Chapter 1

Introduction

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The Speaker of the House of Commons had a difficult brief when he addressed James VI and I and the House of Lords at the prorogation of the new king’s first parliament on 7 July 1604. After a tetchy session, Sir Edward Phelips attempted to re-establish the rapport between the monarch and the Commons. Faced with this tricky assignment, Phelips began his speech with an unobjectionable platitude:

HISTORY, most high and mighty Sovereign, is truly approved to be the Treasure of Times past, the Light of Truth, the Memory of Life, the Guide and Image of Man’s present Estate, Pattern of Things to come, and the true Work-mistress of Experience, the Mother of Knowledge; for therein, as in a Crystal, there is not only presented unto our Views the Virtue, but the Vices; the Perfections, but the Defects; the Good, but the Evil; the Lives, but the Death, of all precedent Governors and Government, which held the Reins of this Imperial Regiment.¹

The king and most of Phelips’s audience doubtless recognised that he was quoting Cicero’s praise of history.² By then extolling the settled laws of kingdoms, Phelips encouraged James to respect the time-hallowed political arrangements of his new southern realm. England, he stated, ‘hath ever been managed with One Idea, or Form of Government’, a happy blend of princely, senatorial and magisterial virtues. Yet the session had demonstrated that history, far from illuminating truth, rather served or even exacerbated disagreements over the Union of the Crowns and over the king’s ancient prerogative rights of purveyance and wardship. The famous Apology, drafted by a Commons’ committee, went so far as to claim that the House’s privileges had been ‘more universally and dangerously impugned than ever (as we suppose) since the beginnings of Parliaments’.³ The Lords thought that the Commons were asking ‘more of the king than of any of his predecessors since before the conquest, no, not in the barons’ wars’ of the thirteenth century.⁴

How history was understood in early modern England therefore
underpinned parliamentary debates. This book contends that history did more than inform such deliberations: history also altered perceptions of parliament’s role in the polity, both among members and among those whom they represented. When contemporaries historicised parliament, it ceased to be a one-off ‘event’ and came instead to be regarded as an institution, a permanent presence in the body politic’s imaginary. This evolution helps to explain why parliament moved to centre stage in the English state by 1642. Therefore, the early modern parliament, we argue, must be understood through broader developments in historical thought and writing.

The essays in this book thus address the changing nature and increasing diversity of early modern historical writing. Scholarship on early modern historical practice has identified, and then contested, its supposedly revolutionary character. Modernising narratives of generic innovation, evidential refinement and greater accuracy have been asserted, but then critiqued. This modernising framework certainly does not do justice to the complexity and non-linear development of early modern historical thought. During our period, though, distinct modes of historical thinking and interpretation emerged which had practical implications for the ways that participants in parliaments interpreted events and that a wider public came to understand the assembly itself.

Meanwhile, the essays in this volume demonstrate that ‘parliamentary history’ itself was a product of the post-Reformation and pre-Revolutionary world. The narrative histories of classical and humanist writers, which provided the major historiographical models emulated by early modern authors, offered no obvious template for writing histories that took secular institutions as their object. The stimulus for the first systematic interrogation of, and writing about, parliament’s history was the potent dynamic of religious, political, intellectual and social change in post-Reformation England. The changing, and unchanging, character of history in this period therefore provides the context for our volume of essays, and this is where we begin. Thereafter the Introduction will relate contemporary approaches to the past to the growing historical consciousness within and about parliament and the historicised modes through which early modern authors chose to think and write about it. Taken together, these factors, we propose, explain parliament’s transformation.

As well as identifying his quotation, the audience hearing Phelips’s oration would have shared the Speaker’s vision of the significance of history in public life. Following the most ancient ruminations, early modern writers reiterated that the study of history offered moral education: as the anonymous preface to Henry Savile’s translation of Tacitus famously claimed, the res gestae of eminent individuals afforded readers exemplary ‘patternes either to follow or to flye,, [sic] of the best and worst men of all estates, cuntries, and times’. Since the classical period, though, history was also praised less as a tutor of morals but more as the unrivalled repository of prudentia, the practical wisdom derived from experience that was deemed essential for
establishing authentic political understanding. Contemporaries affirmed Polybius’s observation (already a cliché in the ancient world) that ‘History is in the truest sense an education, and a training for political life’. So Thomas Blundeville, author of the earliest English-language treatise on the purpose of history, *The True Order and Method of Writing and Reading Histories* (1574), recommended his subject-matter to the earl of Leicester ‘as well to direct your private actions, as to give Counsell lyke a most prudent Counseller in publyke causes, be it matters of warre, or peace’. 

In early modern England, would-be ‘prudent counsellors in public causes’ enthusiastically subscribed to these commonplaces. The papers of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, are strewn with extensive notes on historical sources about every conceivable matter of policy, including debates in parliament. Worrying over the unsettled succession during the session of 1566–67, Cecil made notes upon the civil war of the mid-twelfth century between Stephen and Matilda. He and other leading privy councillors also exploited the learning of clients and associates: the voluminous collections of Francis Walsingham’s brother-in-law Robert Beale – lawyer, diplomat and clerk of the privy council – were an armory of antiquarian advice on diplomatic and domestic politics and the Church. Another erstwhile servant of the inner regime was another brother-in-law of Walsingham, Thomas Norton. Poet, lawyer, pamphleteer, translator of Calvin’s *Institutes*, and remembrancer to the mayor of London, the polymath Norton also wrote the preface to Richard Grafton’s *Chronicle* of 1569. In the early 1580s, as he languished in the Tower (allegedly for speaking out against the queen’s proposed marriage to the duke of Anjou), Norton was commanded by Walsingham to compile compendia of historical notes on war, laws and rebellions.

The relationship between statesmen and scholars persisted under James VI and I. Henry Howard, earl of Northampton, the most highly educated of all noble privy councillors, consistently tapped historical experts for political counsel. The Catholic antiquarian Edmund Bolton presented the earl with a disparate range of antiquarian disquisitions on heraldry, royal finance and the problem of overpopulation. Bolton also exhibited particular concern to elevate and regulate both the production and the study of national narrative history, because of its peculiar relevance to governance. His treatise *Hypercritica, or a Rule of Judgement, for Writing or Reading our Histories* (composed between 1618 and 1621, but unpublished in his lifetime) urged future authors of English history to found their scholarship on thorough interrogation of archival materials. Closer, though, was Northampton’s relationship with the greatest archivist of the age, Sir Robert Cotton, whose collections from the Anglo-Saxon to the Tudor past rivalled anything that the crown held, and formed the basis of his advice to Howard on an exhaustive range of state affairs, such as peace with Spain in 1604, the treatment of Catholics in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, the dire straits of royal finances, and the reform of the system of noble honours.
The ambitions of these historically minded counsellors support the thesis advanced in Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine’s famous essay ‘How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy’: that an understanding of history was deemed an advantageous skill to the aspirant public servant, one which could be continually developed by a gentleman well beyond formal education at grammar school, university or inn of court. Fulke Greville, another gentleman with great prospects, was advised by a weighty mentor – perhaps the earl of Essex, perhaps Francis Bacon – to employ a university scholar to ‘gather’ for him ‘Epitomes’ from the most important ancient and modern writers in order to advance his political career. Nor was appreciation of the value of history limited to those fixed on advancement at court. As studies of Sir John Newdigate and Sir William Drake have shown, gentry bearing important local office and possessing social prestige pursued rigorous regimes of self-improving study, mining histories to enhance their understanding of their own political world and their capacity to govern it wisely.

These members of the elite pursued a variety of occupations in central and local government, as councillors, courtiers, administrators, diplomats, soldiers, lawyers and magistrates; another career open to members of the educated gentry was, of course, the Church. These were also the varieties of ‘public men’ who comprised parliament’s membership. When gathered together in the two Houses, the nobility, gentry, senior clergy and urban elites viewed themselves not so much as legislators but ever more as counsellors in the largest advisory body to the monarch, with an active duty to offer informed opinion on the greatest matters of state. As well as serving the privy council, Thomas Norton and Robert Beale were also prominent MPs, embroiled in the greatest parliamentary controversies of their day: the question of the Elizabethan succession and the reform of the ecclesiastical laws. Norton – ‘the great parliament man’, as his son defined him – was one of the foremost orators in the Elizabethan Commons: his speeches in the parliament of 1572 are notorious for their sense of patriotic Protestant duty, as he urged the necessity of the execution of the duke of Norfolk and Mary, queen of Scots.

Cotton, too, enjoyed an extensive career in the Jacobean and Caroline parliaments. A ‘known Antiquary’, as he was described in the Commons Journal of 1607, Cotton was an authority on parliamentary precedents. His library, which he would move next door to the Commons in 1622, was already a much-frequented resource for statesmen, scholars, parliamentarians and government officers. Cotton’s collections provided the historical weight behind efforts to impeach the duke of Buckingham and compose the Petition of Right, but also to bolster the king’s finances and identify dormant royal prerogatives. In November 1629, a matter of months after the acrimonious dissolution of parliament, Charles I took the decision to close the library for good.

By the early seventeenth century, then, serious history had become essen-
tial to the political education of members of parliament. Much education in history, though, occurred outside of formal institutions, at the initiative of the individual, while the history taught in grammar schools and in the universities – the latter beyond the formal curriculum – was exclusively classical. The chairs founded at Oxford (1622) and Cambridge (1628) were in ancient history, and the first incumbents lectured on Florus and Tacitus respectively. The lack of history in the university curriculum was recognised to be a serious deficiency: around 1602, Cotton proposed the establishment of an ‘Academy for the study of Antiquities and History’ in order to educate the nobility for public service. In 1617, Cotton’s friend Bolton rekindled these proposals for an ‘Academ Roial’, also dedicated to the study of history, antiquities and literature. As well as overseeing the regulation of all non-theological printed literature, this academy would produce an official chronicle of Great Britain, essential to the nurturing of Bolton’s great historical project: the writing of a ‘Corpus rerum Anglicarum’, a definitive history of England to compare with Livy’s history of Rome.

The recognition given to historical training reflected a long-term transformation in elite identity. Literacy, civic virtue, humanism and cosmopolitanism were increasingly esteemed. At least half of MPs in the early seventeenth century had studied at Oxford or Cambridge and well over half at an inn of court or of chancery. Many had also undertaken continental travel, for the study of other states, societies and languages was regarded as a complementary practical political education (as well as being more appealing to some than the discipline of the university curriculum). So widely recognised was the learning found among parliament’s members that the institution itself gained a reputation as a great ‘university’ or ‘school’: a place to which different types of expertise were brought, but also one at which understanding would develop and knowledge be acquired. Parliament provided a masterclass in rhetoric and in practical, savvy and hence historically inflected argumentation. This learning shaped parliament’s external reputation, but also contributed to a consciousness among members of their being experts in governance. In particular, ever-deeper learning in the law enabled members to realise the potential inherent in parliament’s status as the highest court in the land in the 1620s.

Scholars have abandoned disputes about whether or not the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a ‘revolution’ in historical writing, yet they remain largely in agreement that vital transformations in historical thought and practice occurred across early modern Europe. The most significant of these developments – derived from humanists’ dual interest in classical literary forms and the practical application of learning and knowledge – was simply a rapidly growing consciousness of the nature, as well as the value, of history. The inclination to theorise the character of historical writing and research in the sixteenth century resulted in a new breed of abstract treatises.
on the *ars historica* (the historical art), which set out to categorise genres of historical writing and to prescribe the method proper both to its authorship and composition and/or its study and utility.\(^{27}\) In the *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (Method for the easy comprehension of histories) of 1566, Jean Bodin, the most famous such theorist, argued that the best sorts of history were written by public figures of the greatest practical experience: ‘those very able by nature, and even more richly endowed by training, who have advanced to the control of affairs’.\(^{28}\)

While not pioneers of the *ars historica*, English scholars were well acquainted with the most important specimens. Bodin’s dizzying account of how the correct method would facilitate comprehension of the universal laws governing human societies was widely read and admired in England by the 1580s. For all the fun that Philip Sidney poked at ‘The historian ... laden with old mouse-eaten records’ in his *Defence of Poetry* (1580∑1582), his private instructions for historical study to his brother Robert contained the advice to digest carefully and profitably the ‘Method of writing Historie [which] Boden hath written at large’.\(^{29}\) Blundeville’s *Order* – which sketchily addressed both the ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ of histories – was not an original work, but in fact an abridgement of some of the less innovative sections of the Italian philosopher Francesco Patrizi’s *Ten Dialogues of History* (1560) and of a manuscript treatise of Jacopo Aconcio, the exiled Italian theologian and engineer (which, like Blundeville’s synthesis, had been dedicated to Leicester).

English authors also produced original guides to the reading and writing of history. In 1623, Degory Wheare, Oxford’s first professor of history, published the popular manual *De ratio et methodo legendi historias dissertatio* (Dissertation on the reason and method of reading histories), which emphasised the pedagogic value of history for both moral and practical instruction, and classified and epitomised major works of ancient and modern history for future readers.\(^{30}\) Edmund Bolton’s *Hypercritica*, which aimed to educate aspiring authors of English history, naturally focused on establishing rules for the composition, rather than reception and study, of historical texts. Bolton was rare amongst the theorists of the *ars historica* in being a practitioner of, as well as a commentator upon, historical writing: his Roman history, *Nero Caeser, or Monarchy Depraved* (1624) was innovative in method – making use of coins and inscriptions – and arresting in its argument for strong kingship. Perversely, Bolton intended his lurid narration of the extreme ‘prophanations, blasphemies, & scandals of tyrannous excesses’ of Nero’s reign to evince the superiority of ‘sacred monarckie’: that Rome endured despite such tyranny was ‘the wonder which no other forme of gouernement could performe’.\(^{31}\)

The writer who came closest to Bodin’s ideal of the politician-historian was possibly Francis Bacon. Bacon’s public career encompassed considerable service in parliament, in the lower and the upper Houses: in 1610, acting as an official spokesman for the Jacobean government as solicitor-general, Bacon
reminded the Commons that ‘I was a parliament man when I was but 17 years old.’ Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and its expanded Latin edition, *De dignitate et augmentis scienpticarum* (1623), contained within his attempt to classify human knowledge perhaps the most sophisticated English account of a theory of historical writing. The ‘Dignity and Authority’ of ‘Civile History’, wrote Bacon, were the foundation of ‘Civile Prudence’. Bacon’s own great work of history, however, was composed when his political and parliamentary career was over. *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, written in October 1622, had originally been conceived as an appeal to King James to save him from impeachment in the parliament of 1621. In a bitter irony, historical research contributed to Bacon’s fall, for James had taken advice on the revival of the ‘ancient’ process of impeachment from Sir Robert Cotton.

To the classical and Renaissance world, histories were in their most fundamental sense a literary form, namely a narration of public deeds. The categories of historical writing defined by the authors of the *ars historica* were usually divided along lines of genre rather than subject, albeit ones which bore an increasingly complex and imperfect resemblance to contemporary practice. Most abstract theorists split the history of human experience (as opposed to sacred or natural history) into two subdivisions – ‘civil’ or ‘political’ history and ‘ecclesiastical’ history – and expended greater energy addressing the former. Bacon maintained that subject-matter and genre were intrinsically linked. Within civil history, ‘PARFITE Historie’ was comprised of three themes – ‘a TIME, or a PERSON, or an ACTION’ – each with a corresponding literary form: ‘The first we call CHRONICLES, The second LIVES, and the third NARRATIONS, or RELATIONS’. Most important for our subject is Bacon’s impeccably traditional understanding of the narrow range of the historian’s subject: where an assembly or an institution such as parliament would fit was unclear.

Bacon’s schematised division did describe some prominent varieties of Tudor and early Stuart historical writing. Despite the sneering of Bacon’s contemporaries, the chronicle tradition – those ‘vast vulgar Tomes’ of Edmund Bolton’s memorable phrase – experienced an Indian summer of popularity in the sixteenth century, as the printing press disseminated chronicles old and new to a far larger audience than even the most widely copied manuscripts could have reached. One of the first works to emerge from Caxton’s press was John of Trevisa’s translation of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon* (1480). Mid-Elizabethan MPs could read printed editions of Matthew Paris’s *Historia major* (1570) and Thomas Walsingham’s *Historia brevis* (1574), which had been steered through the press by the archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. As record of conflicts between crown and papacy, these chronicles provided Parker’s ideological bulwark for the royal supremacy. Scott Lucas’s and Ian Archer’s essays below explore the two most innovative English chronicles of the sixteenth century, Edward Hall’s *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York* (1548,
1550) and the largest English work of collaborative writing of the age, Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland (1577, 1587).

The chronicles may have added little that was new to historical thought or method. They were, however, one of the most important sources for the historical education of the English public. In his essay, Ian Archer suggests that MPs were more likely to cite historical precedent from legal sources rather than from narrative histories. Yet even Sir Edward Coke – a legal purist when it came to historical sources – was criticised during the parliament of 1621 for ‘his Hollinshed learning’. Hall’s Union was a source for parliamentary oratory in Elizabeth’s reign. Henry VIII’s speech of 1528 about the necessity of providing an heir was quoted during the succession debates, while the Reformation Parliament appealed to those advocating further change in the Church. The story of Bishop Fisher’s objection to the bills against clerical abuses was used in Elizabethan parliaments to define the limits of free speech, but in early Stuart ones to assert the Commons’ right to censure the behaviour of individual members of the Lords.

Other varieties of historical writing, more recognisably humanist than the chronicle, also bore only an approximate relation to the genres defined in Bacon’s tripartite classification. Polydore Vergil’s Anglica historia (1534), the subject of Paul Cavill’s essay, has the temporal range of a chronicle, being a narrative account of English history from the earliest records to the reign of Henry VIII. Otherwise, Vergil’s work was characteristic of the civic humanist histories of his Italian homeland: the taut Latin prose of the narrative was tidily divided into books structured around regnal divisions, each of which emphasised a particular political theme. As David Womersley has argued, the Anglica historia also evinced a more ambivalent relationship with providentialism than that displayed by most chroniclers, underplaying the governing hand of God over human affairs. When borrowing from Vergil for his continuation of the Chronicle of John Hardyng (1543), Richard Grafton imposed a clearer eschatological framework that reflected his evangelical priorities.

In inclining to emphasise the human, rather than the divine, movers of events, Vergil anticipated the emergence of another species of historical writing: the politic history (a recent, rather than contemporary, coinage) was distinguished less by literary form than by its dispassionately analytical approach to political events. Modern scholars have made much of the emerging mentality of readers and writers who viewed causation in terms not of the irresistible hand of God or of fortune or even of the virtuous qualities and deficiencies of individuals, but rather of the murkier, morally compromised world of human intentions, where appraising the ethical qualities of historical agents mattered less than probing the motivation and consequences of their actions.

Instead of creating a new genre, politic history accentuated an aspect of classical historiography. As Kevin Sharpe and Noah Millstone have argued, the
histories English gentlemen devoured to develop their burgeoning education in statecraft were at first instance the ancient historians, above all Tacitus, but also Sallust, Polybius and Thucydides, which they read alongside continental works in the same vein, most significantly those of Francesco Guicciardini, Niccolò Machiavelli and Philippe de Commines. The continuing interest in ancient sources for politic history persisted into the seventeenth century. When the keeper of the Vatican Library, the Jesuit Nicholas Alemannus, published the newly discovered manuscript of the Byzantine writer Procopius’s *Secret History* in 1623, readers across Europe were scandalised by this lurid exposé of the depravity of Justinian’s court. The civil lawyer Thomas Ryves rushed into print a defence of this Christian emperor and great codifier of the Roman law.

As well as reading histories to equip them as ‘statists’, English authors began haltingly to write their own politic accounts of the national past. Inspired by the recent discovery of the first six books of Tacitus’s *Annals*, Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III* (c.1515) was a brilliant early forerunner, and Bacon’s *History of the Reign of King Henry VII* – a ‘Life’ within his own schema for ‘perfect history’ – a mature masterpiece. English writers and audiences, however, viewed politic history as a form of counsel to rulers, rather than as secular analysis of historical causation for its own sake. This was slick new packaging for the traditional ‘mirrors for princes’, seen in works such as *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), where the ghosts of statesmen past exhorted living rulers to better courses. Bacon’s Henry VII – which created the enduring legend of the bureaucratic, frugal and independent king – was an acute contrast to James VI and I, with his extravagance, lazy preference for delegation and reliance on courtiers (who had ruined Bacon’s career). Cotton’s *Short View of the Long Life and Reign of Henry III* (1614, 1627) offered a different cautionary tale to James and then to his son: advice on how a weak king, imperilled by his fondness for wicked favourites, might regain his regal dignity by re-establishing authority over the ancient landed nobility, the rightful ruling elites.

The analogical habits of thought of the politic historian sit uneasily with the alleged sense of historical development supposedly ushered in by the Renaissance ‘invention’ of periodisation: the division of the past into classical, medieval or middle, and contemporary ages. In fact, this purported awareness of historical change was mainly confined to philology. Both a great scholar and a leading parliamentarian from the later 1620s, John Selden stands out: the first English scholar to use the term *medium aevum* (translating it as ‘the middle ages’), Selden conceived of English law, society and custom as constantly evolving, rather than as being static. But an understanding of anachronism is difficult to detect in the period’s narrative histories as opposed to its antiquarian scholarship, in the spate of politic lives of medieval kings, and in the parallels drawn between Roman emperors and modern-day rulers.
Jason Peacey’s essay explores the afterlife of the infamous English example of politic history, the civil lawyer John Hayward’s *First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV*. Published in 1599 with a notorious dedication to the earl of Essex, this work earned its protesting author a spell in the Tower for perceived comparisons drawn between the misgovernment of Richard II and Elizabeth I. As Bacon observed, most of Hayward’s text was ‘stolen’ from recent English translations of Tacitus’s *Histories* and *Annals*. Hayward thus re-clothed ancient Romans in the garb of late medieval kings and magnates so as to speak to the concerns of the Elizabethan present.\(^{49}\) In 1642, Hayward’s history took on another guise when it was republished with Cotton’s *Henry III*, a Plutarchian pairing of differently unfortunate and weak kings. Hayward’s recent ‘narration’, derived in part from an ancient Roman text and offering politic counsel from medieval history to rulers in the very recent past, had a rejuvenated application to the burgeoning crisis of the nation. Thus the persistent perception of the didactic utility of history acted as a brake on conceptual advance towards any ‘modern’ sense of temporal change.

Nearly all politic histories orientated their subject-matter around individual rulers, ostensibly recording the deeds and major events of the reigns of kingly protagonists. In the hands of Elizabethan and early Stuart writers, though, parliament featured with increasing prominence in these new narrations of English political history. In Bacon’s *Henry VII*, parliament is an Eltonian institution, summoned and controlled by the crown, with the purpose of legitimising the king’s new title and enhancing his authority over his subjects. In Hayward’s *Henry IV*, by contrast, it is the forum for opposition to the monarch: the parliamentary context of Richard’s deposition and Henry’s election is clearly established, raising the incendiary contemporary question about the role of representative institutions in making and unmaking kings. For Cotton, parliament under Henry III is a political arena to be manipulated and exploited to serve the private ends of individuals and interest groups. In forcing the king to summon parliament, his factious and ambitious barons ‘as little meant to releue the King as they did to acquiet the State, their ende at that time beeing onely to open at home the pouerty of their Maister, to lessen his reputation abroad, and to braue out their owne passions freely, whilst those times of liberty permit’.\(^{50}\) The growing and reflective treatment of parliament within politic histories of English kings foreshadowed its emergence as a historical protagonist in its own right.

The one impersonal institution, of course, which could appeal to an ancient canonical tradition of historical writing was the Church. Ecclesiastical or ‘sacred’ history was usually treated in Bacon’s terms as a form distinct from history about secular affairs, the province of the clerical rather than the lay historian, and subject to generic conventions established by the early Christian writer Eusebius rather than Thucydides, Livy or Tacitus. These
distinctions were obviously troublesome to authors of civil or politic history writing in the age of Reformed Christianity, and particularly in England, where the temporal prince claimed to be the supreme head or governor of the Church. As William Camden wrote in the preface to his own work of politic history, the *Annals of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (1615), ‘although I am not ignorant that matters of warre, and matters of Policy, are things most proper to history: yet Ecclesiastical matters I neither could nor indeed ought to omit: (for betweene Religion and the Common-wealth there can be no separation.’

Despite Camden’s concerns about generic purity, ecclesiastical history experienced a golden era in the sixteenth century, where it became a powerful weapon in the arsenal of Reformation controversialists. To counter the Catholic charge of uprooting and creating the Church anew, Protestants channelled enormous energy into devising their own legitimating histories of the visible Church. The monumental collaborative achievement of the *Ecclesiastica historia* (1559), known as the ‘Magdeburg Centuries’, inspired the great English Protestant example of the genre: John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (1563) twinned an apocalyptic narrative of deepening papal tyranny over the institutional Church with the persecution of the community of true believers from the earliest days of Christianity to the present.

English Catholics – in the vanguard of attacks on Protestant historical thought – were also editors and authors of histories of British religion that equalled the scope, variety and innovation of the works of their Protestant counterparts. The first general Catholic history of the English Church, Nicholas Harpsfield’s *Historia Anglicana ecclesiastica*, circulated widely in manuscript from its composition around 1570 until its publication in 1622. A direct riposte to the *Acts and Monuments*, the work pitted the ascent of the medieval English Church under papal allegiance against the rise of Wycliffite heresies. Catholics also poured scorn on the historical scholarship of their Protestant adversaries in ways that prompted greater engagement with documentary evidence in corroboration of their claims. Thus, Reformation and Counter-Reformation historians engaged with their sources in an ostensibly more critical manner than did the authors of politic or civil history. Following Eusebius, ecclesiastical histories tended to include documents – the literal ‘acts and monuments’ of Foxe’s history.

In response to Harpsfield’s devastating assault on the errors in the first edition of the *Acts and Monuments* of 1563, Foxe responded by loading the massively expanded new edition of 1570 – the first to be entitled ‘the Ecclesiastical history’ – with law-codes, printed and unprinted chronicles, letters, speeches and materials extracted from the parliament rolls. The editorial method of Reformation historians, however, was always shaped by a confessional agenda, rather than by a concern for correct understanding in its own right. For Harpsfield and Foxe, controversies surrounding the accuracy of historical sources were a form of confessional point-scoring. Thus the
reader of the Acts and Monuments, expecting to encounter the tragic history of the persecuted flock, will also be confronted with much – heavily edited – material pertaining to the political and legal history of England and Europe and to the affairs of princes and nobles as well as of martyrs. As Alexandra Gajda’s essay shows, Foxe’s interest in describing anticlerical legislation that foreshadowed the parliamentary reformation of the sixteenth century makes the Acts and Monuments also a significant repository of contemporary thought about the relationship between Church, crown and parliament.

The Acts and Monuments were also a vital spur to the imagination of the period’s dramatists, including Shakespeare. This connection reminds us of a further form of historical writing that bears an uncomfortable relationship with contemporary divisions into genres. In his Aristotelian treatise on literary form, the Defence of Poetry, Philip Sidney defined history and ‘poesy’ (imaginative literature) as separate species of writing. For Bacon, a similar distinction pertained: while envisaging a discrete history of literary achievement being written, he nevertheless regarded poetry and history as distinct entities, the first belonging to the imagination and the second to memory. In his private advice on historical education to his brother, though, Sidney was less sure about erecting a formal boundary between history and imaginative literature. The historian might need to impose the fictive method of the poet to portray moralising lessons persuasively: ‘the Historian makes himselfe a discouerser for profite and an Orator, yea Poet sometimes for Ornament.’

The strict divisions between history and fiction were, of course, splendidly flouted by numerous early modern poets and dramatists. As writers drew on the growing stock of printed chronicles and histories, the later Elizabethan era became one of the great ages of historical literature. A breed of poet-historians such as Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton and William Warner turned their pens to the versifying of English history. The English chronicle play blazed fiercely in the 1590s, before fizzling out at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Too many dangerous associations had been evoked by Essex’s Rising of 1601, when a performance of a play covering Richard II’s deposition (possibly Shakespeare’s) had been commissioned by the earl’s supporters at the Globe Theatre on the eve of his rebellion.

Episodes from the nation’s past dramatising political crises, wars and even deaths of English monarchs, performed in public playhouses, were the most socially heterogeneous form of historical education of all. Drama and poetry about English or British history also engaged directly with contemporary politics, reimagining the past to explore the anxieties of the present (entirely legitimate, of course, in terms of the didactic ‘truths’ of human behaviour that history was meant to perpetuate and elucidate). Paulina Kewes’s essay demonstrates the extent to which ideas about the methods of designating an heir to the throne – parliamentary and elective vis-à-vis blood right – were a central theme of Gorboduc, the famous tragedy of 1561. Written by Thomas Sackville and the parliamentarian Thomas Norton, Gorboduc was set in a
mythical Britain and prophesied the catastrophes that would befall a realm with an uncertain line of succession. Overall, though, the period’s drama, if not its poetry, tended to eschew direct comment on political or constitutional ideas. History plays predominantly explored the vicissitudes of politics from the perspective of the moral agency of participants: explicit representation of the institution of parliament was usually shunned by contemporary playwrights. As Peter Lake has recently argued, the most celebrated depiction of parliament in ‘Jaco-bethan’ drama – the allegedly censored deposition scene from Shakespeare’s Richard II – in fact, did not set the action in parliament at all.60 Parliament received greater attention in some of the period’s poetic history. In the work of Samuel Daniel, a poet uncommonly concerned with the relationship between imaginative literature and history, parliament featured prominently. Of Henry IV’s assumption of the throne, Daniel remarked on parliament’s complaisance, adding it ‘was the powre that stood him best in steed’.61

The political engagement of English poets and dramatists reminds us that much contemporary polemic was conducted through historical argument, and that histories could be propagandistic as well as didactic texts. Peter Lake’s recent study of the pamphlet wars waged by the Elizabethan Protestant regime and its Catholic opponents shows both sides to have been engaged in the construction of ‘secret histories’ and libels.62 Catholic and Protestant polemic provided mirrored explanations of how the schism in the Church had come about, with both sides traducing their opponents’ behaviour as amoral and secular. In these confessional exchanges, we can see the application of the moralising framework of politica history not merely to the court and to the actions of princes and their servants but also to the Church. The most direct attack on English Protestantism came in 1585 with Nicholas Sander and Edward Rishton’s account of the creation of the royal supremacy, De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani (Of the origin and progress of the English schism). In lurid cartoon-strips, this work depicted the Break with Rome as the appalling outcome of the depravity and greed for absolute power over the Church of the Tudor monarchs and their evil servants, and of the moral failure of the majority of the political and religious community to withstand them. It was nothing short of a politic history of the English Reformation.

Writing the recent history of the English Reformation also necessitated a focus on the formal mechanism through which the Church had been transformed, namely the passage of religious legislation by the Tudor monarchs in parliament. For Catholics like Sander and Rishton, the ‘parliament faith’ of the reformed Church of England therefore directed their polemic at undermining the legitimacy, independence and morality of such ‘human and secular assemblies which [unlike church councils] have not received from God the promise of the spirit of truth, judgment, and justice’.63 The proceedings of these parliaments were also, then, the subject for politic analysis. The
Protestant inversion of this narrative was constructed too. Where Sander and Rishton had to explain the noxious corruption of Elizabeth’s own ‘Reformation Parliament’, Foxe had to explain the enactment in earlier medieval and Tudor parliaments of laws persecuting true belief. Both accounts came up with the same explanation – evil counsel – but applied it to different parliaments. Thus, in these works of religious history, as in their secular counterparts, parliaments became once more a subject for politic analysis, if not yet the primary subject of a politic history.

However varied these many types of writing now seem to be, contemporaries identified such literary accounts or narratives of human affairs as ‘history’ in contrast to another sort of endeavour: the preservation of and writing about ‘antiquities’, the textual and material remains of the past, and the study and categorisation of impersonal entities, particularly laws, customs and institutions. The distinction was also elucidated in the *ars historica*. Antiquarianism, in Bacon’s formulation, was the ‘defaced’ negative to ‘PARFITE HISTORIES’, the salvage of ‘the shipwrack of time’: antiquarian scholars preserved the ‘Remnants of History … when industrious persons by an exact and scrupulous diligence and observation, out of Monuments, Names, Words, Prouerbes, Traditions, Private Records, and Evidences, Fragments of stories, Passages of Bookes, that concerneth not storie, and the like, doe saue and recouer somewhat from the deluge of time’. For all Bacon’s dismissive language, antiquarian scholarship experienced an upsurge in practice and popularity at least as intensive as developments in the formal writing and theorising of history.

The combined dynamic of humanism and religious reform was the catalyst for pioneering scholarship. Forerunners of the Elizabethan antiquarians, John Leland and John Bale approached the recently dissolved monasteries as archival treasure-troves, teeming with the evidence through which to reconstruct the nation’s religious past. By the 1570s, antiquarian research had become formally embedded in the scholarly culture, with the publication of the first topographical and chorographical accounts of the English localities, beginning with William Lambarde’s *Perambulation of Kent* (1576). And around 1586 – the year when William Camden published the first edition of *Britannia*, his celebrated choreography of the whole of the British Isles – a community of leading scholars had established themselves as an institution for antiquarian study. The College or Society of Antiquaries met weekly or fortnightly during legal terms in order to present papers on the customs, institutions, laws, offices and physical remains of the nation. The Society’s membership of around forty known individuals included most of the leading antiquarian writers and collectors – Camden himself, Sir Robert Cotton, Robert Beale, William Fleetwood, William Lambarde, Arthur Agarde, Sir John Doddrige, Francis Thynne – that is, heralds, lawyers and statesmen, educated largely in the universities and inns of court.
As with distinctions between poesy and history and between civil and ecclesiastical histories, the boundaries between antiquarian and historical writing were porous. Several members of the Society of Antiquaries also composed narrative histories, Cotton being an obvious example. The most celebrated practitioner of both disciplines was, of course, Camden, whose *Britannia* was highly esteemed across the European republic of letters, and whose *Annals of the Reign of Elizabeth I* is the greatest politic history of the period before 1642. Camden certainly conceived the works as different types of project: *Britannia* was a topographical account, describing each region’s antiquities, customs and physical remains; the *Annals*, which took Tacitus and Polybius as its stylistic (if not syntactical) models, a chronological narrative of political events. The latter was founded, however, on the shoulders of antiquarian study – immersion in original documents: Camden flaunted his archival labours in his famous preface, detailing the ‘Charters and Letters patents of Kings and great personages, letters, consultations in the Councell Chamber, Embassadours Instructions, and Epistles, I carefully turned over and over. The Parliametarie Diaries, Actes, and Statutes, I ranne thorow, and read over every Edict or Proclamation.’ So authoritative was the *Annals* believed to be that in parliament in 1626 it would be preferred over the testimony of the Elizabethan Lords Journal.

Antiquarians were predominantly interested in ancient laws, procedures and institutions, political and religious, which established and restricted the operation of political power. And it was therefore as antiquaries, rather than as historiographers, that contemporaries first approached the history of parliament. The significance of antiquarian scholarship for the emergence of ‘parliamentary history’ in its modern sense lies in the interest antiquaries afforded parliament as a subject of scholarly investigation in its own right, well in advance of the earliest specific narrative histories of parliament being written. If chronicles and narrative histories, medieval and early modern, had regularly – if summarily – mentioned parliament as a feature of the political events that they described, it was in the antiquarian study of the Elizabethan period onwards that systematic scholarly examinations of parliament’s origins and evolution were made. These examinations formed part of a much-wider enquiry into the roots of many other courts, customs, institutions, protocols and ranks. When combined with a historiography increasingly devoted to deciphering political motivations and thoughts, however, this research produced the peculiarly combustible historicised sensibility so characteristic of the early Stuart parliaments.

The career of the common lawyer, county magistrate and pioneering scholar William Lambarde exemplifies the intersection of antiquarian enquiry with parliamentary history. With the encouragement of Archbishop Parker’s circle, Lambarde researched Anglo-Saxon history while serving as an MP in the 1560s. His collection of Old English laws (the *Archaionomia* of 1568) became England’s earliest statute-book; it provided a source for
parliamentary debates from the 1570s onwards. Following the publication of the *Perambulation of Kent* and of a guide for fellow justices of the peace, Lambarde wrote a manual on the procedures and privileges of the House of Commons that would (tellingly) be printed in 1641. Lambarde’s last major work was a historical study, completed in 1591, of England’s high courts of justice that reaffirmed the deep-rooted foundations of the rule of the law. *Archeion* placed the origins of parliament – the highest such court – in the early middle ages, an instinct that his prior recovery of Anglo-Saxon law-codes must have consolidated. This tract circulated widely in manuscript, before being printed in 1635. Historical literateness, lawyerliness and public life were thus inextricably linked for Lambarde and for fellow members of the Society of Antiquaries.

Moreover, in January 1601, Lambarde was appointed keeper of records in the Tower of London. He quickly prepared a catalogue of the historical materials now in his custody, which he presented to the queen in August (occasioning Elizabeth’s famous self-comparison to Richard II) and died weeks later. This final spurt of antiquarian activity reflected a parallel development. Antiquarian and historical study flourished alongside a growth in formalised record keeping by individuals and institutions at local and national levels. The availability of monastic lands from the 1530s, the rise in litigation from the mid-century and the expanding ambitions and demands of government (from shire militias to poor relief) necessitated the multiplication and reorganisation of public archives; at the same time, local elites developed a corresponding concern to preserve the records of family, town and county.

The need felt by Leland and Bale’s successors to conserve the documentary remains of the national past may have stimulated a greater commitment to the preservation of the records of present-day government. As Nicholas Popper has shown, the establishment of the State Paper Office in 1578 reflected this duty to archive public records. The office was created at the same time as individual councillors and statesmen such as William Cecil and Francis Walsingham were hiving off their own vast repositories of official papers for private keeping. These twin processes converged in Cotton’s library, which doubled as a private collection and a public repository. Archival endeavours, whether on national, civic or corporate scales, also encouraged literary production. John Hooker collected and sorted the archives of Exeter and wrote an account of the city. He also produced in 1572 the first updated manual of parliamentary procedure (a version of which would appear in the second edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*). Hooker included an English translation of the *Modus tenendi parliamentum* (c.1320s), still the standard guide to parliament’s workings, of which there would be no fewer than six copies in Cotton’s library.

Changing ideas about archives affected the ways in which parliament’s own records were compiled, accessed and consulted. Transitions ‘from memory to written record’ perhaps have taken place in most periods of
English history: certainly, they occurred in the sixteenth century. A good deal of parliamentary lore must have rested on oral tradition. William Fleetwood’s ‘I remember’ became a well-known gambit among Elizabethan MPs. His reminiscing (not universally admired) blended personal memory with historical learning into a singular form of didactic recollection. The very spot in St Stephen’s Chapel where in 1584 the traitor Dr William Parry had made his outburst against anti-Catholic legislation was pointed out in a Commons’ debate seventeen years later. This corporate memory – sustained through continuities of membership and clerical service – presumably explains why the need to replace the Modus tenendi parliamentum as a guide to procedure was not felt sooner. The procedural manuals written under Elizabeth by Hooker and Lambarde therefore attest to a burgeoning desire to register current conventions and hence to locate in time parliamentary protocol.

Parliamentary records themselves also became better preserved in our period and diversified in form as well. Three types of record can be distinguished: the formal, retrospective record of sessions, the parliament rolls; the progressive accounts of daily business in the two Houses, the Lords Journals and the Commons Journals; and private accounts of members, principally diaries but also individual speeches and documents. Examining each type in turn allows us to trace how parliament became a historical subject. These records became more prominent within parliamentary proceedings, thereby changing the way in which political questions were debated. So it was that in the parliament of 1624 John Selden could authorise himself to contribute to the debate, despite ‘being so young a Parliament-man’, because ‘he has been no stranger to the journals of either House’.

The survival, extent and content of these records partly results from the fact that at some point in the sixteenth century something like a parliamentary archive came into being. Although the idea that this had been created as early as 1497 seems to be an institutional fiction, by the end of the sixteenth century both Houses possessed their own record depositories. To this day, parliamentary bills (‘ancient petitions’) up to 1483 are to be found in the National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office and heir to chancery), but ones from 1497 (‘original acts’) are held in the Parliamentary Archives (formerly the House of Lords Record Office). This separation presumably reflected a decision by the clerks to retain intermediate documentation of the legislative process that was written up in its final form on the parliament rolls. Over the sixteenth century, the clerks thus distanced themselves from chancery and started behaving more like independent functionaries.

The great early seventeenth-century clerks, Robert Bowyer and his successor Henry Elsynge, not only recorded current sessions but also took a professional and personal interest in past ones. Bowyer copied and excerpted the Tudor Lords Journals, while Elsynge imitated fourteenth-century parliament rolls in his own productions. Elsynge also began writing his own updated Modus tenendi parliamentum. Concurrently with their position as
clerks, the two men jointly exercised the keepership of the records in the Tower. Guides to the government’s archive directed searchers towards parliamentary material held there. The man who perhaps may be called the first historian of the early modern parliament, Sir Simonds D’Ewes, dated his historical epiphany to a trip to the Tower after lunch on 4 September 1623. The Tower came to be conceived as a pre-eminent resource, distinct from Westminster and Whitehall, for early Stuart politicians seeking evidence for the privileges of the crown and the liberties of the subject.

Of our three types of parliamentary record, only the parliament rolls continued from the medieval period. The older (pre-Tudor) rolls were held in the Tower, while contemporary ones remained in the Rolls Chapel in chancery. The parliament rolls had long been consulted for specific purposes, primarily by those seeking to obtain an exemplification (a certified copy) of a private act. The historicising of parliament grew in part out of seeing such records as sources. What were preserved and consulted as matters of legal fact came to be seen additionally as evidence about the past. Henry Stafford desired to know whether his father, the duke of Buckingham, had been attainted in 1523, but discovered material that he put to use in A Mirror for Magistrates. As we have noted, John Foxe made use of parliament rolls in order to write a Protestant version of medieval English ecclesiastical history. The rolls thus became a historical source, such that Cotton would have a multiple-volume transcript prepared for his library.

It was presumably by searching the parliament rolls that an act, passed in 1372 but not contained in statute-books, was rediscovered that had granted the king’s subjects a right of access to governmental records. Such access proved crucial for the early Stuart parliament, as it enabled members to research the rights of the subject and the ancient limits set on monarchical prerogatives. In 1610, the group of MPs so tasked reported that ‘we find, by our long travail and search of records in the Tower and in other places ... that impositions, so laid upon the subject by the king without the free consent of the Commons in parliament, are no lawful impositions’. A day was ordered at which the sources brought to light would be read in English, rather than in French or Latin, so that MPs ‘of the meanest capacity and learning’ might understand and take notes of them. This appeal to ‘the record’ associated parliamentary proceedings with the adversarial model of legal pleading. It may therefore have fostered an oppositional mentality, of ‘the King and us’.

Our second type of source, the Journals – the clerks’ records of daily proceedings in the Lords and in the Commons – appear for the first time in this period. We cannot be sure when the first Journals were compiled. Fragments of proceedings in the Lords in the mid-fifteenth century anticipate the first surviving Journal of the upper House from 1510; revealingly, it was around the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that those fragments were transcribed from records that have since vanished. The earliest extant Commons Journal dates from 1547, but scholars remain undecided
about whether it was then an innovation. The nature of the Journals was changing: from being the private notes of the clerks tracking the progress of bills (a complex task in a bicameral legislature), the Journals were becoming the House’s own record of its deliberations.96

The elevation in the early seventeenth century of the Journals into semi-official records led to a concern about what they should include and omit and how they might be misused (including by the crown). Hence in 1607 a Commons’ committee was appointed to review the contents of the House’s Journal from the beginning of James’s reign.97 Such records thus gradually came to form part of what Paul Seaward in his essay treats as the ‘institutional memory’ of parliament. An assiduous note-taker, Robert Bowyer envisaged the clerk’s role as to sift out what was ‘fit to be registered and left to posterity to record’ in the Journals.98 A sense that parliament should curate its own archive was developing.

Moreover, the early modern parliament became the site not only for the production but also for the dissemination of texts: in a sense, it became its own historian. The rule that parliamentary affairs should be kept secret was more honoured in the breach than in the observance: indeed, sometimes we know of its being reaffirmed thanks to a private diarist!99 As a hypothesis it could be suggested that, over our period, restrictions on the dissemination of parliamentary affairs tended to move from a blanket ban towards the prohibition of discussion (inside as well as outside parliament) of particularly sensitive subjects such as the royal succession. Cardinal Wolsey took umbrage that no sooner was a matter broached in parliament than it ‘was immediatly blowne abroad in euery Alehouse’.100 The clerical officers of parliament connived in the circulation of proceedings in defiance of their oath.101 These proceedings were the raw materials from which history could be written. In 1629, D’Ewes began work on a critical edition of the Journals of Elizabeth’s parliaments, wherein he found ‘Incomparable Historical matters’.102

It was not only official records that expanded, diversified and circulated in this period: private records of proceedings kept by members also proliferated. Personal diaries, our third type of source, transformed how parliaments were written about, divulged and remembered. We should not set great store by the neat fact that the first extant diary was composed in 1485 by the burgesses of Colchester, for a gulf separates this laconic account from the diaries that survive from the 1570s onwards.103 These became increasingly interested in the very debates (as exercises in rhetoric as well as for their substantive argumentation) that the Colchester burgesses had passed over. The anonymity of the earliest Elizabethan diarists perhaps reflects the roots of the practice in the law-reporting of the inns of court; even in the 1620s, notes of parliamentary proceedings were still being taken in law French.104

Diaries were composed with the intention of preserving proceedings for posterity. Hayward Townshend, the great diarist of Elizabeth’s last two parliaments, self-consciously described his own role in the Commons.
Unwarranted in a truly private memorial, this insertion of oneself into events fitted reportage intended for a wider readership, which Townshend’s diaries gained through manuscript circulation in the early seventeenth century. Diaries and speeches were polished, cross-checked and written up in order to make them good literature. In 1625, although not yet an MP himself, D’Ewes advised Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston ‘how to frame a journal’ of the last parliament. Diaries were being written to be shared, not only with acquaintances but also with wider reading circles.

The textual materials available to modern scholars working on parliament thus drastically expand between 1485 and 1642: a student of Henry VII’s parliaments has to cope with no speeches, whereas one working on Charles I’s has to decide how to collate multiple versions of the same speech (and, sometimes, to worry whether it was delivered at all). This difference resulted only partly from the vagaries of archival survival: it also reflected decisions (taken with a diminishing sense of any impropriety) to memorialise, disseminate and distribute parliamentary proceedings. Cheap print, networks of scribes and an emerging news industry made that development possible, but did not make it necessary. Diaries, newsletters and ‘separates’ (one-off parliamentary productions) came to be dispersed and read as memorials of what occurred – in effect as proto-histories. They thus anticipated by two or three decades the circulation of privileged information about parliament through the medium of print during the Civil Wars.

The scribal productions of early seventeenth-century parliaments continued to be copied and read long after their sessions had ceased being news. By the end of the 1620s, serial newsletters were being produced to meet demand for up-to-date reports on parliamentary affairs while the session was still in progress. But these reports were no longer ephemeral: they were treated as the first draft of history, as dispatches to be pored over, collated and re-examined in the light of subsequent events, and hence they survive in remarkable numbers. The newsletters and separates emanating from the session of 1629 were woven together into a single ‘True relation of all the proceedings in parliament’ by scribes. As Chris Kyle has observed, the tide of paper leaving the early Stuart parliament had come to outstrip that entering it through lobbying and petitioning.

Parliamentary sources were thus creating contemporary history: how people read these texts deserves consideration. Some did so with a hermeneutic already honed by their study of history – in particular, with ears pricked for what Tacitus termed the *arcana imperii* (mysteries of power). Sir William Drake ranked the Journals alongside the works of Commynes, Guicciardini and Machiavelli as histories worthy of study. Such readers drew on politic history to interpret what lay beneath the surface of events, a technique Drake then applied in taking notes on the history unfolding before him in the Long Parliament. Though politic history was anyway in vogue, the manner in which parliamentary knowledge percolated through society lent itself
to such an approach: extensive, but imperfect, information circulating in semi-legitimate, covert forms through social networks favoured a technique of joining up the dots. Readers became (what Noah Millstone has termed) ‘historians of the present’, parsing current affairs primed by past patterns. As Millstone’s essay shows, Sir John Eliot drew inspiration from Paolo Sarpi’s *History of the Council of Trent* (1619) for his history-cum-memoir of the parliament of 1625. Though ‘too narrow’ for a conventional history, parliament was perfectly suited to a politic history. Thomas May’s authorised *History* of the Long Parliament (1647) would prove a culmination, both personally for the writer (whose original historical interests had been ancient and then medieval) and collectively (through the envisaging historically of an assembly that was still in session). Here was a classical-republican history of the immediate past. Taking Lucan as its model, May’s depiction of the origins, outbreak and course of the Civil Wars made parliament, rather than an individual human actor, its principal protagonist.

That the Tudor and early Stuart parliament changed significantly seems beyond question. How, when and why it did have been a great – maybe even the greatest – subject of English historiographical controversy ever since the Civil Wars. A volume that addresses early modern attitudes to parliament is also engaged in dialogue with the present state of the field. Although the History of Parliament Trust continues to produce original research of remarkable quality and depth, wider parliamentary history appears becalmed. The divisions that formerly raged have now subsided. The labels ‘Whig’ and ‘revisionist’, and even ‘post-revisionist’, no longer command adherents: ‘The Civil War is over’, a one-time participant declared in 2002. Several binary choices, once contentious, no longer seem imperative. Parliament was an institution and an event. Legislation and the giving of counsel both mattered: the tension between them concerned a lack of time. Parliament bridged centre and locality: debates, petitions and legislation amplified the specific, forcing generalisation. The gentry had patrons and yet exercised independent judgement: they instinctively looked upwards, but were not ciphers. Categories of MP based on a model of government and opposition, such as ‘Puritan choir’ or ‘man of business’, have fallen from favour. ‘Court’ and ‘country’ were transient identifications, invested with meaning, yet not ideological fixtures: today’s ‘opposition’ spokesman would be preferred as tomorrow’s royal councillor. Conflict and consensus thus coexisted.

Within this complex discursive universe, the notion of the ‘ancient constitution’ may now appear too prescriptive. As set out in an influential study by J. G. A. Pocock in 1957, the ancient constitution comprised the belief that the common law of England – the warp and weft of the body politic – was not only of great antiquity but also of an immutable character. Unaltered by the Norman Conquest, this reified custom sustained itself independently of the monarchy. Because it was modelled on Sir Edward Coke, Pocock’s concept...
seemed indelibly associated with parliamentary opposition in the 1620s: it was the ideology of the Petition of Right. Subsequent refinements of Pocock’s study have undermined the ideological singularity of the ancient constitution. In particular, the mental world of the early Stuart period could not be divided between those who recognised the transformations wrought in 1066 and those who denied them. Hence, as Paul Cavill’s essay suggests, belief in Anglo-Saxon parliaments did not translate into a particular political outlook. Within a worldview that took the antiquity of the established order for granted, Coke’s contribution was to specify what precisely (he thought) the ancient constitution was. For Coke, Magna Carta was the quintessence of the ancient constitution. As Sir John Baker has recently shown, Coke’s elevation of Magna Carta into the chief guarantor of the liberties of the subject was the consummation of the increasingly historical approach to constitutional issues taken by later sixteenth-century common lawyers.

Coke’s ancient constitution was a thing of great clarity (and, of course, of considerable contemporary relevance), but possibly also one of improbable fixity. One effect of the growth in historical research was that the ancient constitution became an object of enquiry, as well as of reverence. Deeper historical research tended to rebut the sort of certainty that Coke represented and to undermine the bases of his interpretation. The authenticity of the supposedly eleventh-century Modus tenendi parliamentum, the principal prop for Coke since his reference to it in parliament in 1593, was doubted. Hence any attempt to make concrete the ancient constitution sowed the seeds of doubt, a point that Pocock himself emphasised (albeit chiefly by looking ahead to the Tory historians of the Restoration). The common-law case for the king could be just as compelling. The crown’s controversial claim to levy impositions on non-customed goods was arguably an ancient common-law right dating from the time when ‘parliaments were not so stirring’. It was, however, this implication that led the MP Heneage Finch to reject the attribution by ‘ignorant chroniclers’ of parliament’s beginnings to the twelfth century.

Yet this political system did break down. Recent scholarship has tended to emphasise the 1620s as the tipping point, the moment when the trust on which mutual understandings were based became seriously (perhaps irreparably) compromised. In a corporate way, over this decade parliament embraced the publication of its affairs, shifting the old presumption of blanket secrecy to one of selective openness. What bothered MPs in 1626 was that a scrivener was selling a copy of their remonstrance before it had been presented to the king. The sheer volume of material being produced, its extended reach, above all, the greater interactivity between the assembly and those it represented disrupted the rhythm of parliamentary business. The impression is given of an accelerating political process which ran away from the crown’s control. Like Sir John Eliot, Conrad Russell’s preferred metaphor for parliament was a mirror that reflected problems that arose elsewhere; but, like glass, parliament intensified problems too – it could even start a fire.
Introduction

An enlarged historical consciousness helped to make parliament much more central to politics in the 1620s than it had been a half-century earlier. A sense of an interrelationship to the past became constitutive of a ‘parliamentarian sensibility’. MPs and peers came to envisage their roles in terms of a mythologised continuum that stretched back over centuries and to articulate this heightened awareness in ways that altered their conduct in parliaments. The revival of parliament as a judicial body in 1621 is the obvious illustration. The import of the word ‘revival’ needs stressing: this was a historically driven process, dependent on rediscovering and exercising dormant powers. As Simon Healy’s essay notes, where precedent was lacking, then the Houses were stymied, for they could not see themselves as going any further than had their forebears: ‘Innovations in Parliament [were] most dangerous’, Coke opined. Bicameral impeachment alongside a first-instance and appellate jurisdiction for the Lords emerged as the most historically legitimate forms of judicature. Even if we pinpoint this decade as the moment when political goodwill evaporated and the crown ceased to enjoy the benefit of the doubt, the need to identify the longer-term shifts in mentality that culminated in this transformation persists.

References to the past abounded in parliaments long before the 1620s. This is hardly surprising: applying the lessons of experience was presumably as old as political deliberation itself. Each major political controversy of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – over the royal supremacy, the succession, the Union of the Crowns, prerogative income – involved an argument about how (a particular, and sometimes newly uncovered, vision of) the past dictated to the present. Allusions in Elizabethan parliaments encompassed the legendary adoption of Christianity under King Lucius, the laws of the Heptarchy and of the first kings of England, the wars of succession in the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, and the Break with Rome. European history from ancient to near-contemporary times was also cited extensively, if not always appositely: in 1563, the Lords commended to the twenty-nine-year-old queen the example of a royal nun who had waited till she was aged fifty to marry! In 1610, Robert Cecil urged that the Great Contract be evaluated ‘non ad similitudinem, sed ad rationem [not by resemblance, but by reason]’. Yet this proffered grand bargain spurred MPs to seek precedents. Salisbury’s plea thus proved unavailing because the reasonableness of any practice tended to be intuited from its longevity. Rationality was authenticated through history. What may have been a relatively recent development in 1610, however, was a strong sense of history as the usages and rules (‘precedents’) of the past.

Each major constitutional controversy concerned parliament’s competency: what parliament was and should do emerged from discovering what it had (supposedly) done. The greatest stimulus to historical thinking since the Conquest, the Reformation energised the conceiving of parliament in
temporal terms. As members of the Elizabethan establishment processed the Catholic allegation that they had erected a ‘parliament faith’, some turned to the ancient past to show that English religion had always been one. As Alexandra Gajda’s essay reveals, debate over parliament’s antiquity therefore followed in the slipstream of the vigorous polemical exchanges about England’s ecclesiastical history. The phrase ‘ancient constitution’ may, in fact, be a coinage of the new Church’s Catholic opponents, who contended that recent parliaments had ridden roughshod over long-standing conventions in the polity. One of the very earliest usages of this phrase occurred within the ‘Challenge Controversy’ of the 1560s: specifically, in Thomas Harding’s defence of the ‘auncient constitution of the [Catholic] church’ against John Jewel. Other MPs believed in the legislative parity of the Commons and therefore assumed it to be ancient, until in 1581 the maverick MP (and suspected papist) Arthur Hall showed the lower House to be ‘a newe persone in [the] trinitye’. The undefined status of the Tudor union of crown-in-parliament rendered appeals to history mandatory, because in the past the rules under which this hybrid entity operated could be discerned. As Paulina Kewes’s essay discusses, history tended to demonstrate how unattractive, unworkable or simply inappropriate were continental alternatives to hereditary parliamentary monarchy, which made it all the more important to establish what these rules were.

The humanist, cosmopolitan, text-based and historically literate culture of the governing elite stimulated new ways of conceiving of the English state. In the session of 1571, an anonymous MP, possibly the diarist himself, opposed a proposal to repeal the old statutes that required burgesses to reside in the constituencies they represented. He did so on the grounds that the Commons was amply supplied with well-read and well-travelled members who ‘can tell you howe the crowne of Fraunce is delivered out of wardshippe’; what the House needed more of were members whose knowledge of the far north and deep south of England was personal rather than cartographical. History, our speaker implied, seems to have served as a form of vicarious experience by which to demonstrate political prudence, a theme that should be very familiar from this introduction. But the sorts of knowledge that these MPs were supposedly garnering from their historical reading and foreign travel is revealing: to the French example (taken from Comynnes), our speaker added others – from Castile, Portugal, Denmark, Germany and Italy – all disclosing the mutability of polities and several suggesting the waning fortune of representative institutions. It seems to have been through inspecting the sad history of continental assemblies, especially their decline in the face of growing monarchical power, that a heightened consciousness of the contingent character of the English parliament arose. If contemporaries did not yet write histories of parliament in a modern diachronic sense, it was in part because – thankfully – they did not yet need to.

This speech was not the only allusion to the French crown’s deliverance
out of wardship made in this session. In a defence of royal prerogatives, Sir Humphrey Gilbert presented the French, Danish and Portuguese examples as a warning to the Commons not to contend with the crown’s authority, lest ‘subjectes thereby rather [be] made slaves’. The classical and seigneurial topos of the changing constitution – of free citizens and subjects becoming slaves and tenants-at-will, serfs or villeins – has been tracked from the early seventeenth century. Here, in a speech which (the diarist remarked) ‘was many wayes disliked’, this mythology was prefigured. Alongside it, however, persisted the notion that the infrequent meeting of parliament was the subject’s desideratum: the lord keeper’s opening address (scripted by Burghley) in 1593 made that point. Warfare, heavy expenditure and hence high taxation sustained this assumption; peace, prerogative finance and the dissolutions-in-anger of James’s first three parliaments suppressed it.

Greater awareness of precedents for regular meetings turned the possibility of a ‘personal rule’ imitative of continental monarchy into a reality by demonstrating that, ominously, early Stuart kings were indeed consulting parliament less often than their predecessors had. The 1610s and 1620s thus engendered histories of parliament, creating antecedent ‘personal rules’ where none had been perceived at the time. ‘Wee are the last monarchy in Christendome’, noted Sir Robert Phelips in 1625, ‘that retayne our originall rightes and constitutions’. Parliament’s very survival seemed in doubt: ‘This is the crisis of parliaments, by this [decision whether to vote supply] we shall know whether parliaments will live or die’, warned Sir Benjamin Rudyard three years later. Fears for the future led to behaviour that gave monarchs cause to doubt the value or wisdom of summoning parliaments: they thus proved self-fulfilling.

These anxieties confront us with the gulf that separates contemporary understanding of the early modern parliament from our own. Whereas contemporaries moved from a static sense of parliament to worrying about its decline, we think of parliament’s rise on multiple counts: legal authority, legislative busyness, physical size, geographical inclusiveness, electoral participation, political influence and public prominence. Conrad Russell’s exceptional emphasis on parliament’s decreasing ability actually to get things done – its inability to satisfy petitioners or to grant sufficient supply, its ‘evasion’ of responsibility for policy failures – admits a very large, almost self-cancelling, exception: ‘The one conspicuous success of Parliaments during this period was their success in getting themselves recognized as “the representative of the people”.’ Moreover, much of parliament’s inefficiency – as with other law courts – was the result of its popularity.

What must strike us is how little attention this aggrandisement attracted at the time, because perhaps parliament’s primary role in contemporary eyes – the giving of counsel – changed least. The principle of the Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533) that nothing new was occurring applied throughout our period. Parliament rose through a kind of constitutional ‘slippage’, whereby
powers exercised in it became powers belonging to it. A historical cast of mind could turn every high watermark into a benchmark from which the present parliament was always in danger of retreating. Hence, to Peter Wentworth, freedom of speech was ‘no innovacion, but rather a renovacion, or rather the seeking of a continuacion of the decayed castile [castle].’ A wider adoption of Wentworth’s perspective in the early seventeenth century provoked the crown’s counter-apprehension of a slide towards a ‘popular state’ that would leave a king of England exercising no greater authority than a doge of Venice. Both views drew on the idea that mixed polities, being inherently unstable, tended to mutate, as one element came to preponderate.

History acquired even greater resonance in the crisis of 1640 onwards, as Jason Peacey’s essay shows. Two years in, the joint edition of Cotton’s Henry III and Hayward’s Henry IV repeated Cicero’s commendation of history as ‘the light of truth’. The history lessons for 1642, however, were opaque. What might a reader have made of Cotton’s comment that ‘the Commons to whom dayes present seeme ever worst, commend the foregone ages they never remembred, and condemne the present, though they knew neither the disease thereof, nor the remedy’? Here history-as-counsel confronted its own limitations, frustrating contemporary application. This slyly perceptive remark from the most influential figure in early Stuart historical activity reminds us that recourse to the past was intended to solve problems, not to aggravate them. Nevertheless an increasingly historical perspective seems critical both to the creation and then to the disintegration of the post-Reformation polity.

In Paul Seaward’s phrase, a ‘faintly mythologised and only vaguely conceptualised body’ became a ‘much more concrete historical entity’. To that sense we might add transformations in the ways political information was exchanged that made parliament into the best-documented and most attention-garnering institution in the land, a worthy subject of historical narration: a textual Behemoth being born. Surveying the resulting parliamentary miscarriages of the 1620s, Sir Henry Spelman diagnosed how:

When States are departed from their original Constitution, and that original by tract of time worn out of memory; the succeeding Ages viewing what is past by the present, conceive the former to have been like to that they live in, and framing thereupon erroneous propositions, do likewise make thereon erroneous inferences and Conclusions.

Without a self-confidence and legitimacy that was to some measure grounded in credible antiquity, parliament could never have rivalled in extremis the office of king as an acceptable locus of authority in 1642.

Both history and parliament changed significantly during the Tudor and early Stuart periods, but without undergoing paradigm shifts. More history was written, in new forms, under different impetuses; demand from readers grew. In terms of historical method, however, there was no revolution: no
modernising trajectory that automatically entailed greater accuracy or better scrutiny of evidence. While developing in many ways, parliament still looked the same and proceeded similarly in 1485 and in 1642. We struggle to pinpoint a decisive moment of transformation. This collection, however, proposes more than a resemblance between its two subjects. It argues that the early modern parliament – its ways of working, its values, its meanings – was ever more a historical conception, and that this resulted from the endeavours of administrators, antiquarians, archivists, bureaucrats, clerks, lawyers, letter-writers, librarians, poets, scribes and statesmen, many of whom were also parliamentarians. The histories of parliament undertaken in our period were thus not ‘literature’ in the present sense of an artistic response, but rather a deepening investment by participants. This collection therefore reaffirms the importance of parliament for studying the relationship between early modern literature and politics.147

Over our period, parliament became the essential part of the English state. It did so because the mores, sentiments and values of those whom it represented changed. Parliament’s status as the one occasion at which the whole realm was present (in person or by proxy) came to matter more. Studies of representation in figurative and metaphorical senses should complement this primary meaning of embodied comprehensiveness.148 But parliament shaped, as well as reflected, cultural and intellectual developments: the constitutionalist mode of thinking so dominant at the end of our period grew in considerable measure out of the interaction of history, law and politics in, around and about parliament. The collection thus restates the crucial role of institutions for the study of political culture and thought. Modern scholars’ aversion to examining institutions in and of themselves seems, to us, as time-bound as the Victorians’ much-criticised enthusiasm for constitutional history. Approaching the early modern parliament through its historical consciousness restores archiving, bureaucracy and governance to the reconstitution of mentalities. Institutional politics became a domain of imagination and creativity too. Here may lie our revolution.

NOTES

We are very grateful to Susan Brigden, Peter Ghosh, Peter Lake, Malcolm Smuts, George Southcombe, Grant Tapsell and Blair Worden for commenting on drafts of this introduction.

2 Cicero, De oratore, II.36.
5 See, in particular, F. S. Fussner, The Historical Revolution: English Historical


7 Polybius, Historiái, 1.1.2. 8 Thomas Blundeville, The True Order and Methode of Wryting and Reading Hystories (1574), sig. A2r.

9 Procs 1558–81, pp. 164–5; Popper, Walter Ralegh’s History, p. 62.


17 R. Cust, ‘Reading for magistracy: the mental world of Sir John Newdigate’,

18 CJ, I, pp. 226, 659.
26 See n. 5 above.
30 J. H. M. Salmon, ‘Precept, example, and truth: Degory Wheare and the *ars historica*’, in Kelley and Sacks (eds), *Historical Imagination*, pp. 11–36.
32 *Procs 1610*, II, p. 111.

34 Sharpe, Cotton, pp. 166–7; S. Handley, ‘Cotton, Sir Robert Bruce, first baronet (1571–1631)’, ODNB.

35 Bacon, Advancement of Learning, ed. Kiernan, p. 66.


39 Procs 1558–81, pp. 137–8; Procs 1593–1601, p. 78.

40 Procs 1558–81, pp. 359–60; CJ, I, pp. 496–8, 883.


54 Alan Cope [i.e. Nicholas Harpsfield], Dialogi sex contra summi pontificatus, monasticae vitae, sanctorum, sacrarum imaginum oppugnatores, et pseudomatares (Antwerp, 1566). The work also attacked the ‘Magdeburg Centuries’ and Protestant writings by Johann Sleidan, John Bale, John Jewel and Jean Crespin. See E. Evenden and T. S. Freeman, Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of John Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’ (Cambridge, 2011), ch. 5.


57 Bacon, Advancement of Learning, ed. Kiernan, p. 62.


64 Bacon, Advancement of Learning, ed. Kiernan, pp. 65–6.


70 Proc 1538–81, 1, pp. 275–6.


78 *Procs 1584–89*, pp. 109–10, 122, 125.


80 *Procs 1624*, entry for 19 March.


82 Of the two terms, only ‘original act’ was contemporary: E. R. Foster, *The Painful Labour of Mr. Elsyng* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Soc., new ser., 62/8, 1972), p. 34; G. Dodd, ‘Parliamentary petitions? The origins and provenance of the “ancient petitions” (SC 8) in the National Archives’, in W. M. Ormrod, Dodd and A. Musson (eds), *Medieval Petitions: Grievance and Grace* (York, 2009), pp. 14–28. In 1593, the clerk of the parliaments was accused of delaying enrolment so that people were forced to consult the ‘original acts’ instead: *Procs 1593–1601*, p. 148.
84 Procs 1610, I, pp. xxi–xxx; Foster, Painful Labour, pp. 6–8, 29–32, 35–45.
87 Hence the Petition of Right was ‘no scroll to be lost at Whitehall or elsewhere, but a record fit for the Tower’: CD 1628, III, p. 630.
88 Agarde, Repertorie of Records, p. 5; Powell, Direction for Search, p. 16.
90 See Chapter 4.
93 Procs 1610, II, pp. 74, 118, 365, 372–3, 409 (emending ‘travel’ to ‘travail’).
94 CD 1628, II, p. 176.
98 Procs 1610, I, p. xxvi.
101 Ironically, Bowyer’s oath prefaced the transcript of the Journals of Henry VIII and Edward VI’s reigns that entered Cotton’s collection: CD 1629, p. xxiii; Tite, ‘Cotton library’, p. 135; Foster, Painful Labour, p. 12 and n. 34.
102 Simonds D’Ewes, The Journals of All the Parliaments during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth (London, 1682), sig. A1r.
103 The diary was copied into a borough register: The Red Paper Book of Colchester, ed. W. G. Benham (Colchester, 1904), pp. 60–4.
104 HOP HOC 1604–29, IV, p. 597; VI, pp. 303, 747.
107 Kyle, Theater of State, ch. 3.
Hence the technical debate between modern scholars about how to quote from diaries, reviewed in Parliamentary Debates in 1610, ed. S. R. Gardiner (CS, 1st ser., 81, 1862), pp. 153–4.


CD 1629, intro., chs 2–4; Millstone, Manuscript Circulation, pp. 103–4, 231–3; Kyle, Theater of State, ch. 4.

Sharpe, Reading Revolutions, pp. 87, 115, 125–6, 158–63; Millstone, Manuscript Circulation, pp. 165–6, 178–84.

Procs 1625, p. 489; Millstone, Manuscript Circulation, ch. 6.

Compare the work’s title and its professed subject: Thomas May, The History of the Parliament of England, which began November the third, MDCXL (1647), sig. A3v: ‘The Subject of this work is a Civill War.’


The development was anticipated – and perhaps can be explained – by the growth of case law over the sixteenth century: J. Baker, ‘English law and the Renaissance’, in his Collected Papers on English Legal History (3 vols, Cambridge, 2013), III, pp. 1460–77. See also Chapter 7.
131 Thomas Harding, A Confituation of a Booke Intituled An Apologie of the Church of England (Antwerp, 1565), fo. 74r. We are grateful to George Artley for drawing this point to our attention. See further Chapter 4.
132 Procs 1593–1601, p. 408.
137 The king described himself as having ‘broken the neck of three parliaments’: Procs 1624, entries for 25 March and 15 April.
140 HOP HOC 1604–29, VI, p. 112.
142 Cromartie, Constitutionalist Revolution, p. 56.
143 Procs 1584–89, p. 328.
145 Robert Cotton and John Hayward, The Histories of the Lives and Raignes of Henry the Third, and Henry the Fourth (1642), sigs A4v–A5r, C6r.
148 Interestingly explored in O. Arnold, The Third Citizen: Shakespeare’s Theater and the Early Modern House of Commons (Baltimore, MD, 2007), intro. and pt 1, although the work’s emphasis on the exclusive character of parliament’s representativeness may need revising in the light of subsequent scholarship.