Renovating the Sacred
Renovating the Sacred:

*Faith Communities and the Re-formation of the English Parish Church*

By

Irena Tina Marie Larking
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOI</td>
<td>Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoE</td>
<td>Church of England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Churchwardens’ Accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEBO</td>
<td>Early English Books Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE</td>
<td>Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Norfolk Archaeology or Miscellaneous Tracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRO</td>
<td>Norfolk Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMR</td>
<td>National Monuments Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Statutes of the Realm</td>
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<td>Suffolk Record Office</td>
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<td>TRP</td>
<td>Tudor Royal Proclamations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transc.</td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAI-R</td>
<td>Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAI-S</td>
<td>Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Stuart Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP</td>
<td>Bishop Redman’s Visitations 1597</td>
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A NOTE ON DATES FOR CHURCHWARDENS’ ACCOUNTS

The calendar year for churchwardens’ accounts will be taken as from March to March and will be shown as a split year, e.g. 1566/7, in order to account for the months of January and February.
Map 1.2: County of Suffolk, showing the parishes included in this study. – Long Melford, Buxford, Cratfield and Metfield. Source: William Camden, Britannia, 2, (1610), between 458-9.
CHAPTER ONE

SILVER, TIMBER, AND LINEN:
CONSTRUCTING A MATERIAL CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

Let us know always that this was a world, and not a void infinite of grey haze, with phantasms swimming in it. These old ... walls, I say were not peopled with phantasms; but with men of flesh and blood, made altogether as we are. Had thou and I then been, who knows but we ourselves had taken refuge from an evil time, and fled to dwell here.

—Thomas Carlyle

The year is 1529/30 and it is Easter Sunday. William Coo, a clothmaker from Boxford, Suffolk, is about to do what he has always done. He goes to his parish church and witnesses the miracle of the Mass, where bread and wine are mysteriously transformed into the body and blood of Christ. As he walks into the nave he finds a place to stand, perhaps somewhere in the south aisle that was often reserved for the men of the parish. The whole space is filled with sound from the newly purchased organ and the smell of burning frankincense. His surroundings are also filled with the images of saints painted on walls, as statues in niches and as embroidery on the priest’s garments. At the east end of the south aisle are four images housed in niches and wall paintings, one of which may have been St Edmund. At the east end is the chancel and the stone high altar and it is adorned with elaborate objects: chalice, plate, candles, including the Paschal Candle, and cloths. The priest, his attendants and perhaps a choir are also in the chancel and they are chanting Latin prayers and responses. Coo and his fellow lay parishioners are forbidden to enter the chancel, physically and symbolically barricaded by the presence of the roodscreen and their lay status. Yet all of them, as a faith community, are about to join together on

—Quoted in Darren Oldridge, Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 2–3.
the one Sunday in the year where the lay parishioners join with the clergy to eat Christ’s body—Easter Sunday. 2

The year is now 1564/5 and it is again Easter Sunday. As Coo walks into his parish church, he momentarily reflects on how different the interior is from 35 years ago. The painted images that once adorned the walls have been covered over with whitewash, perhaps in preparation for the painting of English biblical texts. The organ no longer sounds inside (nor outside) the church. The remnants of broken images and niches can still be seen in some places—the physical sign of the rejection of Roman Catholicism. No longer does Coo have to stand, as it is possible that the nave now has permanent seating for the congregation so he can listen to an English sermon delivered from the pulpit in posterior comfort. The parish, as a faith community, is about to partake of Holy Communion—not a sacrificial Mass, performed at the stone high altar, but a commemorative service in remembrance of Christ’s crucifixion. In 1529/30, Coo and his fellow lay parishioners were barred from entering the chancel. Now all communicants join with their minister in the chancel and kneel around a wooden communion table, simply adorned with a white linen cloth, a communion cup, and paten. Once Coo was forbidden to consume the wine, which was the preserve of the clergy only. Now he is called, by both monarch and minister, to consume both the bread and the wine in this commemorative act of remembrance, at least three times a year, including Easter Sunday. 3

The story of William Coo is, for the most part, the story of every man and woman who lived through the English Reformation. The transition from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism is not simply about doctrine or the dictates of monarchs and high-ranking clerics. It is also about the lived experiences of individuals in parishes acting as faith communities between c.1450–1662, and the complex nexus between objects, their placement within and outside the parish church, and their uses (and abuses) to

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3 Boxford CWA [transc.], 55, 70; Boxford CWA FB/77/E2/2 ff.136, 141, 142. From Northeast’s brief biographical notes on William Coo and a reference in the accounts to a William Coo in 1560 and a “father Coo” after 1572, it is possible that the William Coo of 1530 was still alive in 1565. Boxford CWA [transc.], 72; Boxford CWA FB/77/E2/2 f. 173.
express and shape a faith practice. It is only when this nexus is explored that we can begin to understand William Coo’s world and the faith community that he, and others like him, inhabited.

### 1.1 A New Foundation Stone?

Most lay people did not leave records about how they felt or what they thought about the Reformation, so the task of reconstructing this history is complex and challenging. Thus, we need to trace this process another way. One way in which this can be done is by using material culture with an emphasis on the complex interactions between objects and the society in which they are used. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie call for historians to break down the barriers between religious and social histories and propose that this can be done through cultural history. They remark that: "cultural history is awakening us to what we should have always known: namely, that religion and society interact, and do so in complex, unpredictable and at times perverse ways."

The parish church and how it was used were central to the experience of William Coo. The materiality of religion was just as important for early modern Protestantism as it was for medieval Roman Catholicism. William Cantwell Smith defines faith as “the religious experience or involvement of an individual,” and something that is expressed outwardly and, oftentimes, within the context of a community. In late medieval and early modern England, religious practice centred, for the most part, on the parish church and the material culture used to perform the liturgy or enhance the church space for worship. We may never know what most people thought about the Reformation and its impact on their lives, but we can analyse how communities practiced their faith. David Hall suggests the term “lived religion” as a way of exploring the daily religious lives of the Christian laity. It is a concept that assumes that behaviour has

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meaning, but also allows for tension and the “messiness that leaks into everyday life.”

Caroline Walker Bynum observes that the materiality of the object is an essential part of the spiritual experience that is had with and through that object. Two recent examples of this are Dolly MacKinnon’s in-depth study of the parish community of Earls Colne, Essex, and Alexandra Walsham’s study on religiously-inspired objects within the domestic setting.

As Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson advocate: “The academic turn towards the everyday has prompted a renewed interest in material culture because everyday life is rooted in the experience of materiality … The historical study of everyday objects therefore allows access to the lived experience of people in the past.”

Archaeologist Jonathan Finch rightly states that understanding the use of material culture to establish new ideas is equally as important as the destruction of material culture to remove old ideas:

the material impact of the Reformation within the parish churches has yet to receive the detailed consideration it deserves. The focus has tended to be on the loss of medieval art or material culture, rather than on the process of establishing a new religion within the archaeological framework of the old.

By undertaking local or regional studies in aggregate and combined with the methodological trajectory of material culture, the complexity of faith communities at a parish level can be revealed. After all, no person or parish was an island. As Duffy remarks, the Reformation became “quite literally, part of the furniture.” It is true that the experience of faith did

8 Ibid., x.
not occur solely within the confines of the parish church, but it is here that individual experiences were collectively brought to bear on the experience of the community. It is in the parish churches scattered across England that the material traces of that experience can be found.

1.2 Surveying the English Reformation with Old and New Tools

Late medieval and early modern English society was inherently religious. Life was measured and experienced through religious events. The core events in one’s life—birth, marriage, death, community, religious instruction—were all celebrated with rituals and services that took place at particular locations within the parish church using certain objects. These events were collective events in the sense that, for the most part, they were celebrated as a community. Thus, the community of the parish was a faith community; that is, the individuals of a parish came together as a collective body for the purposes of religious activity and adhered to a particular set of beliefs. These faith communities expressed themselves with and through the objects that surrounded them within the locality of the parish church—the site of collective religious expression.

This is not to say that the faith community within any given parish was always a homogeneous entity. They were often made up of complementary sub-communities, such as voluntary groups that functioned alongside and participated with the dominant faith community of the parish, and/or competing sub-communities or cohorts, namely communities that were in opposition to the prevailing faith practice of the parish. Similarly, the parish church was also not a homogeneous space but rather made up of several spaces that had specific functions within which certain objects were located and where certain rituals or ceremonies took place. It was through the complex relationship between space, object, and people that faith communities expressed their collective, sometimes competing, experiences. As England traversed the untravelled and unpredictable path of becoming a Protestant nation over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, faith communities, in the Diocese of Norwich as elsewhere, would be tested by what it meant to be Protestant and, more importantly, how being Protestant ought to be practiced as a collective experience.

The Diocese of Norwich—the traditional epicentre of the English Reformation—consisted of the two major counties of Norfolk and
Suffolk. Yet, this reputation will be challenged by showing that the transition from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism was neither inevitable nor smooth. Diarmaid MacCulloch remarks that Norfolk and Suffolk formed the “heartland” of East Anglia and were connected by “strong links”—administrative, trade, and familial. From about 1450 onwards, the production of wool became increasingly important to the country’s economy as cloth became a major product for both internal and external markets. It was also during this time that East Anglia became one of the key centres of cloth manufacture, and clothiers like William Coo “came to exercise great control over the rural industry.”

Norman Scarfe observes that in 1524 Norfolk was the second wealthiest county in England and Suffolk was the fourth wealthiest (equal with Essex). It is for this reason that the churches in East Anglia are often referred to as wool churches, and their building, re-building or refurbishing coincided with the boom in the cloth market that often funded such projects.

This book explores nine parish churches scattered across the Diocese, along with their surviving churchwardens’ accounts and material remains over the period c.1450–1662. The material markers of one’s faith were as important to the reformed yeoman sitting near the front of the nave by the pulpit as they were to the local gentry family who had established a chapel in the south aisle and were coming to terms with the fact that it had been ordered to be dismantled. These parish churches are: North Elmham, Stockton, Tilney All Saints, Redenhall, St Peter Mancroft, Boxford.

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Metfield, Cratfield, and Long Melford. The vast majority of the population of the Diocese of Norwich lived outside of Norwich city, so the experience of the Reformation for most people occurred within a rural setting. We will see that the pathways of reform for the Diocese of Norwich were complex, mixed, and contested.

The use of churchwardens’ accounts is not new and historians have drawn on their valuable contents to reconstruct regional histories for both the late medieval period and early modern period. Since the late medieval period, the office of churchwarden had been a local response to meeting the demands of parish government and the election process varied from parish to parish. Churchwardens’ accounts are essentially the financial records of expenditure and income for the parish church that were ratified by parish gatherings. At first glance such documents appear rather dull, as the records, with varying degrees of detail, note the payments of seemingly endless maintenance costs for church fabric and fittings, the receipt of rent money, or payments for the poor and needy. But amongst the records of bell ropes and nails, the churchwardens also recorded the income received from gifts and bequests, the sale of church plate, the purchase of a new Bible or the maintenance costs for the church pulpit—the material markers of early modern religious change and continuity. It is through these records that we are able to reconstruct the ongoing process of reform through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and determine how these changes were incorporated into the experience of faith communities within some of the parishes in the Diocese of Norwich. Churchwardens’ accounts may not record all of the activity related to a parish’s collective faith experience, but they certainly reveal what the

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parish, in general, believed was a worthy investment for the spiritual health of the community. 21

Several sets or portions of churchwardens’ accounts have survived in manuscript form and are the key primary resource for this book. This is the case for the parishes of Boxford (1529–1696), Long Melford (c.1547–1706), Cratfield (c.1517–late seventeenth century), Metfield (1510–1704 [fragments] and 1655–61), St Peter Mancroft (1580–1706), and North Elmham (1583–1629). Until recently, the Boxford churchwardens’ accounts had only been transcribed for the years 1529–61. The Boxford accounts for 1559–1665 have been transcribed for the first time for this book, along with transcribed fragments of the accounts for Long Melford and Metfield. 22 There are also transcribed accounts for Boxford (1529–61) and Cratfield (1490–1660). Thanks to the efforts of earlier antiquarians or later historians, several transcripts of the original accounts have survived. These are Tilney All Saints (1445–1589), North Elmham (1539–77), St Peter Mancroft, Norwich (1580–1710), and Long Melford (1529–77). 23 Some antiquarians only provided extracts, which is the case for Redenhall

21 For reference to this limitation see Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 21.
(1573–1762), Stockton (1625–97), and Metfield (1547-1862). Thus, the documents that they produced—churchwardens’ accounts—reveal the parish’s dominant faith community acting collectively through their chosen churchwardens. This book will also draw on and analyse a range of religious legislation, both national and diocesan, and the Book of Common Prayer. Such documents stipulated the requirements for how churches ought to be furnished and how individuals ought to behave, and so provide a key indicator of the level of compliance amongst the faith community.

Alongside the churchwardens’ accounts and religious legislation, the material remains of each church, namely the fabric and fittings, will provide physical evidence for the process of reform. Such evidence becomes crucial especially when no churchwardens’ accounts are available for a particular period or the accounts remain silent on specific matters. Yet the survival of material remains in churches is also problematic, because what is left is what the caretakers of the church, whether past or present, have deemed worth preserving, or what may have been gifted to the church from elsewhere at a later date. Numerous parish churches succumbed to the work of Victorian or later restorers, whether through the replacement of earlier objects with nineteenth-century or later pieces, or modifying earlier pieces to suit nineteenth-century or more recent tastes and/or functionality.

In exploring the churchwardens’ accounts and the material remains and physical spaces of each church, we can see that they have their own particular stories to tell about the Reformation and how continuity and change became a part of the collective faith community of each parish. It is difficult to determine whether an entire parish was in favour of a particular change, adaptation or innovation, or whether the decision was made by a cohort of influential individuals. Nevertheless, what we can tell from the churchwardens’ accounts and material remains is that the Reformation shaped the way in which these communities worshipped together. This was not limited to changes in theology, as important as

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these were, but also took in the re-ordering of the church space, both the interior and exterior, and the objects within them. The surviving materials—both written and physical—indicate that all these parishes likely experienced conflict or disagreement over how parish worship should be conducted, and thus challenge a perceived perception that the Reformation was in any sense smooth or inevitable. The process of reform within the parishes depended upon local influences, customs, and financial capacity.

The chapters will be set out chronologically, starting in approximately 1450 and progressing until the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and the restoration of the Prayer Book in 1662. This acknowledges that the English Reformation was indeed a process rather than an event that had its roots in the late medieval period, and one which would impact the cultural and material makeup of parish churches and the faith communities that worshipped in them through the seventeenth century.25 The book has retained the dating as given in the churchwardens’ accounts (both the transcriptions and original manuscripts) and will take the year of the accounts as being from March to March. Each year will be shown as, for example, 1563/4 to denote the inclusion of the months January to March.

Late medieval religion was infused with the presence of images, Latin prayers and chants, sacred objects, and the distinct demarcation of church spaces. Both priest and people had specific roles in creating a community of the faithful. Chapter two will analyse the sensory environment of the late medieval parish church and examine how doctrines that were central to the Roman Catholic faith—the sacrament of the Mass and purgatory—were physically embedded in the fabric of the parish church. The organisation of spaces and how objects (statues, altars, plate, candles, cloths, screens) were placed within those spaces were determined by both law and local practice. Parishioners, both as individuals and in groups, also participated in the furnishing of their parish church through gifts and bequests, and therefore contributed to the spiritual life of the parish in tangible ways. Yet even before the Reformation there were individuals within some parish communities who questioned this experience of faith and rejected late medieval religious devotion and external piety in favour of a faith experienced increasingly through the vernacular Bible.

By the mid-sixteenth century the questioning of medieval modes of piety was gaining some momentum amongst the crown, leading clerics, and lay people. The questioning of late medieval religious practice,

especially during the reign of Edward VI, started the process of overturning Roman Catholicism and its trappings in favour of a reformed religion. Chapter three will look at the central doctrines of the Reformation—sola scriptura, the rejection of transubstantiation, and the rejection of images—and how they were manifested within the sacred space of the parish church. This chapter will show that the process by which the Reformation came to be a part of the fabric of parish churches was through a combination of both state legislation and grassroots activity—both through iconoclasm and the introduction of new objects (such as communion tables and communion cups) required for collective worship. This chapter will also address the brief period of Counter-Reformation during the reign of Mary I, and the ways in which faith communities re-ordered their parish churches once more for Roman Catholic worship.

Having switched between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism several times over the course of about 30 years, and having experienced the turbulent process of iconoclasm, parishioners were faced with the reality of re-ordering their churches once again for Protestant worship. Chapter four will assess how Protestantism, under Elizabeth I, was re-established in parish churches through the re-ordering of church space and the objects (communion tables, seating, pulpits) used within it. From the maintenance or purchase of communion tables, the writing of scripture texts on the walls, to the removal or destruction of Roman Catholic imagery, churches were once again being re-formed for Protestant community worship with its focus and centrality on the Word.

The church space and the objects within it may have been re-formed for Protestant worship, but there was considerable debate over how exactly such objects should be used and how the new Protestant liturgy should be performed. Chapter five will explore the debate over adiaphora and how parishioners responded to the ritual and ceremonial requirements of the 1559 Book of Common Prayer and the 1559 Royal Injunctions. It will analyse the returns from the 1597 visitation of the Diocese of Norwich to assess the extent of non-conformity within the Diocese. It will be seen that there were a variety of ways in which both ministers and parishioners could express their disagreement with the liturgy, some of which were more disruptive than others.

The push to maintain the sacredness of the church intensified during the early part of the seventeenth century through the “beauty of holiness” programme that was promoted by several bishops, including Archbishop William Laud, who had the backing of the Crown. Despite the fact that the majority of parishioners conformed to the requirements of the 1559 Prayer
Book and the 1559 Royal Injunctions, it appears that many parishioners resented the invasive way in which these requirements were enforced. Chapter six will explore the “beauty of holiness” programme and how it became embedded within the fabric (such as altar rails and images) of parish churches, alongside the continued practice of maintaining the material culture of reformed worship. This chapter will also look at the intense reaction to the beautifying of the church interior and controlling of the actions of both minister and congregation, through the iconoclastic activity that occurred from the early 1640s onwards. The final part of the chapter will assess the implementation of Parliament’s Directory of Public Worship (January 1644/5) as an attempt to provide an alternative liturgy for parish congregations. It will show that the Directory was not widely adopted by parish congregations, who sought, instead, to reinstate the Prayer Book, which happened in 1662.

In exploring the process of the English Reformation through the prism of material culture that was heavily embedded within faith communities of the Diocese of Norwich during ca. 1450–1662, this book aims to show that such an approach can bring a fresh perspective to a well-trodden field of historical enquiry. By exploring the English Reformation through such objects, the spaces within which these objects were located, and the people who interacted with the objects within the locality of the parish church, we can see how these faith communities actively responded to the twists and turns of religious change during the dynamic, and sometimes turbulent, ongoing process of reform.