

### **Parish, Power & Politics. Nineteenth Warwick Symposium on Parish Research**

**Veranstalter:** Beat Kümin, University of Warwick; Marjolein Schepers, Vrije Universiteit Brussel / IAS Warwick; Maria Tauber, University of Warwick; Daniel Gettings, University of Warwick; on behalf of the Warwick Network for Parish Research

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**Bericht von:** Daniel Gettings, Department of History, University of Warwick

This year's Parish Symposium marked the second virtual meeting of the research network in its 18-year existence. It was also the first time since 2003 that the event was motivated by weight of submissions to expand across two days. BEAT KÜMIN (Warwick) opened proceedings with his comments on the strong response to the call which, in addition to the Symposium's over 100 registered attendants, he suggested spoke to the dynamic nature of parish studies as a field. He then thanked all those who had agreed to participate, co-organize and help with running the conference.

The symposium's theme of „Parish, Power and Politics“ sought to move beyond social and religious aspects of the parish that are so often the focus of studies on this subject; to explore power relations both within parishes as well as between parishes and other localities. To facilitate this, the conference was divided into six panels which covered the topics of poor relief, strangers and locals, negotiations of community, patronage, people and politics and finally parish governance (see full programme below). Papers ranged in their chronology from the medieval period to the early twentieth century and speakers from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK came together to explore a number of distinct themes within the topic of parish politics.

The opening keynote address<sup>1</sup> by KEITH SNELL (Leicester) looked to explore the future for parish studies after the Covid-19 pandemic. He focused on the dichotomy of „extreme localism vs. globalism“ that Covid represents as a crisis on the world stage, the im-

pact of which (through various lockdowns) has been felt most strongly at the smallest levels of community. Drawing on his own experiences of the pandemic, his correspondence with other academics, news stories and his wealth of academic expertise, Snell's talk served as both a moving inspection of the vast array of social, cultural, and environmental consequences of Covid beyond its medical toll as well as how these consequences must be understood by parish historians of the future to better their research. Of particular significance were how new experiences of quarantine, of prohibition of religious services, of isolation and of loneliness must shape the perspectives of those writing histories of these topics in the future.

This report reviews the 24 papers under the four overarching themes of belonging, socio-political order, elite-parish relations and financial affairs. Firstly, geographic and emotional association with a parish through being born or living there, was the focus of several participants including ALICE BLACKWOOD (Oxford), GERMÁN JIMÉNEZ MONTES (Gronigen) and HANNAH REEVE (Newcastle). Blackwood's presentation explored rotation in parish office holding in Southwest England. Through an in depth, quantitative analysis of the records of churchwardens in particular, she demonstrated the centrality of tradition and location to the distribution of political authority in the early modern period. Holders of particular local properties each took turns in office and they were forced to resign if they spent extended periods outside the parish or failed to contribute to the common stock. Jiménez Montes' presentation on the construction of „foreign“ identity in sixteenth-century Seville made similar note of the importance of geographic locality. While Dutch traders were neither born in the city nor ethnically Spanish and so theoretically had no right to engage in business with the new world, the paper demonstrated that in fact citizenship in Seville was a far more fluid affair than previously assumed. By „becoming local“ through living in the city and acting as Castilian natives, these traders were able to integrate rel-

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQQjSuVKvVY> (01.12.2021).

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actively easily into local society through their physical presence. Reeve's presentation examined migration on a much smaller scale between the parishes of the city of York in the eighteenth century. Poor rates and churchwardens' accounts document a high turnover in parish populations, with individuals commonly moving for reasons of work or marriage, suggesting a highly flexible pattern of affiliation.

The papers of MICHELA BERTI (Pesaro) and EMILIE CORSWAREM (Liège), TAMARA SCHEER (Vienna/Rome) and MARK SCHMERBAUCH (Berlin/Frankfurt am Main) examined the confluence between parish belonging and national identity. Berti and Corswarem's work on music and the national churches of early modern Rome illustrated how these sites served both parochial and practical purposes as well as wider representative functions, as quasi-embassies of their respective nations. The complex exchange and interplay between Rome and these national cultures makes them congenial case studies of multiple identities. Scheer turned to the German Roman-Catholic parish in the same city around 1900. She provided clear examples of the complex space in which these sites operated, as the criteria for what was and wasn't German varied in line with changes in the nation state, as well as the disconnect between how the church was supposed to act in theory, and how it actually did in practice. She noted connections between this church and military history, links further explored in Schmerbauch's paper on the German military parish. He stressed the value to be gained for modern historians in utilising the military chaplaincy archive in Berlin to understand how military parishes could offer soldiers a sense of belonging and comfort when far from home on military service.

ANTHEA JONES (Cheltenham), STEPHEN KING (Nottingham Trent), ROBERT W. DANIEL (Warwick) and PRISCA M. GREENHOW (Leicester) all explored how an individual's „belonging“ to a particular parish could be negotiated for economic reasons. Jones focused on the „really poor“ through three sources relating to a Canterbury community to demonstrate that both a large number of

individuals received alms and that many were able to negotiate payment by the parish they ended up in rather than where they were born. King showed that in negotiating poor relief, applicants drew on their memories of a parish's internal workings to demonstrate their „embeddedness“ within a community and that they deserved money from a particular source. Daniel used the tireless work of Robert Wilson and his wife for seventeenth-century All Saints, Wandsworth, to show how the „labouring poor“ were able to gain a locality's respect and admiration. Greenhow, in turn, highlighted the concept of „deservingness“, through which various factors made an individual more or less eligible for relief at Mattishall in Norfolk.

KATHARINA SIMON (Marburg), RALPH HOULBROOKE (Reading), SAMANTHA WILLIAMS (Cambridge) and GABI WÜTHRICH (Zürich) presented papers on the relationship between parishes and the socio-political order, a second main theme of the symposium. Simon examined how early modern parish petitions represented a kind of „peace making from below“. As a method of communication in which all could take part, petitioning offers a social lens onto the formation of community consensus on who should be included or excluded from a parish. Houlbrooke sought to re-interpret the Swallowfield articles previously discussed by Patrick Collinson and others. Rather than as evidence of a „self-governing commonwealth“, Houlbrook read this unusual source as the product of strained social order within the village. Williams turned to the implementation of plague measures in seventeenth-century Cambridge. Using court records, she noted a high level of infringements and many refusals to pay fines, demonstrating severe resistance to increasing local government authority. Wüthrich explored public education during a famine in the Swiss city state of Zurich. The problems of confessional requirements, physical distance and exorbitant cost made schooling a controversial topic among the local population, while the support of local clergy enhanced its success. Taking us into the modern period, SARAH BOOTE POWELL (Warwick) and MARY O'CONNOR (Oxford) examined how

the parishes of nineteenth-century England acted as units for popular political organisation. Boote Powell examined how vestries of the 1830's enfranchised women, giving them an outlet for political contributions within local communities. Through payment of a fee, anyone in these parishes was able to participate in elections, redefining ideas on what constituted „the electorate“ and legitimising women's roles in politics decades before universal suffrage. O'Connor highlighted vestries as a source of political agitation for working class issues. The ability of rate payers to organise meetings, draw up petitions and debate issues of the day gave huge swathes of communities a previously underappreciated route to take part in politics.

The papers of CRISTÓVÃO MATA (Coimbra), LINDA ROBERTSON (Dundee), TOM BERVOETS (Brussels), SPIKE GIBBS (London School of Economics), EMMA MARSHALL (York) and MARIA TAUBER (Warwick) all reflected on the relationship between landowning elites and the parish, a third principal theme. Mata explored the use of the „Padrado“ privilege by the powerful Aveiro family of Portugal which allowed them to claim a large portion of tithes from parishes in their lands and act as their patrons. They made frequent use of this privilege until changes were made in the eighteenth century. Robertson examined similar issues in the English context. She showed that patrons held significant hidden political power in local communities; power which was of particular use to Catholic nobles who were excluded from much of English political life. Bervoets tackled the complex interactions and debates between parish priests, churchwardens and patrons in eighteenth-century Brabant. These tensions between spiritual and secular forces remind us of the parish's duality as both a religious as well as social unit. Gibbs sought to re-examine Keith Wrightson's „incorporation“ thesis through an examination of manorial office holding. He showed that rather than manorial power replacing parish power, the two worked side by side for much of the period with increasing popular participation in both and the same individuals appearing on both juries and as church-

wardens. Marshall's paper approached the topic from a healthcare perspective, examining the role of seventeenth-century elites in providing medical knowledge and care to local parishioners. Demonstrating an „inter-connected network of interdependency“, she showed that elite patronage did not exist in a social vacuum and elites felt an obligation to serve the communities over which they held power. Tauber, on the other hand, zoomed in on Mary Clarke, the wife of a Somerset MP well known for her manifold local initiatives around 1700. Challenging gender stereotypes, Mary showed great political acumen as she held meetings and acted as political liaison between her husband and parishioners.

Finally, ALAN MACDONALD (Dundee) and STEPHEN PIERPONT (University College London) and PETER M. SOLAR (Bruxelles/Oxford) presented work specifically on parish finance. The former presentation sought to provide a comprehensive introduction and overview into the complexities of Scottish tithing customs. He showed that, rather than a corrupt system in which manorial lords monopolized church *teinds* for their own gain, in fact there was a great deal of internal logic within parish financing though it was mostly controlled through tradition rather than written regulations. The latter presented early thoughts on the evolution of land tax administration through the seventeenth century. The paper looked to question how parishes were able to develop accurate revenue assessments for tax purposes, what the cost of such assessments would have been and whether the establishment of the land tax resulted in changes to the way in which the poor rate was assessed on a local level.

Taken together, the contributions displayed a vast array of methodologies, sources and historiographical inspirations, testifying to the breadth of parish studies. Surveying the event in a comment preceding the concluding discussion, JOHN CRAIG (Simon Fraser) was struck by both the range of subjects covered as well as the technically demanding and challenging nature of the papers presented. He commended the parish symposium as a particularly stimulating forum to present ongoing work. Welcoming emerging and senior academics as well as independent scholars in

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equal measure, it has the potential to attract new generations into a field exploring general themes in localized perspective.

### **Conference Overview:**

#### *Keynote Address*

Chair: Marjolein Schepers (VUB/IAS Warwick)

Keith Snell (Emeritus Professor of Rural and Cultural History, Leicester): Parishes, pandemics and paths to take: post-Covid historical options

#### *PANEL 1: Local Politics of Poor Relief*

Chair: Marjolein Schepers

Anthea Jones (Cheltenham): A grass-roots examination of the annals of the poor in one parish and one year

Steven King (Nottingham Trent): Remembering the parish and its ways: Memory as currency in the negotiation of poor relief

Samantha Williams (Cambridge): The „unruly infected“? Authority, order and the impact of plague on everyday life in Cambridge, 1625

Gabi Wüthrich (Zürich): From local to global: Public education and poor relief strategy during an early modern famine

#### *PANEL 2: Strangers & Locals*

Chair: Heather Falvey (Oxford)

Michela Berti (Pesaro) / Emilie Corswarem (Liège): Music and sense of belonging. Liturgical, musical and ceremonial practices of National Churches of Rome in the early modern period

Germán Jiménez Montes (Groningen): Foreign identity and categories of belonging in sixteenth-century Seville

Tamara Scheer (Vienna/Rome): Arbitrariness of exclusion and inclusion: The German Roman-Catholic parish in Rome and its politics of belonging (1859-1915)

Hannah Reeve (Newcastle): Migration and belonging in the long eighteenth century

Maik Schmerbauch (Berlin/Frankfurt a.M.): German military parishes as an important part of Catholic military welfare and public

defense policy

#### *PANEL 3: Negotiating Community*

Chair: Jeremy Boulton (Newcastle)

Alice Blackwood (Oxford): Residency and representation in the politics of the English parish, 1540-1660

Robert W. Daniel (Warwick): Parish poor and church labour in early seventeenth-century Wandsworth

Prisca M. Greenhow (Leicester): Who „truly belonged“ to the parish of Mattishall in Norfolk?

Katharina Simon (Marburg): In or out? - Negotiating belonging in early modern petitions

#### *PANEL 4: Patronage & Paternalism*

Chair: Andrew Foster (Kent)

Alan MacDonald (Dundee): Funding the cure of souls in Scotland's parishes c.1100-c.1620: Appropriation, Reformation and revocation

Cristóvão Mata (Coimbra): Seigneurial patronage and ecclesiastical prosopography: The padroado privilege of the House of Aveiro (16-18th Centuries)

Emma Marshall (York): The parochial politics of gentry healthcare practices in early modern England

Linda Robertson (Dundee): The post-Restoration exercise of power through ecclesiastical patronage in western Sussex

#### *PANEL 5: People & Politics*

Chair: Christopher Langley (Newman)

Sarah Boote Powell (Warwick): Petticoat parishioners: Female agency and parish polls in 1830s Coventry and Northampton

Mary O'Connor (Oxford): Parish vestries and popular politics in early nineteenth-century England

Maria Tauber (Warwick): Mary Clarke's „parliament of women“ – Representing the MP in the parish

#### *PANEL 6: Parish Governance*

Chair: Per Seesko (Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen)

Tom Bervoets (Brussel): Conflicting interests: The legal struggle for parish governance in ru-

ral Brabant, 1715-85

Spike Gibbs (LSE): State 'incorporation', parish and manor: Churchwardens and manorial officeholders at Worfield, 1327-1648

Ralph Houlbrooke (Reading): Trouble in Swallowfield

Stephen Pierpont (UCL) / Peter M. Solar (Bruxelles/Oxford): The poor rate, the land tax and the evolution of local tax administration during the seventeenth century

*Concluding Discussion and Outlook on ZOOM*

Comment by John Craig (Simon Fraser)

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