

Jonathan Harlow with Jonathan Barry (eds.), *Religious Ministry in Bristol 1603-1689: uniformity to dissent* Bristol Record Society Publication 69 (Bristol, BRS 2017). 182pp., 1 map. Hardback, £15.00 + p&p [ISBN: 978901538383]. **Reviewed 05.2018**

This is an ambitious book dedicated to a very distinguished historian who has given excellent service to this society and region over many years: Joe Bettey. It aims to provide details of all the clergy of Bristol churches and chapels, within and without the Church of England, who served their respective congregations between 1603 and 1689, two auspicious dates for any community in England and Wales. One marked the accession of a new king, James VI and I - who many now regard as the real saviour of the Church of England - yet the period also encompasses the reign of his son Charles, who almost broke it, while the Toleration Act of 1689 marks the end of attempts to gain comprehension after the Restoration in 1660. There is clearly much to cover here in terms of theory and practice; who were the clergy who served the churches of Bristol, what were their doctrinal beliefs, what spectrum of beliefs came to light in the city, and how did all this change over the period? How were the religious needs of this important city served? And providing material to answer these rather basic questions is by no means easy.

The volume is split broadly into two parts: the first provides details of all the known ministers who served congregations in the city, including, where possible material on their living circumstances, wealth and family. It does this by covering the livings and then moving to discuss lectureships and the different denominations that emerged after 1640. The second, and more substantial part, ranges over material pertaining to their ministry, drawing chiefly from extracts from their printed sermons and tracts under a variety of headings touching on doctrinal beliefs. The topics include how best to give a sermon and what should be discussed, which in turn included 'scripture as truth', 'providence', 'predestination, grace and works', 'death and hell', and of course, mercifully: 'salvation'. The two parts are supported by two appendices with very brief biographical details of the 163 'clergy' identified as serving during this period, and a list of the 91 books and sermons consulted from which extracts have been taken. Two of the people identified were women, the Quakers Anne Yemens and Barbara Blaugden. Within the 27 page introduction tables are provided on imprisonments, hearth tax returns, wills and probate material. 'Tables' - really simple lists - of the 18 Bristol livings and the 13 bishops who served the diocese between 1603 and 1689 are provided in the section on the ministers.

This is a very difficult book to review. The intentions are honourable, much excellent detail pertaining to religion in Bristol is provided, and this will undoubtedly yield treasure

trove for those working on more neglected aspects of the period, such as the Interregnum. It also brings non-conformists and later dissenters out of the shade. The Bristol Record Society has taken a brave decision to produce a volume outside the normal mode, for this is not a standard transcription of a single source or series of related texts. It is much more of an assembly of notes towards a volume, a set of card indexes almost. And as such it will have its uses. Nevertheless, one cannot help but wonder what might have been produced upon further deliberation of the material located? More could have been made of the distribution of information which naturally favours the period after 1650. Of the 91 works consulted for extracts, only eight were produced before 1640. Much more might have been said in the introduction about the sources that underpin this work, the survival of registers, churchwardens' accounts, wills and inventories. These are touched upon in places throughout the book, and the *Clergy of the Church of England Database* figures strongly in footnotes, but the opportunity to discuss sources and their delicate handling largely goes missing.

Mention is made of the difficult context to this study. Bristol was a very poor diocese, it was badly constructed from the outset and needed to be re-constituted in the nineteenth century and worst of all it has lost most of its early modern records. More could perhaps have been made of the sheer difficulties of putting such a volume together; it is no mean feat to arrive at what might seem to be a fairly straight forward list of clergy who served the city. It is useful to be given the sketchy details we have, but this only serves to whet the appetite for more. This is essentially a work in progress, and no bad thing for that, for all record society publications are perhaps a call for others to conduct further research; the aim is not to provide a tidy monograph.

The introduction strives to provide some of the necessary background, but while the discussion is conducted in a crisp, clear and direct fashion, it fails to raise many of the questions surrounding the supply of data, problems with that data, and - most of all - the reasoning behind constructing the volume in this manner. This is an honest introduction, but the editors would have been forgiven much by being even more open about the problems encapsulated in taking on this ambitious project.

I write as someone who has been a literary director of a record society for over thirty years. I well understand the problems faced by editors and society councils as they weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of specific editions. I also applaud the desire to break new ground, in period coverage, themes, and approaches. This volume provides a good shell with standard supporting apparatus such as a glossary and a guide to further reading. The tables

mentioned indicate a laudable desire to provide an explanatory framework to what is in the second part, fairly esoteric material. Although I do not think it has gone far enough in explaining problems associated with this project, I do welcome this volume for what it does provide - which is within a strong record society tradition - namely a volume that provides excellent material to stimulate further research.

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