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0521651867 - Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: The Colchester Plunderers

John Walter

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Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution

This is a critical re-evaluation of one of the best-known episodes of crowd action in the English Revolution, in which crowds in their thousands invaded and plundered the houses of the landed classes.

The so-called Stour Valley riots have become accepted as the paradigm of class hostility, determining plebeian behaviour within the Revolution. An exercise in micro-history, the book questions this dominant reading by trying to understand the interrelated contexts of local responses to the political and religious counter-revolution of the 1630s and the confessional politics of the early 1640s. It explains both the outbreak of popular 'violence' and its ultimate containment in terms of a popular (and Parliamentary) political culture that legitimised attacks on the political, but not the social order.

In seeking to understand the immediate event, the book advances a series of arguments of more general importance for the enterprise of reading crowd actions. As well as being a contribution to the history of the English Revolution, the book also questions how that history has been written. Exposing the genealogy of the Stour Valley riots, the study offers a critical reflection on how the history of the popular role within the Revolution has been, and might be, constructed.

JOHN WALTER is Reader in History and Director of the Local History Centre, University of Essex

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It being my lot to be fixed in the Town of COLCHESTER, and finding that it abounds with many curious Materials, which, if digested, might be of use to present and future generations, I thought I could not better employ my leisure hours than in compiling this Book, which I now offer to the Reader.

Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the most ancient Town and Borough of Colchester* (1748), Preface.

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Abbreviations

APC	<i>Acts of the Privy Council of England</i> , ed. J. Dasent et al. (London, 1890–1964)
BL	British Library
Bodl. Lib.	Bodleian Library
CCC	M. A. E. Green, ed., <i>Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for Compounding, etc., 1643–1660</i> (5 vols., London, 1889–92)
CJ	<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i>
CRO	Essex Record Office, Colchester branch
CSPD	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series</i>
CSPV	<i>Calendar of the State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in other Libraries of Northern Italy</i> , ed. R. Brown and A. B. Hinds (38 vols., London, 1804–1947)
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. Sir L. Stephen and Sir S. Lee (London, 1917–)
EA	<i>Essex Archaeology and History</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EJ	<i>Essex Journal</i>
ER	<i>Essex Review</i>
ERec	<i>Essex Recusant</i>
ERO	Essex Record Office
ESRO	East Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
HLRO	Houses of Lords Record Office
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
JBS	<i>Journal British Studies</i>
MR	<i>Mercurius Rusticus, or The Countries Complaint of the Murthers, Robberies, Plundrings, and other Outrages,</i>

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	<i>Committed by the Rebels on his Majesties faithfull Subjects</i> (Oxford, 1643), repr. in P. Thomas (ed.). <i>The English Revolution 3. Oxford Royalists</i> (4 vols., London, 1971)
LJ	<i>Journals of the House of Lords</i>
PJ	<i>Private Journals of the Long Parliament</i> , ed. W. H. Coates, V. F. Snow and A. Steele Young (New Haven and London, 1982–97)
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
PSIA	<i>Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology</i>
RecHist	<i>Recusant History</i>
RO	Record Office
SR	<i>Suffolk Review</i>
TEAS	<i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i>
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal History Society</i>
VCH	Victoria County History
WP	<i>Winthrop Papers</i>
WR	<i>Walker Revised</i>
WSRO	West Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds