in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 260.