

## Remembering the Parish – Eighteenth Warwick Symposium on Parish Research

**Veranstalter:** Warwick Network for Parish Research

**Datum, Ort:** 07.11.2020–07.11.2020, Coventry (online)

**Bericht von:** Maria Tauber, History Department, University of Warwick

For the first time since its inception in 2003, the Parish Symposium took place as a virtual gathering on Blackboard Collaborate, attracting nearly 100 researchers. BEAT KÜMIN (Warwick) welcomed speakers and participants and thanked the university's Humanities Research Centre for their continuing support. This year's conference theme was explored in five panels dedicated to 'Buildings', 'Communities', 'Records', 'Revolution' and 'Environments'. Speakers from the UK, Germany, Poland, and Canada explored a variety of written and material sources relating to parishes from the Middle Ages to the present. Contributions centred around acts and objects of memorialisation, collective and individual parishioners' recollections of past events and their role in shaping and imagining the parish's present and future. The question of who was in charge of remembering shed light on contested memories, identity formation processes and the overall significance of collective memory in the parish community.

NICOLA WHYTE (Exeter) delivered a keynote address in which she highlighted the social, spiritual, and economic importance of ancient boundaries and landmark features for both parish communities and individual households. Drawing on a rich and fascinating body of sources from Norfolk, including material traces in the landscape, maps, court records, and forged documents, she portrayed the making and unmaking of boundaries as a complex intergenerational social process in which memories were often tightly linked to space. Whyte noted that the number of post-Reformation court cases dealing with boundary disputes show that the preservation and formation of boundaries remained a significant part of local identities and parish policies. Addressing recent historiography and its

focus on the creation of new boundaries (enclosure) in the early modern period, Whyte pointed out prevailing aspects of continuity, observing ancient patterns of boundary divisions, and revealing a complex network of jurisdictions inherited from medieval times.

The first panel looked at buildings. LYDIA FISHER (Exeter) examined nineteenth-century accounts of surviving medieval stained glass, which, due to its high replacement cost, had largely survived the reformation changes. Although many windows were altered or removed, Fisher was able to trace back the changes through comments in builder's accounts and Victorian surveys. Spanning epochs, she illustrated shifting attitudes towards stained-glass windows and their effects on the appearance of present-day churches, while, at the same time, adding to our understanding of original medieval parish church interiors.

MICHAEL ROTH (Kiel) explored the connection between church foundation stones and remembrance, making the comparison to twentieth-century time capsules. Drawing on early modern examples from the Holy Roman Empire, he described how builders and parishioners across Europe used foundation stones to convey information to a future generation. In anticipation of the potential destruction of the church, the foundation stone would often contain intentionally deposited objects and writings commenting on grain and wine prices, the deeds of individuals, and the political circumstances in which the church had been erected. Through a dedicated ritual and the active encouragement of young people to pass on their memories of the event, the laying of the foundation stone would become part of the parish's collective memory.

MICHAEL SEWELL (Essex) gave an example of how a church ruin could shape the collective identity of a parish throughout the long nineteenth century up until today. He illustrated how the Civil War legacy of the town of Colchester remained deeply ingrained in the collective memory of Saint Botolph's parish, who had lost their parish church during the siege of Colchester. A 'parish in exile', its congregation continued to mourn the absence of their church, keeping

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the ruins as a reminder of its presence. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the ruins became the focal point of Colchester's attempts to reinvent itself as a market town. And although meanings and uses changed over time, ranging from artistic and commercial activities to a meeting place 'for troublesome youth', their political significance remained, telling the story of an English town.

The second session dealt with communities. MARY CARRICK (Wawne) shared the results of her research on her home village of Wawne in East Yorkshire. She used probate inventories, dating from 1570 to 1732, to examine the agricultural innovations of Meaux Abbey and its changing priorities, including the Cistercian's water management and agricultural produce.

ALEXANDER HUTTON (London) then examined the influence of lower tier councils on the respective survival or disappearance of 'historic counties' in England which were subject to structural reforms in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s. Using the examples of Rutland and Huntingdonshire and their differing attitudes towards their local county councils, he reaffirmed the importance of a sense of belonging to one's county, while pointing to variations in regional affinities across rural England. Breaking with stereotypical images of local county-pride, Hutton painted a more complex picture of parish and county identities and resistance, referring to different social and economic preferences.

The third panel looked into records. JOHN CRAIG (Burnaby) described late Elizabethan London parish records as living documents which were read, re-read, and altered. They reveal details about the sense of a community and the lives lived within it and thus helped to imagine a community. A comparison between the scribes Robert Heaz and Thomas Harridance showed that writers had their own way of keeping records and adjusting to the community's needs, be it to manage growing numbers, pay tribute to loved ones or mark external events within a local context.

In the other contribution, STANISŁAW WITECKI (Kraków) examined priest's ego-documents in eighteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian parishes. In comparing techniques and the narratives in the diaries of

laymen and clergy, he delivered a thick description of clergymen's everyday life experiences. He singled out the sacred and the profane and used quantitative analysis to trace changes in the social roles of pastors over time, always with special regard to the politico-ecclesiastical context in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The fourth panel turned to the theme of revolution. Following Ann Hughes' work on parish returns in the Commonwealth Exchequer Papers and John Walter's studies on churchwardens' accounts, IAN ATHERTON (Keele) demonstrated that a detailed study of parish registers can lead to similarly rich results on Civil War memory in the localities. According to Atherton, parish registers did not only function as chronicles but also as repositories of personalised memories. They can reveal processes of negotiation and communal attempts to deal with trauma. His paper, furthermore, marked out different frames of time keeping used in parish registers, with one example being key events in the life of a community.

FIONA MCCALL (Oxford/Portsmouth) shared loyalists' memories of parish religious practice during the 1640s and 1650s recounted in letters written two generations later. She offered a glimpse into the memories of families and servants of the clergy who had resisted godly reforms to complement a history which, according to McCall, is still largely informed by a Whig perspective. She further described later political attempts to gather information from the localities and instrumentalise accounts of loyalists' experiences during the Interregnum to defend the state of the Church of England under Queen Anne and thus shape the historical consciousness of the nation.

IMOGEN PECK (Coventry) then argued that national and local veteran commemorations existed well before the nineteenth century. Her case study of St Botolph Aldgate in London showed that Civil War soldiers kept a sense of community long after the fighting had ceased. Peck analysed a conflict in the Parish of St Botolph where annual celebrations to mark the victory of the Battle of Newbury interfered with the politics of the parish, revealing the distinctive nature of lo-

cal war remembrance, which cannot be described as top-down and which reflected the particular military engagement organised at parish level.

The fifth and final panel explored environments. HANNAH REEVE (Newcastle) stressed that the custom of perambulations survived the appearance of maps and enclosures and continued well into the eighteenth and, in some cases, nineteenth centuries. This was due to the large social dimension and the multiple functions of ‘beating the bounds’ which ranged from solving legal disputes to the symbolical inclusion of homes on the very edges of the parish boundaries.

HÀIGHLEÀGH WINSLADE (Winchester) combined an archaeological and a historical approach to examine the embedding of churches within their surrounding landscapes in the weald and downland of South East England. She considered soil properties and access to resources, such as water, to explain the delineation of parishes and the placing of churches. In tracing connections between recusant Catholic families and their affiliation with parish churches across the borders of Hampshire and Sussex, she was able to show that parish communities could extend beyond county borders.

The symposium concluded with a comment by Nicola Whyte who reflected on the ‘prospective’, future-oriented exploration of the past and the complex dynamics of contestations as recurring themes, speaking of the ‘power of the past in the past’. Reminded of the fact that parishes were never fixed entities, she was particularly intrigued by the different layers explored throughout the days and the composition of parishes as both physical and imagined places.

The contributions complemented each other very well, and a rich variety of methodologies (e.g. material culture studies, historical anthropology, and archaeology) and sources (places, buildings, maps, letter, diaries etc.) enabled a fruitful and in-depth discussion. Several interventions pointed to the potential of a collaborative project on maps as seen throughout the conference. Such visual evidence illuminates period meanings of space and allows us to trace changes over time. One participant asked

whether the use of maps for perambulations became necessary once parish relations started to become too complicated to memorise; or whether it was merely us as historians who rely on documentary evidence. Are we placing too much importance on records as compared to orality? On the whole, the symposium highlighted the crucial role of parish communities in local memory, however, with the caveats that regional disparities need to be taken into account and that, in terms of the British Isles, more work needs to be done on the larger parishes with multiple chapelries in northern England.

The 19th symposium on ‘Parish Politics’ will take place on 15 May 2021.

### **Conference overview:**

Beat Kümin (University of Warwick): Introduction

Nicola Whyte (University of Exeter): Remembering the Parish Landscape

#### *Panel 1: Buildings*

Chair: Marjolein Schepers (Universities of Brussels/Ghent/Warwick)

Lydia Fisher (University of Exeter): Removed and rearranged: Recovering medieval stained glass from 19thC accounts

Michael Roth (CAU Kiel): Church foundation stones as time capsules in early modern European perspective

Michael Sewell (University of Essex): Use of siege ruins in Colchester in the long nineteenth century

#### *Panel 2: Communities*

Chair: Joe Chick (University of Warwick)

Mary Carrick (Independent, Wawne): A very peculiar parish: Wawne, also Waghen in Holderness, East Yorkshire

Alexander Hutton (King’s College London): Remembering and forgetting the English historic county since 1945

#### *Panel 3: Records*

Chair: Andrew Spicer (Brookes University, Oxford)

John Craig (Simon Fraser University, Burn-

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aby): Record keeping and remembrance in early modern London parishes

Stanisław Witecki (Jagiellonian University, Kraków): 'Recollections of 18thC everyday life in egodocuments of Polish-Lithuanian priests

*Panel 4: Revolution*

Chair: Andrew Foster (University of Kent)

Ian Atherton (University of Keele): Remembering the English Civil Wars in parish registers

Fiona McCall (University of Portsmouth): The wickedly wicked times: loyalist memories of the interregnum parish

Imogen Peck (University of Coventry): Veterans, commemorations and the politics of the parish in early modern England

*Panel 5: Environment*

Chair: Maria Tauber (University of Warwick)

Hannah Reeve (Newcastle University): Perambulation in Yorkshire: Boundary beating in the long eighteenth century

Hàighlèagh Winslade (University of Winchester): Parish churches in the downland and their connections to the landscape

Nicola Whyte: Comment

General Discussion and Outlook

Note:

[1] For further Symposium resources and general information on Parish Network activities please visit the Parish Network homepage at [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/myparish/parishsymposia/2020remembering/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/myparish/parishsymposia/2020remembering/)

Tagungsbericht *Remembering the Parish – Eighteenth Warwick Symposium on Parish Research*. 07.11.2020–07.11.2020, Coventry (online), in: H-Soz-Kult 17.12.2020.