'An Engine Which the World Sees Nothing Of ': Revealing Dissent Under Charles I's 'Personal Rule'

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In 2000, Jonathan Scott characterized the years of Charles's personal rule by the term the 'peace of silence'. By this he meant that the seeming peace and quiescence of the 1630s was chiefly due to the silencing of dissent. For much of the twentieth century, this 'peace of silence' could be found reflected in the historiography of early Stuart England. Even when the personal rule received its first full-length study – Kevin Sharpe's 1992 The Personal Rule of Charles I *– the story of dissent in the 1630s remained largely underexplored. In order to uncover the covert and diffused nature of dissident thought under Charles's personal rule, it is necessary for research to adopt a commensurately localized or decentred frame of reference. Work which has done this has often revealed previously obscured veins of dissent. A future direction for studies of dissident thought and action in the 1630s could lie in network analysis and, in particular, the examination of puritan networks of association.*

'Not only all mouths are stopped, but the parliament doors sealed for many years.' 'When we … have any great things to be accomplished, the best policy is to work by an engine which the world sees nothing of.'[1] Both these contemporary quotes, from quite different perspectives, refer to the Caroline 1630s, the years of Charles I's 'personal rule'. The first is from, if not an 'insider' figure then at least a servant of the establishment, the diplomat Sir Thomas Roe. The second is from a decidedly 'outsider' figure, the puritan minister, John Preston. The first describes the policy outcomes of Charles's government, while the second represents the response of the government's critics. Charles's course of action for the 1630s had been adumbrated on 27 March 1629 when he pronounced that 'we would account it presumption for any to prescribe any time unto us for parliaments, the calling, continuation, and dissolving of which is always in our own power'.[2] Thus commenced eleven years without the chief and traditional forum for the expression of

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[1] L. J. Reeve, 'Sir Thomas Roe's Prophecy of 1629', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 56.133 (1983), 115–21 (p. 121); Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), p. 175.

[2] James F. Larkin, ed., *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), II, pp. 226–28.

dissent: parliament. Charles's response to overly conspicuous expressions of dissent during this time was amply demonstrated by the show trial and subsequent mutilation of the famous dissidents Henry Burton, John Bastwick, and William Prynne, representatives of the three esteemed professions of divinity, medicine, and law. This absence of parliament and the rigorously punitive treatment of dissent combined to produce what Jonathan Scott has termed the 'peace of silence'.[3]

I. The Historiography of the 'Peace of Silence'

For much of the twentieth century, this 'peace of silence' was reflected in the historiography of early Stuart England. Dissent in the 1630s remained underexplored due to two main historiographical trends. First, many historians looked to the institution of parliament, and particularly the House of Commons, to gauge the strength and character of dissident thought and action. Second, even once the 1630s was recognized as an important period in its own right – especially in relation to the outbreak of civil war in 1642 – much of the resultant work maintained a decidedly centrist focus. This was most conspicuously (and comprehensively) exemplified in Kevin Sharpe's 1992 monograph, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*. Although this centralized view of the 1630s told us much about life and politics at court and in the metropolis more generally, it nevertheless overlooked the existence and functioning of dissident groups and networks which, in response to the regulatory apparatus of Charles's regime, had necessarily become more covert and dispersed. In other words, the 'peace of silence' still, to a large extent, prevailed.

The first of the historiographical trends noted above was largely a derivative of the revisionist vs. Whig/Marxist debate which dominated much of the twentieth-century historiographical scene. For the Whiggish interpretation of the 'causes' of the English Revolution and civil wars, parliament was the crucible of constitutional conviction and the chief instrument for promoting the laws and liberties of the people. Marxist historians in the mid-twentieth century modified this account by assigning these 'progressive' parliamentarians a socio-economic class. For historians like Christopher Hill, the burgeoning strength of the House of Commons was symbolic of the growing presence and power of an emerging middle class.[4] And even when both these meta-narratives were subjected to the revisionist

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[3] *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 118–22.

[4] *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958); *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964).

challenge of the 1970s and 1980s, the personal rule frequently remained overlooked. This was chiefly due to the propensity for much early revisionist work to challenge the Whigs/Marxists on their own turf. Thus, while laying a pox on both their houses by downplaying the importance of parliaments, much of this revisionist work nonetheless continued to focus on the position and significance of parliaments in the early Stuart polity, albeit with a view towards demonstrating their relative weakness and decline. This tendency was perhaps most obvious in the work of that pioneer of revisionism, Conrad Russell. Through a succession of painstakingly researched articles and books, Russell sought to show that parliaments were not flagships of constitutional or socio-economic progressivism but, rather, 'irregularly recurring events'.[5] This led to Thomas Cogswell remarking in 1990 that 'seventeenth-century parliaments, which were earlier seen as jogging down the Whiggish High Road to Civil War, are now instead viewed as slouching along the Low Road to Extinction'.[6] Clearly, one outcome of this parliament-focused dialectic was a more nuanced and complex picture of parliament and its place within the governmental process. But another consequence was the creation of two extensively researched, yet largely unconnected, parliamentary periods (the 1620s and 1640s) to the neglect of the intervening non-parliamentary period.

Accordingly, Kevin Sharpe could write in the introduction to his 1992 monograph, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, that there had been 'no full study of the personal rule of Charles I since Samuel Rawson Gardiner wrote over a hundred years ago'.[7] His lengthy study represented an attempt to redress this situation and in a number of notable ways it did. Essentially, Sharpe undertook to assay the nature, function, and character of the personal rule. But in doing so, *Personal Rule* employed a particular angle of view: it described and explained the 1630s from the perspective of Charles I and his government. Even the appellation 'personal rule' privileged (and privileges) the role of the king and assumes the centre as the locus of activity; power and influence are, in effect, presented as emanating in concentric circles from the person of the king. Hence Sharpe's sympathetic study of Charles's governance found a place within the broad revisionist school of thought by emphasizing the intrinsically deferential, hierarchical, and 'unrevolutionary' nature of early Stuart politics and society. In Sharpe's account, the 1630s were depicted as a time of relative political calm and stability, with the events and issues of real discord postponed to the two or three years prior to the outbreak of

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[5] *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–1642* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), p. 3.

[6] 'A Low Road to Extinction? Supply and Redress of Grievances in the Parliaments of the 1620s', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), 283–303 (p. 285).

[7] *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. xvii.

hostilities. Indeed, Sharpe claimed that by 1637, 'far from being intrinsically weak … Charles's government appears to have been rather stronger than in the 1620s or than that of his immediate predecessors, or successors'.[8]

Sharpe's tendency to centralize the terms of reference for the 1630s proved remarkably pervasive. A historiographical development which particularly profited from a centrist perspective was the 'cultural turn' of the 1990s. Charles was a keen patron of the arts and cultural historians had often, and rightly, viewed the 1630s as a time of cultural efflorescence. Royal masques, in particular, flourished and there was a concomitant effusion of theatrical production and literary output. Of signal value was the facility of cultural historians to interrogate such cultural expression for what it could reveal of the political tenor of the period. For example, the various Van Dycke portraits of Charles, as well as Rubens's famous ceiling of the Banqueting House in Whitehall, tended to present the 1630s in a manner amenable to Charles's (and Sharpe's?) predilections: a depiction of kingship in which a benign monarch imposed order upon chaos. But again, by virtue of the fact that much of this cultural production took place at court or in the metropolis generally, this cultural turn only perpetuated a centrist purview of the 1630s. Both these foci – the centrist propensity and the awareness of cultural politics – can be seen reflected in a 2006 collection of essays specifically devoted to the 1630s, *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary Essays on Culture and Politics in the Caroline Era*. Notwithstanding the editors' acknowledgement of the prevailing tendency to 'view all events [in the 1630s] from the perspective of the centre' and their stated aim that *The 1630s*, instead, incorporated the 'significance of other perspectives … [including] the cultivation of a regional understanding of the period', the majority of the essays nevertheless could not withstand the centripetal pull of the personal rule.[9] Most continued to maintain a centrist perspective with a particular concentration on the politics of the court and cultural production.

Certainly a positive consequence of this has been a more detailed and complex picture of court politics. Clearly the court was a key 'point of contact' and, in the absence of parliament, it became even more important. Court studies have now shown us that Charles presided over a very different court from his father: where James's court was open and accessible, Charles's was closed and controlled; where James encouraged dialogue and debate, Charles

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[8] Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, p. 953.

[9] I. Atherton and J. Sanders, eds, *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary Essays on Culture and Politics in the Caroline Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 1.

had an aversion to disagreement and dissent.[10] In particular, there has been a renewed appreciation of the role played by the queen consort, Henrietta Maria, and her own courtly adherents.[11] The extent to which Henrietta Maria filled the void left by the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham in 1628 is debatable – a number of people benefited from Buckingham's departure from the scene (the Earl of Strafford perhaps most obviously) – but, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the queen consort was able to exert more influence in the 1630s than she did in the 1620s.

The centralizing force can also be discerned in (the ongoing) debates over the nature of the Caroline Church. There is now no doubt that the 1630s witnessed the triumph of Archbishop William Laud's hegemony over the church but what is more contentious is the nature and significance of this 'Laudianism'. Much of the debate has been provoked by the thesis propounded by Nicholas Tyacke which claimed that Laud (with the backing of Charles) ushered in a number of controversial changes to the English Church. These changes were wide-ranging and included alterations to the theology, liturgy, ecclesiology, and even aesthetics of the Church.[12] In a more general sense, this 'Laudian style' mirrored Charles's style of government and, as such, the Laudian Church was also increasingly concerned with order, hierarchy, and

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[10] For court studies, see Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, pp. 209–74; David Starkey, *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987); Evelyn Cruickshanks, *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000); Fiona Pogson, 'Making and Maintaining Political Alliances during the Personal Rule of Charles I: Wentworth's Associations with Laud and Cottington', *History*, 84 (1999), 52–73.

[11] This was pioneered in a seminal article of 1978 by Malcolm Smuts – 'The Puritan Followers of Henrietta Maria in the 1630s', *English Historical Review*, 93 (1978), 26–45. See also Caroline Hibbard, 'Henrietta Maria in the 1630s: Perspectives on the Role of Consort Queens in *Ancien Régime* Courts', in *The 1630s*, eds Atherton and Sanders, pp. 92–110; and Erin Griffey, *Henrietta Maria: Piety, Politics and Patronage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

[12] *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Tyacke's work broadly complemented work by Patrick Collinson on the Elizabethan and Jacobean churches; see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) and *The Religion of Protestants: The Church of England, 1559–1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). See also Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, 'The Ecclesiastical Policies of James I and Charles I', in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 23–49; David Como, 'Predestination and Political Conflict in Laud's London', *Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), 263–94; Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c. 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Chapters 4–6. For a good discussion of the historiographical significance of Tyacke's research, see Peter Lake, 'Introduction: Puritanism, Arminianism and Nicholas Tyacke', in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke*, eds Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 1–15.

control.[13] This examination of the rise of Laudianism has obviously been a good thing but it has also meant that we arguably now know more about the religious policies of Laud and Laudianism in the 1630s than we do about those whom Laud alienated – puritans. Tyacke himself acknowledged this 'darkness [which] seems to descend over the history of Puritanism' and sought to disperse it somewhat in two important yet often overlooked articles.[14]

     This essay is not arguing that this centralization of focus is inherently wrong in any sense. After all, to a large degree, it is simply tracking the shifting currents of power and interest. And evidently our knowledge of the 1630s is much richer for the work that has been done on the court, Laudianism, cultural expression, Henrietta Maria, and Charles himself. But it does argue that activities and developments at the centre form only part of the story of the 1630s and setting such terms of reference probably facilitates the creation of an impression of the 1630s as a time of calm and quiescence. In particular, it does not really get us closer to an explanation of the volume and force of dissent which would find expression in the Short and Long Parliaments of the 1640s. Clearly there is another more obscured story of the 1630s about which still too little is known. And this is where Sharpe's *Personal Rule*, in particular, was found wanting. Without doubt his study illuminated important aspects of the methods and functioning of the court and central government but, by the same token, it did little to shed light on the activities or preoccupations of those who were critics of the regime. Anthony Fletcher, in a review of *Personal Rule*, quite rightly drew attention to this fact, remarking that although Sharpe often made reference to the 'cause of the godly … explication of what this "cause of the godly" already was and how it was sustained during eleven years without a parliament is extraordinarily lacking … and [therefore Sharpe] misses the deep frustration of men in the circles of John Pym and Lord Saye and Sele'.[15] Admittedly, Sharpe would probably have had few qualms with

[13] Peter Lake, 'The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s', in *Early Stuart Church*, ed. Fincham, pp. 161–85; Anthony Milton, 'The Creation of Laudianism: a New Approach', in *Politics, Religion and Popularity*, eds Tom Cogswell, Richard Cust, and Peter Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 162–84.

[14] Nicholas Tyacke, 'The Fortunes of English Puritanism, 1603–1640' and 'The "Rise of Puritanism" and the Legalising of Dissent, 1571–1719', both reprinted in Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism, c. 1530–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 61–89, 111–31 (p. 111). See also, Jacqueline Eales, 'A Road to Revolution: The Continuity of Puritanism, 1559–1642', in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560–1700*, eds Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 184–209.

[15] 'Book Review of *The Personal Rule of Charles I*', *English Historical Review*, 109 (1994), 966–68.

this criticism as he himself acknowledged 'that while historians have begun to uncover evidence of close cooperation among puritan peers in 1640, the full extent and cohesiveness of the puritans' organization during the 1630s still awaits further research'.[16]

II. Revealing Dissent

It seems, in fact, that simultaneous to the centralization of power in the 1630s there was an equal and opposite decentralization and diffusion of dissident thought and activity. This process obviously owed much to the absence of an accessible central forum for the expression of dissent (parliament) but it was also facilitated further by an increasingly rigorous government programme of censorship and repression. As Secretary Dorchester commented in 1629, 'Hereafter none do presume to print or publish any matter of news, relations, histories, or other things in prose or in verse that have reference to matters and affairs of state, without the view, approbation and license [of the government].'[17] High-profile opponents of the crown, like the famous trio of Burton, Bastwick, and Prynne mentioned above, were anomalous and found themselves on the receiving end of punitive action. Only exceptionally brave or foolish men courted such martyrdom and, as a consequence, dissident action in the 1630s was often necessarily dispersed, muted, and covert: Preston's 'engine which the world sees nothing of'.

So how does one pierce beneath the veil of the 'peace of silence' and go about the detection and interrogation of such dispersed and obscured dissident activity? I would suggest that what is required is a commensurate adjustment of research focus; in other words, a revisiting of the regional and local spheres of action. In particular, the networks of association which bound individuals who had been or would be noted dissidents in the parliaments of the 1620s and 1640s could be explored for their facility to sustain dissident links or even a dissident ideology during the 1630s. A renewed appreciation for the politics of the regional and how they intersected and interacted with the politics of the national can often reveal a quite different picture from that generated at and by the centre. Alexandra Walsham, in an impressionistic yet suggestive article, advocated something like this in order to sound out the parochial roots of 1630s Laudianism. She proposed that the real impact of Laudianism can only be gauged through the 'painstaking reconstitution of communities, and of the networks of religious affiliation criss-crossing

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[16] Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, p. 744.

[17] Quoted in Sharpe, p. 121.

them'.[18] Studies which have built upon Walsham's recommendation have often revealed a religious polity deeply divided by the Laudian changes. While such results have brought into question, at least in some localities, the depth and breadth of the popular appeal of the Calvinist consensus, conversely, they have also often exposed significant currents of resentment or opposition to Laudianism.[19] Such research underscores the need for a renewed appreciation of the localized or decentred perspective in order to glean the story of dissident thought and action in the 1630s.

Other studies which have reoriented the focus and scale in this manner have, at times, unearthed remarkable nuggets of evidence. A good, if brief, early example is Kenneth Fincham's enlightening article on the Kentish gentry in which he demonstrates that some members of the local gentry possessed a surprisingly sophisticated grasp of national issues and concerns. Moreover, Fincham shows that sentiment which circulated in private was often (and not surprisingly) more critical of the governing regime's policies than anything which entered the public discourse. In a similar fashion, a very recent article by John Walter demonstrates the insights to be gained from examining the broader religious politics of the 1630s as they were refracted through a local lens. His microhistorical analysis of the Essex village of Radwinter offers a subtle exploration of the impact of Laudianism at the local level and the schisms this occasioned.[20]

Walter utilized a similar local lens in a larger study of popular violence in Colchester.[21] His *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: The Colchester Plunderers* shows how a microhistorical study, when appropriately sited within the broader historical context, can bring into relief previously hidden or overlooked elements. Walter takes as his point of departure riots which broke out around Colchester and in the Stour Valley in mid-1642.

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[18] 'The Parochial Roots of Laudianism Revisited: Catholics, Anti-Calvinists and "Parish Anglicans" in Early Stuart England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49 (1998), 620–51 (p. 650).

[19] Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, Chapter 6; Sylvia Watts, 'The Impact of Laudianism on the Parish: The Evidence of Staffordshire and North Shropshire', *Midland History*, 33 (2008), 21–42; Matthew Reynolds, 'Predestination and Parochial Dispute in the 1630s: The Case of the Norwich Lectureships', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 59 (2008), 407–25. For an earlier example in this vein, see John Fielding, 'Arminianism in the Localities: Peterborough Diocese, 1603–1642', in *Early Stuart Church*, ed. Fincham, pp. 93–114.

[20] Fincham, 'The Judges' Decision on Ship Money in February 1637: The Reaction of Kent', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 57 (1984), 230–37; Walter, '"Affronts & Insolencies": The Voices of Radwinter and Popular Opposition to Laudianism', *English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), 35–60.

[21] *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: The Colchester Plunderers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Through a detailed and wide-ranging examination of local sources, he meticulously reconstructs and examines the background story to this event. Though his initial focus is the civil unrest of 1642, much of the book pertains to the politics of the 1630s, both at a local and national level. Through a nuanced, 'thick description' methodology, Walter reconstructs the popular, high, and religious politics of the region, demonstrating the ways in which they intersected and interacted. The result is a richly embroidered, sophisticated study of the nature and function of popular political culture in the years leading up to civil war. The study also offers an instructive example of the benefits to be gained from a reorientation of scale and focus, particularly with regard to the 1630s.

Moving down the spatial scale are valuable case studies of individuals as gleaned from their own writings. Thus we have the diary-based portraits of Robert Woodford (by John Fielding) and Samuel Rogers (by Tom Webster and Kenneth Shipps).[22] Woodford was a middling-sort, provincial townsman from Northampton. He was largely unremarkable and was never likely to rise to any sort of national prominence. Although he never found himself in trouble with the Caroline authorities (no doubt partly due to this low profile), his diary reveals a man who was privately critical of many of the developments he was witnessing in the 1630s. As with Fincham's Kentish gentlemen, such private misgivings which lurked beneath apparent public acquiescence illustrate the danger inherent in characterizing the 1630s simply by public demonstrations of opposition. The case of Woodford exemplifies both the relatively high level of political consciousness and the restrictions on its expression that typified someone of his views and social rank. Similarly, the 1630s found Samuel Rogers a relatively obscure puritan minister in Essex. Like Woodford he never ran foul of the authorities, though in the case of Rogers this may have had something to do with the ability of the puritan community to harbour and protect their own. Nevertheless, this lack of a record of public criticism of the policies of the Caroline establishment belies significant private opposition. For example, his description of the Laudians who were dominating the Caroline church of the 1630s as 'idolatrous, superstitious Arminians … [who] have prevailed lamentably within these 7 years; the Lord in mercy fight for his witnesses that seem to be slain now almost' hardly signifies a man comfortable with the changes to the religious

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[22] John Fielding, 'Opposition to the Personal Rule of Charles I: The Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637–41', *Historical Journal*, 31 (1988), 769–88; Tom Webster and Kenneth Shipps, eds, *The Diary of Samuel Rogers, 1634–1638* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004). See also Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

landscape.[23] Although the representativeness of individuals such as Woodford and Rogers can always be disputed, the diaries of these men certainly point towards the existence of a hidden undercurrent of dissident thought in the 1630s which has often been missed by the centralizing currents of Charles I's personal rule.

Of course it is important to beware the trap of slipping into a mere dialectic of binary opposites (similar to the court–country polarity of the 1970s) by proceeding to privilege the local over the national.[24] Rather, what is required is a framework which charts where and how the local intersected with the national and which scrutinizes the complex matrix of forces – national and local, supra-county and sub-county – that impacted upon contemporaries' social, political, religious, intellectual, cultural, and familial milieus.[25] Such a framework is evident in Jacqueline Eales's study of the Harleys of Herefordshire.[26] In this finely grained analysis of the experience of Caroline rule from the perspective of a puritan gentry family, the picture that emerges is of a family deeply rooted in their locality but also cognizant of, and indeed actively involved in, the broader national concerns of the time. The central role that the puritan community played in the Harley's ideological and social milieu is a key theme. To this end, the Harleys were committed patrons of puritan clerics and participated in various puritan communitarian activities – what Sir Robert called 'our exercises' – such as public fasts and communal days of prayer.[27] Moreover, Eales demonstrates how such puritan exercises were increasingly at odds with the Laudian religious establishment of the 1630s and argues persuasively that it was this ideological alienation which was of primary importance in determining Sir Robert Harley's positioning in the politics of the Long Parliament and, ultimately, the family's parliamentarianism in the civil war. The supra-county connections afforded

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[23] *The Diary of Samuel Rogers*, p. 66.

[24] This court–country dichotomy was most pronounced in the county community studies of the late 1970s and early 1980s. For a representative example, see Alan Everitt, *The Local Community and the Great Rebellion* (London: Historical Association, 1969). For instructive critiques of this 'county community' paradigm, see Ann Hughes, 'Warwickshire on the Eve of Civil War: A County Community?', *Midland History*, 7 (1987), 42–72; Clive Holmes, 'Centre and Locality in Civil-War England', in *The English Civil War: Conflict and Context, 1640–49*, ed. John Adamson (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 153–74.

[25] A good example of a study in this vein is David Cressy, *England on Edge: Crisis and Revolution, 1640–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[26] *Puritans and Roundheads: The Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[27] Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, p. 59.

by the puritan community during this time were of especial importance to the Harleys, located, as they were, in a predominantly royalist county.

Perhaps what can be most fruitful for apprehending the diasporal nature of dissident activity in the 1630s is the study of networks of association. That is, the exploration of the various social, business, religious, literary, and familial networks which interconnected contemporaries in order to discern how and why they were integrated and interacted. Examples where this mode of analysis has been employed include articles by Ann Hughes and Jason Peacey.[28] Hughes's article shows how a relatively humble man, such as Thomas Dugard ('this minor member of provincial quasi-clerical society'), could be brought into the orbit of a renowned elite dissident figure like Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, simply through puritan networks of sociability. This 'parliamentary-puritan connection' could comprise a number of figures from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, the cement of which was a common, yet covert, dissident ideological framework. Peacey illustrates how a puritan exercise, such as fund-raising for 'seasonable treatises', could act as a networking utility which sustained and reinforced the puritan community. The fact that such an operation was, again, covert provides further evidence for the authoritarian character of the period, while, at the same time, its very existence indicates the commitment and coordinated action of the puritan community.

An important and more extensive study of this kind has been conducted on the puritan clergy by Tom Webster. Webster employs a kind of qualitative prosopography to survey the period 1620 to 1643 with an explicit emphasis on the networks of association which bound the various puritan clerical communities in England.[29] In particular, he focuses on the functioning of sociability for the supplying of a vital bond between puritan clerics. Webster shows that through such puritan exercises as public fasts and combination lectureships, a vibrant and resilient godly community and ideology was able to be maintained despite the repressive apparatus of Laudianism. Webster's work shows the potential that network analysis has for drawing out and rendering significant previously obscured 'ties of commonality'. In particular, such networks of association can point towards the manner and means by which a dissident ideology, which had found expression in the 1620s parliaments and which would do so again in the Short and Long Parliaments of the 1640s,

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[28] Hughes, 'Thomas Dugard and his Circle in the 1630s: a "Parliamentary-Puritan" Connection?', *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986), 771–93; Peacey, 'Seasonable Treatises: a Godly Project of the 1630s', *English Historical Review*, 113 (1998), 667–79.

[29] *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

was not only sustained but also modified and negotiated throughout the intervening non-parliamentary years.

III. The Religious Politics of Puritan Networks

I would like to propose that Webster's puritan networks could be further augmented by a complementary study of the puritan laity in the 1630s. Such a study could explore how the 'cause of the godly' incorporated networks of association that interconnected lay puritans and also integrated them with Webster's puritan clergy.[30] Both Webster's and Eales's studies show that the godly were often seen (and indeed saw themselves) as an avowedly distinct community within society. As such, there were a number of particular practices and customs which had the dual purpose of not only setting them apart from the non-godly but that also bound the godly to each other. These included activities like attendance at 'profitable conferences' (which were often accompanied by fasts), patronage of godly divines, and 'gadding' to sermons. Obviously, these activities had an intrinsically religious purpose but they also helped augment networks of association.[31] Moreover, such intra-referential religious practices could assume a heightened significance in times of perceived threat – such as that of the altered religious landscape presented by Laudianism.

An example of the experience of a puritan communitarian network under Laudianism is provided by the Feoffees for Impropriations. The Feoffees for Impropriations was essentially an organization which sought to acquire impropriations (livings under lay jurisdiction) and use the revenue to support approved puritan ministers. There were officially twelve feoffees – four clergymen, four lawyers, and four merchants – who were invested with the task of administration of the enterprise but the network associated with the Feoffees spread much farther. There were many contributors and supporters from within the London puritan community and the renowned puritan minister Hugh Peter was employed as a liaison between the Feoffees and potential benefactors. The first recorded meeting of the Feoffees for Impropriations took place on 15 February 1626 and in 1628 they assumed

[30] For a very recent suggestive piece concerning the operation of such networks in the 1630s, see Peter Lake, 'The "Court", the "Country" and the Northamptonshire Connection: Watching the "Puritan Opposition" Think (Historically) about Politics on the Eve of the English Civil War', *Midland History*, 35.1 (2010), 28–70.

[31] Anthony Milton has recently examined such practices for their potential to contribute to social 'pillarization'; see his 'Religion and Community in Pre-Civil War England', in *The English Revolution c. 1590–1720: Politics, Religion and Communities*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 62–80.

control of the St. Antholin's lectures in London which supported six lecturers. The strategy was for novice lecturers to spend six years at St. Antholin's after which they would be placed in one of the re-acquired impropriations. The Feoffees met regularly (until Laud dissolved the organization in 1633) and towards the end of its existence they were sometimes meeting as often as twice weekly. Thus the Feoffees for Impropriations represented a highly organized, quasi-institutionalized attempt to influence the form of ministry that was practised in the English Church.[32] The enterprise also offers a prime example of a puritan communitarian exercise which involved and encouraged the close cooperation of lay and clerical puritans.

The reaction of the ecclesiastical establishment to the enterprise is instructive. In 1630, rising star of the establishment and later biographer of Laud, Peter Heylyn, delivered a sermon at Oxford in which he denounced the Feoffees for Impropriations as an enclave of sedition. He duly sent a copy of this sermon to Laud.[33] At around the same time, Laud noted in his diary a list of 'things which I have projected to do if God bless me in them'. The second item on the agenda was 'to overthrow the feoffment, dangerous to church and state, going under the specious pretence of buying in impropriations'.[34] In Laud's view, the Feoffees for Impropriations represented a 'cunning way, under a glorious pretence, to overthrow the church government, by getting into their power more dependency of the clergy, than the king, and all the peers, and all the bishops in all the kingdom had'.[35] He brought the Feoffees to the attention of Charles who, in turn, referred the matter to his Attorney-General, William Noy. Upon investigation, Noy confirmed the enterprise as 'a confederacy or conspiracy … against the church' and ruled that they had

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[32] The Feoffees for Impropriations was never incorporated but they had a president and treasurer, kept records of meetings, had a book of orders and constitutions, books of accounts and employed auditors. For more details on the functioning and fortunes of the organization, see Isabel M. Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction of the Church of England* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957) which contains much of the documentation concerning the proceedings brought against the Feoffees in the Court of Exchequer. See also, E. W. Kirby, 'The Lay Feoffees: A Study in Militant Puritanism', *Journal of Modern History*, 14.1 (1942), 1–25; Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), Chapter 11; and Irvonwy Morgan, *Prince Charles's Puritan Chaplain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), pp. 174–83.

[33] Heylyn, *Cyprianus Anglicus* (London: Printed for A. Seile, 1668), pp. 210–11; Anthony Milton, 'Heylyn, Peter, Church of England Clergyman and Historian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) (hereafter referred to as *ODNB*).

[34] James Bliss and William Scott, eds, *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud, D.D.*, 7 vols (Oxford: Parker, 1847–1860), IV, p. 253.

[35] *The Works*, IV, p. 303.

'too great a power of steerage in the church'.[36] In 1632, a suit was brought against the Feoffees in the Court of Exchequer and in February 1633 they were ordered dissolved. Laud then marked the second item in his diary as 'Done'.[37]

But it is neither fair nor accurate to judge the Feoffees by the opinions of their critics. Rather, the evidence seems to suggest that the views of Laud and Noy were probably exaggerated. First, in terms of practical effectiveness, Noy's claim that they had 'vast appetites to have all impropriations and advowsons that they can come by' appears specious. At the time of the trial they only had right of presentation to twenty-six out of approximately eight thousand parishes in England and of these they had only managed to fill a small handful of places.[38] Second, the radicalism or dissident nature of the Feoffees and those they appointed is also debatable. A mainstay of their defence was that they had never 'presented or nominated any to any church or place …
[who] hath not been conformable to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England'.[39] Indeed, in the organization's own orders that were drawn up in 1625, it was clearly stipulated that they 'shall not present any minister to be admitted and placed in any of their church livings, but such as are conformable to the discipline and doctrine and government of the Church of England' and, in fact, it was true that they never presented any candidate that had not been approved by the bishop of the diocese or his deputy.[40] In the end, and probably to Laud's disappointment, the finding handed down in the Court of Exchequer 'did forbear to proceed to any censure or punishment to be inflicted upon the said defendants' and they were only found guilty of the relatively mild crime of functioning as a body corporate without ever being incorporated.[41]

Thus the case of the Feoffees stands as testament to the shifting religious landscape under Laud. To the puritan community, the activities of the Feoffees were a necessary and creditable response to the new policy directions proceeding from the Caroline ecclesiastical establishment. Even a non-puritan, disinterested observer such as Sir Humphrey Davenport, Lord Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer, could only comment that 'the

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[36] Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, pp. 100, 103.

[37] *The Works,* III, p. 253.

[38] Isabel M. Calder, 'A Seventeenth Century Attempt to Purify the Anglican Church', *American Historical Review*, 53.4 (1948), 760–75 (p. 768.)

[39] Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, p. 16.

[40] Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, p. 70.

[41] Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, pp. 125–42.

manner of doing this is not good though the use be good'.[42] But perceptions are important and it was Laud's perception that the organization's *raison d'être* was to foment puritan sedition. His readiness to see the Feoffees as using their 'power to breed and maintain a faction … [and] fill the church with schism' upon apparently little hard evidence, denotes his heightened sensitivity to, and predisposition against, puritan activity of this kind.[43] Thus we can see in the Feoffees for Impropriations an example of a localized network of association interacting with national/central concerns. In doing so we can also see how a puritan communitarian network such as this, which may have had relatively unradical aims, could be construed as subversive and seditious by an antagonistic ecclesiastical establishment.

Other important networks of association coalesced around the activities of the various early Stuart colonizing companies. Perhaps the most famous example is that of the Massachusetts Bay Company, but there were a number of other less well-known colonization enterprises or schemes which brought together like-minded adventurers. One of these was the Providence Island Company. In 1630, the Providence Island Company was responsible for establishing a puritan colony on a small volcanic island off the coast of modern-day Nicaragua. For the entirety of its short-lived existence, the colony struggled to remain a viable venture and in 1641 it was destroyed by the Spanish.[44] It is not so much the ill-fated colony with which I am concerned but, rather, the significance of the Company which governed the colony's affairs remotely from England. For the members of the Company constituted a veritable roll call of prominent puritans who would later challenge the king politically in the Long Parliament and militarily in the civil wars. Indeed, Conrad Russell acknowledged in his entry on the puritan statesman, John Pym, in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that Pym's rise to supremacy in parliament must have been the result of events which took place outside it during the 1630s. He goes on to observe that 'among these events, the founding and development of the Providence Island Company must be one'.[45]

Although the membership of the Company contained a number of notable puritan dissidents, it is probably a step too far to claim that the Providence Island Company was established simply as a cover for plotting subversion. First, there is no evidence to be found in the Company's board meeting

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[42] Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, p. 118.

[43] *The Works,* IV, pp. 304–05.

[44] For the definitive study of the Providence Island colony, see K. Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630–1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[45] Conrad Russell, 'Pym, John (1584–1643)', *ODNB*.

minutes to support such a claim, and second, it diminishes the sincerity of the commitment of the Company's members to the primary purpose of the Company – the establishment of a puritan colony in the Caribbean – for which much evidence can be found in the Company's records.[46] However, this does not mean that the Company played no role in the fostering and sustaining of dissent in the 1630s. What must be acknowledged, at the least, is the organizational framework the Company would have offered these men. The Company met very regularly throughout the 1630s and, in doing so, would have provided these men with a valuable grounding in business administration as well as experience of committee work; experience which they would use with considerable success in later Long Parliament committees. Although the Company minutes do not reveal any overt expressions of dissent, it is impossible to know what was said or organized outside of official Company meetings. It is suggestive that the Company often authorized members who remained in London when others departed for the country to function as 'a standing committee for the ordering of all businesses concerning the company's affairs'. Indeed, Pym was twice sued by Attorney-General Noy for remaining in London on company business.[47]

Furthermore, as with the Feoffees for Impropriations, in the political environment of the 1630s, where dissent has been silenced or driven underground, it is impressions which can often have the most impact. Certainly later contemporary commentators viewed the Providence Island Company with suspicion. According to one anonymous author, the civil war 'was whelped … near Banbury, and moulded in Holborn … by the Islanders of Providence, and put to nurse in London'.[48] Similarly, under the pseudonym Mercurius Civicus, Samuel Butler maintained that 'when this rebellion was but an embryo … it were conceived (some Say) near Banbury, & shaped in Grays-Inn-Lane, where the undertakers for the Isle of Providence did meet and plot it'.[49] Moreover, there is evidence to indicate that Charles and the establishment saw the Company in a very similar light during the 1630s. For example, in 1633 the Crown had watch set on Brooke House, the venue for

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[46] Kew, The National Archives (TNA), Records of the Colonial Office, Commonwealth and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, Empire Marketing Board and related bodies, Governor and Company of Adventurers of Old Providence Island – Journal, 1630–1650, CO 124/2.

[47] TNA, CO 124/2/95–96; *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial, 1574–1660*, ed. William Noel Sainsbury (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), p. 260; Arthur P. Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans: The Last Phase of the Elizabethan Struggle with Spain* (New Haven, CT, 1914), p. 175.

[48] Anon., *A Discourse Discovering Some Mysteries of our New State* (Oxford, 1645), p. 7.

[49] Anon., *A Letter from Mercurius Civicus to Mercurius Rusticus* (Oxford, 1643), p. 3.

the majority of the meetings of the Company. Then, in 1639 and again in 1640, Charles ordered the Company's records to be raided.[50]

So although the Providence Island Company was probably not the hotbed of sedition some authors have made it out to be, there are reasons for believing that it played a key role in the organization and association of key dissenting figures during the 1630s. In this way, it provides another network of association through which a dissenting movement was able to be sustained during this time. Furthermore, the simple fact that its stated purpose – colonization – appeared fairly uncontroversial could have worked in its favour as it could potentially have functioned as an instance of Preston's 'engine which the world sees nothing of'. Indeed, Preston represented one of a number of links between the Feoffees and the Providence Island Company. At least one contemporary believed that he was involved in the establishment of the Feoffees and it was well known that he was a close associate of key members of the Providence Island Company.[51] But probably most importantly, as noted above, there is some evidence to suggest that the Crown began to have misgivings about the Providence Island Company and arguably that is what really matters. For even if the Company network was not using the Company for subversive ends, the simple fact that the Crown suspected they were could have alienated these men and helped foster the feelings of dissatisfaction that they would later give voice to in the Long Parliament. In other words, even if the Providence Island Company network was not a focus for dissident thought and action, the fact that the establishment saw it as such could have effectively made it so.

I would like now to finish with a brief discussion of an instance where the local interacted with the central and show how even relatively contained and fleeting examples of interaction can be revealing of the broader religio-political situation. In November 1636, the noted servant of the Laudian estabishment Bishop Matthew Wren wrote to Laud that

> the Lord Brooke hath settled himself in these parts (at Dalham). He hath a chaplain with him (one Mr. Ashe) who in Dalham and other towns adjoining … hath drawn the people up and down in flocks after him; but

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[50] A government spy reported a suspicious meeting on 28 June 1633 between Saye and Brook and the Dutch Ambassador; see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, of the Reign of Charles I, 1633–1634*, ed. John Bruce (London: Longman, 1863), p. 164. The Company records also show a Company meeting taking place at Brooke House on this date, see TNA, CO 124/2/54. For the raids on the company, see Caroline Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1983), p. 89.

[51] Heylyn, *Cyprianus Anglicus*, p. 209; Morgan, *Puritan Chaplain*.

> I have made so bold with him, as to cite him, and on Wednesday next he
> is to appear.[52]

The circumstances of this confrontation between Ashe/Brooke and Wren
were recounted in more detail by William Prynne.[53] According to Prynne,
Brooke invited the Earls of Bedford and Doncaster 'and three or four lords
more' to the christening of one of his children at Dalham. Brooke's guests
'earnestly pressed the Lord Brooke that they might have a sermon then
preached upon this extraordinary occasion.' Brooke duly requested that
his chaplain, Simeon Ashe, do the honours but Ashe, 'knowing the bishop's
perverseness, was unwilling to do it, till at last, upon his Lord's command
to preach, he condescended'. Ashe's reticence proved well-founded as when
Wren heard of it he ordered Ashe to appear before him. Brooke accompanied
his chaplain 'to know what the business was, and what his Lordship could
object against [Ashe]'. The ensuing exchange between Wren and Brooke, as
related by Prynne, is worth quoting in full:

> [Wren] thereupon answered that [Ashe] had openly affronted him in his
> diocese in daring to presume to preach therein without his special license
> … [Wren noted] that [Brooke] did very ill to offer to maintain his chaplain
> in this; that no lord of England should affront him in his diocese in such
> a manner, and if he did his Majesty should know of it, and that he would
> make his chaplain an example. My Lord Brooke demanded whether his
> Lordship could take any exception wither against his chaplain's life or
> doctrine? He answered no. Then my Lord, said he, I hope the offence is
> not too great, there being no law of God, or the realm, nor canon of the
> church, that inhibits ministers to preach on the Lord's day afternoon.

Wren then asked to see Ashe's licence to preach and letters of order to which
Ashe replied that he did not carry them on his person. Brooke requested
that Wren drop the case but the Bishop was resolved to prosecute. It was
only when one of the other guests at the christening, the Earl of Doncaster,
personally intervened that Wren was finally persuaded to let the matter slide.

This episode illustrates a number of points. First, and perhaps most
obviously, it underscores the rigour with which representatives of the Laudian
establishment, in this case Bishop Wren, prosecuted perceived puritan
irregularities. Second, it provides an example of the close collaboration of the
puritan clergy and laity in resisting these representatives. Third, it illustrates
clearly how, in the ever more anti-puritan atmosphere of 1630s England, even
seemingly innocuous practices and activities like a christening could assume

[52] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner MS 70, fols 103–04.

[53] *A looking-glasse for all lordly prelates* ([London?], 1636), pp. 71–75 (pp. 72–73).

a contentious aspect. And last, it provides evidence for the source of some of the anger which would later be directed against the Laudian bishops in the Long Parliament in the early 1640s. In this episode it is possible to see how (as with the case of the Providence Island Company) the increased sensitivity to, and correspondingly reinforced discipline of, puritan activity by the Laudian authorities may have actually resulted in the creation of a more oppositionist, or at least antagonistic, stance within the puritan community. It is perhaps then no surprise to find, in the less restrictive environment of 1641, Lord Brooke as the author of trenchant criticism of the Laudian regime.[54]

IV. Conclusion

This essay began by arguing that for much early Stuart historiography the 'peace of silence' that Jonathan Scott alluded to in characterizing the 1630s could be found reflected in the work of historians. For most of the twentieth century this was due to the predominance of parliament in the historiographical debate. Historians working within the Whig or Marxist traditions were interested in parliament insofar as it represented the vehicle for progressive constitutional or socio-economic forces. Ironically, much early revisionist work continued to focus on parliament with the aim of disrupting these previous orthodoxies by demonstrating parliament's relative weakness and marginality in the political process. The first major attempt to redress the neglect of the 1630s was Kevin Sharpe's 1992 study *The Personal Rule of Charles I*. However, by tracking the flow of power and influence and focusing on events at the centre, Sharpe's work, though important for analysing the 1630s from Charles's government's perspective, was less helpful for explicating the story of dissident thought and action. Indeed, the centralizing compulsion and increasing authoritarianism of Charles's rule had resulted, unsurprisingly, in dissent being perforce decentralized and veiled. Therefore, in order to uncover such muted and obscured activity, a similar dispersal and regionalization of research focus is needed. Examples of work which has employed a wider, or more localized, frame of reference in this way have often revealed strata of dissident thought and action which, though covert, were nevertheless well-informed and ideologically based. This essay has ended by positing a means by which the diasporal story of dissent in the 1630s could be fleshed out further: via the analysis of networks and, in particular, the networks of association which interconnected the puritan community. It is in the interstices of these networks of association that previously obscured threads of dissident

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[54] Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, *A Discourse Opening the Nature of that Episcopacy which is Exercised in England* (London: Printed by R. C. for Samuel Cartwright, 1641).

thought and action can be detected. Moreover, while these networks – such as that fostered by the Feoffees for Impropriations or the Providence Island Company – and puritan communitarian exercises and practices – such as conferences and even christenings – may not have had obviously dissident aims or functions, they could, in fact, be frequently conferred a more subversive or oppositionist aspect by the anti-puritan policies of the Laudian establishment. In this way, the heightened authoritarianism of the Laudian regime often had the effect of constructing a more pronounced or significant puritan opposition than had hitherto existed.

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