

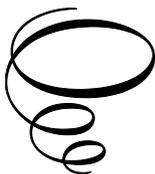
Varieties of History and Their Porous Frontiers

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By

R.C. Richardson

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-6982-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6982-9

Dedicated to the memory of the Very Revd James Atwell
(1946-2020), much loved and inspiring
former Dean of Winchester Cathedral,
and good friend

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PREFACE

If this book were given a sub-title it could surely be *North and South*. Born and raised in Lancashire, after undergraduate studies at the University of Leicester with Joan Thirsk as my Special Subject tutor, my PhD on “Puritanism in the Diocese of Chester to 1642” was undertaken at the University of Manchester and completed in 1968. Since then, I have lived and worked in the south of England, first at what is now the University of Greenwich and then, from 1977, for many years as Head of the History Department at what became the University of Winchester. Thus, at the simplest level *North and South*, the implied sub-title of this collection of essays, accurately summarises the geographical settings of my own career.

More particularly, however, it also describes the geography of the various historical topics to which I have been drawn. Chapters 1, 6 and 8 hark back to my Lancashire and Cheshire days and to my PhD thesis and first book, *Puritanism in Northwest England* (Manchester, 1972). William Hinde’s biography of the Cheshire puritan gentleman, discussed in chapter 1, was one of my key printed primary sources at that time. The essay explores the relationship between subject and author and the significance of the text as an intended healing tract for troubled times on the eve of Civil War. The insider-survey of Lancashire Puritanism by the nineteenth-century Manchester clergyman Robert Halley (see chapter 6), on the other hand, ranked high in the secondary sources then available to me and did much to attract me in the first place to the highly distinctive religious characteristics and dynamics of that region. Chapter 8 restores to G.H. Tupling (1883-1962), author in 1927 of a classic study of the Rossendale valley, the honour that has long been overdue to him as one of the principal founders of regional economic history. Chapters 2 and 3 are squarely grounded in my work on the historiography of the English Revolution and the many books I have published in that field starting in 1977. Chapters 4, 5 and 7 grew out of my developing interest in Hampshire in the early modern and modern periods and in the history of Winchester Cathedral. Chapter 4 examines the extraordinary but short-lived Ranter sensation in Hampshire and Wiltshire and the responses provoked by these frenzied radical efforts to turn the world upside down. Chapter 5 puts John Milner (1752-1826) back on the map as Winchester’s first Roman Catholic historian determined to do full justice to the city’s glory days under the old religion. Chapter 7 gives proper recognition to Hampshire

clergyman and etymologist Richard Chevenix Trench (1807-1886) as the effective originator of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. More broadly, chapters 9 and 10 deal with two leading figures - W.G. Hoskins and Joan Thirsk - in the twentieth-century development of regional and local history as a discipline, both associated with the University of Leicester Department of English Local History with which I had a personal connection. Chapter 11 rounds off this volume with an essay embracing both North and South by examining a series of regional guidebooks designed as an integral and strategic part of the Festival of Britain in 1951 and its expressions of post-war optimism, national solidarity and collective awareness. Produced at the time chiefly with utilitarian purposes in mind, the guidebooks are re-read here as social and cultural history. Chronologically, therefore, the subject matter of the essays collected here ranges over four centuries.

Given the contents, this volume's title – *Varieties of History and Their Porous Frontiers* - no less aptly describes the various essays gathered together in this book and underlines the major consistent interlocking preoccupations of all my research and writing. Historiography forms one of the chief common threads present throughout all the chapters, as it has been also in a lifetime of research and teaching. By extension, the essays in this volume also express my persistent concern to explore connections between writers, texts and contexts, ways of thinking and ways of writing. My long-standing co-editorship (for over thirty years) of the international journal *Literature & History* has left a lasting imprint on my academic outlook, attitudes to disciplinary frontiers, and working practice. The contents of this volume have a very visible methodological dimension. Except for chapters 2 and 3, which are overviews, all the rest have a specific focus, either – in most cases – a particular individual or individuals or a particular phenomenon, as in chapters 4 and 11. Most also have a specificity of place in their subject matter; they are indeed essays in local history. But I follow in the footsteps of Joan Thirsk, mentor and friend, in recognising the very real connections between local history and social history and the historiography which has addressed them. These essays may chiefly examine specific individuals, places and circumstances and be rooted in them, but they are no less securely positioned in a broader context and have a wider resonance and relevance which extend beyond their immediate limits. They are designed to demonstrate that, properly understood, local history is not, nor should it be, exclusively concerned with enclosed, self-contained miniature worlds. Today's local history rejects rather than embraces old-style antiquarianism and its limited agenda and fixations.

Essays in Social History, Local History and Historiography served as the main title of an earlier collection of my essays published by Cambridge Scholars in 2011. (A second volume containing shorter pieces – *Receptions and Re-visiting* – came out alongside it at the same time). Most of the contents of this new book originally appeared as articles in journals published since that date. With three exceptions (chapters 3, 4 and 11) earlier versions of all of them were given as public lectures. Chapter 2 is a revised and extended version of the introduction to a volume of essays I edited, *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992). An earlier version of Chapter 3 (“Changing Perspectives on England in the 1650s”) first appeared, very inaccessibly, alongside an essay by Joan Thirsk in a *festschrift* published in South Korea in 1991 and is reprinted here in a much revised form. Chapter 9, though first delivered as a paper at an American conference in Minneapolis, is published here (substantially changed) for the first time. So is chapter 5. Bringing them all together in this way, self-evidently, draws attention to some of their common denominators, facilitates access to material with disparate origins, and brings the essays before a wider audience.

I am greatly indebted to my friend Michael Durrant for his sustained willingness to provide expert assistance and his endless patience in coping with, and compensating for, my own inadequacies in the IT field. Sunwoo Kim in Seoul and Dr Dongyoung Kim in London also kindly came to my rescue on a number of occasions when the computer was threatening to defeat me. Amanda Millar of Cambridge Scholars Publishing once again proved to be a helpful and painstaking final editor as she did in 2011 when she handled my first two volumes of collected essays.

April 2021

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN BRUEN OF STAPLEFORD (1560-1625) AND HIS BIOGRAPHER*

Although a figure on the local, not the national, stage John Bruen has certainly not lacked attention from later historians. He was briefly celebrated in W. Urwick's *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester* (London and Manchester, 1864) and in George Ormerod's *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (2nd ed., ed. T. Helsby, London, 1882). He was given a significant presence in Robert Halley's *Lancashire: its Puritanism and Nonconformity* (London, 1869, 1872) as a well-documented model puritan and on account of his links, through marriage, with that county. Manchester librarian and antiquarian W.E.A. Axon wrote the article on him which appeared in *The Dictionary of National Biography* while, much more recently, Steve Hindle contributed the lengthier one included in the *Dictionary's* modern-day successor. (In the first he was simply categorised as "puritan layman" while in the second, much more pointedly and partially, the chosen descriptive label was "iconoclast"). Historians of Puritanism, among them Patrick Collinson, William Haller, John Spurr, and myself, have seized on Bruen as a notable exemplar of his type, while historians of the early modern gentry have been quick to recognise how Bruen came to be held up as a model for others of his class to imitate.¹ John Morrill documented the ways in which

* This essay was first published in the *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 116 (2017), 7- 24.

¹ P. Collinson, *Godly People. Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants. The Church in English Society, 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982); W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (1938, reprinted New York 1957); J. Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689* (Basingstoke, 1998); R.C. Richardson, *Puritanism in Northwest England. A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972). Felicity Heal and C. Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Basingstoke, 1994). J.T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry. The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart England* (London, 1984), perhaps because it is angled towards the upper section of the gentry class,

Bruen's sons, Calvin and Jonathan, figured in the religious and political history of Cheshire in the years before, during and after the English Civil Wars.² What all such historians readily recognise is that the principal source for Bruen's life and the principal reason why he has been accorded such significance is the contemporary biography by William Hinde (1568/9-1629), curate in the parish of Bunbury, and Bruen's brother-in-law. This was published posthumously in 1641 by Hinde's son, Samuel, himself a clergyman. The present essay examines both the subject and the author of the biography, placing them carefully in the puritan networks to which they belonged and the context in which they were originally anchored. It also considers the resonance and legacy both of Bruen's life and of the text which recorded it. 1641, the year of publication of the biography, long after the deaths of both Bruen and Hinde, is another important context which requires unpacking. So is 1799, surprisingly, when an abridged, more secularised, edition of Hinde's Bruen was printed in Chester by a publisher no less confident than the first editor and printer in the previous century that the book "may be made useful in promoting the best of causes".³

Bruen's and Hinde's lives intersected at different points. Both had been students at Oxford, though not at the same time and not at the same college. Although Hinde was born in Cumberland, both later shared in Cheshire the same geographical setting, and specifically in parts of the county (the Stapleford/Tarvin area and Bunbury, further west) in which Puritanism functioned as the vanguard of the reformed religion in the face of entrenched Roman Catholic hostility. Though not patron of the Bunbury living – that was in the gift of the London Haberdashers Company⁴ – Bruen was certainly an influential supporter of Hinde's pastoral work and greatly valued the clergyman's ministry and message. Both passionately upheld the puritan godly discipline in their respective parishes and beyond and both aroused episcopal disapproval for their forthright oppositional stance

makes no mention at all of Bruen despite his obvious relevance to the themes under discussion.

² J.S. Morrill, *Cheshire, 1630-1660. County Government and Society during the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), pp.36, 53, 52, 88, 187, 257n., 258n., 284, 287.

³ W. Hinde, *The Very Singular Life of John Bruen Esquire* (Chester, 1799), preface to the reader.

⁴ D. Williams Whitney, "London Puritanism: The Haberdashers Company", *Church History*, 32 (1963). The Haberdashers company appointed an uninterrupted succession of puritan clergy to the Bunbury living in this period – Christopher Harvey, William Hinde, Samuel Torshell, Richard Rowe, Richard Oseley and John Swan. (Richardson, *Puritanism*, p.128).

on ceremonies and images.⁵ Their marriages – to daughters of John Foxe, an office-holder in the household of the Earl of Derby, whose widow lived in Rhodes near Manchester – reinforced an already close relationship.⁶ With such strong links and with such deep first-hand knowledge of the man there is nothing surprising in the fact that Hinde, a comforter of Bruen in his final hours as well as a constant support in the last decades of his life, should have become Bruen's appreciative biographer. It was the natural thing for him to do and served a general as well as a specific purpose. Ample quotation from Bruen's own words punctuate each stage of Hinde's narrative.

Religious biography, a growing genre in the seventeenth century, like biography in general and biographically focussed funeral sermons, was didactic in purpose and held up not only the life of an individual but the values and exemplary significance it embodied; it was a form of writing that boldly conveyed a broader spiritual and social message, though rooted in detail and particular description. "The writing of lives of holy and eminent men departed", declared Nicholas Bernard, "are for us surviving ... as a glass to trim our lives by, a copy to prove our hands, a sauce to sharpen our tastes of the heavenly gift of them".⁷ Religious biography was not a genre restricted to puritans; G. Paule's *Life of John Whitgift* (London, 1612) was one of the earliest protestant examples. But it was one which certainly flourished within puritan circles and Hinde's life of John Bruen quickly became one of its landmarks despite being at first principally intended for local consumption'.⁸ Such was the proliferation of individual religious biographies of clergymen and lay persons that from the 1650s compilations of such works began to establish themselves as a convenient sub-species of publications. Thomas Fuller's *Abel Redivivus, or the Dead yet Speaking. The Lives and Deaths of the Modern Divines* (London, 1651) blazed a trail which others followed, among them Clement Barksdale's *A Remembrancer of Excellent Men* (London, 1670). *The Lives of Sundry*

⁵ S. Hindle on Bruen in *Oxford DNB* and S.J. Guscott on Hinde in *Oxford DNB*.

⁶ Hindle on Bruen, *Oxford DNB*. Hindle in this *Oxford DNB* article states – on what grounds is not clear – that Ann Foxe, Bruen's second wife, was the daughter of the martyrologist John Foxe. This is contrary to the information given in Hinde's biography. Hinde there identifies a different father and since he himself married another daughter from the same family he was surely in a position to know and would have loudly boasted of a connection with the martyrologist if this had indeed been the case.

⁷ Quoted in D.A. Stauffer, *English Biography before 1700* (Cambridge, Mass, 1930), p.89.

⁸ From the title page of Hinde's biography.

Eminent Persons in the Later Age (London, 1683) by Samuel Clark, whose clergyman father Sabbath had earlier ministered in Tarvin and was much loved by John Bruen, is the pre-eminent example.⁹ Modern scholars, most recently Peter Lake, have given these collections of biographies considerable attention.¹⁰

Hinde, holding his degrees from Queen's College, Oxford, subsequently took up a fellowship at that college and was ordained in or around 1595, before moving to his Bunbury living in 1603. He voiced commonly held puritan views that man-made religious ceremonies and regulations, such as those involving the wearing of the surplice and kneeling at the communion, had no validity and he found himself as a result on a collision course with Bishop Thomas Morton of Chester.¹¹ Morton published his account of his dealings with Hinde and other nonconforming Cheshire clergymen. - *A Defence of the Innocencie of Three Ceremonies of the Church of England* (London, 1618). The ministers' stance, he argued, was not only alienating regular churchgoers but unnecessarily exacerbating problems with the papists. As well as busying himself in his parish ministry and as a proselytizer beyond it, Hinde became active in publishing devotional writings. He brought out editions of two works by John Rainolds (1549-1607), president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, one who had clearly influenced and inspired him during his Oxford days, and who was a prominent member of the team which produced the King James translation of the Bible. Hinde dedicated both of these books - *The Prophecies of Obediah* (Oxford, 1613) and *The Discovery of the Man of Sinne* (Oxford, 1614) - to the Provost of Queen's, his own college. With the noted Cheshire-born puritan divine John Dod (1549?-1645) Hinde published *Bathshebaes Instructions to her Son Lemuel* in 1613. On his own account Hinde put into print two religious works, the first of them *A Path to Piety* (Oxford, 1613), dedicated to the Master and Wardens of the London Haberdashers Company, patrons of his Bunbury living, and set out in the form of a catechism for the benefit of his

⁹ Thomas Fuller's *History of the Worthies of England* (1662) had a religious dimension but its range was wider and more secular, embracing as it did politicians, officeholders, writers and musicians, all of them placed within descriptions of their county of origin.

¹⁰ P. Lake, "Reading Clark's *Lives* in political and polemical context" in K. Sharpe and S.N. Zwicker (eds), *Writing Lives. Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2008); A. Pritchard, *English Biography in the Seventeenth Century. A Critical Survey* (Toronto, 2005); Stauffer, *English Biography, passim*.

¹¹ Richardson, *Puritanism*, pp.30-1.

“own flock and family”. The second was *The Office and Use of the Moral Law of God* (London, 1622), also dedicated to his patrons, which served as a refutation of a scandalous popish pamphlet once sent to his late father-in-law John Foxe. Hinde’s name and reputation, it is clear, were familiar in circles beyond Cheshire.

Hinde died in 1629 and Bruen four years before him so the biography when it was finally published in 1641, as the author’s son, Samuel, made clear in the opening pages was self-evidently an “*opus posthumum*, long since left fatherless and kept under hatches”. Whether the text had been mislaid or simply overlooked or under-valued, or held back during the intervening twelve years is not clear. But 1641, the date chosen for its eventual publication, was significant in various ways as will be made clear later. The characteristically diffuse title is worth citing in full not least since it offers at least parts of an agenda which can be followed through in the course of this essay. It is:

A Faithfull Remonstrance of the Holy Life and Happy Death of John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford in the County of Chester, Esquire. Brother to that Mirror of Piety Mistress Katherine Brettergh. Exhibiting a Variety of Many Memorable and Exemplary Passages of his Life and at his Death, Useful for all Sorts and Sexes, but principally intended as a Path and Precedent of Piety and Charity for the Inhabitants of the Famous County Palatine of Chester (London, 1641).

We begin with Hinde’s depiction of the stages in Bruen’s own life, his family context, and proceed to consider his treatment of Bruen as head of a godly household, his influence on his locality through his religious example, charitable giving and his role as a landlord, his networks, his support for puritan ministers, his iconoclasm and dealings with papists and unbelievers, and lastly his death and after-life in print.

Hinde recognised that although Bruen came from a respectable, long-established, estate-holding family in the county his claim for recognition rested on other grounds. “What is nobility without religion and piety”, he insisted, “but an earthen pitcher covered with silver dross? And what is he that is rich in the world and not rich towards God but a branded fool... Such gentlemen atheists we have too many, both younger and elder...”.¹² Even as a youth, though not yet a shining model of virtue, he was upright and shunned the “common and cursed sins of the time as base lying, wanton and wicked swearing, rioting and revelling, drinking and

¹² Hinde, *Bruen*, p.4.

gaming, or that fleshly sin of fornication with which so many of our young gentlemen have now blasted the beauty and glory of their youth, blemished their names, polluted their souls and defiled their bodies".¹³ Dancing and hunting were recreations which he later firmly set aside. Educated locally, Bruen went up to St Alban Hall, Oxford in 1577 along with his brother Thomas but stayed there only two years - long enough, however, to benefit from the gentle guiding hand of a religiously minded fellow student from Cheshire. He returned home at his father's bidding to enter an arranged marriage with a young widow, Elizabeth Cowper, whose father was one of the aldermanic *élite* of Chester, and a puritan reformer noted for the suppression of the medieval mystery plays in the city.

II

The death of Bruen's father in 1587 was a major turning point in the young man's life since with new responsibilities for his family suddenly heaped on him, frugality and godliness became his guiding principles. His conversion experience, Hinde claimed, though not suddenly dramatic, bore some resemblance to that of St Augustine.¹⁴ Siblings were provided for, inherited debts were gradually paid off, hunting and gaming on his estate were abruptly terminated, and his household was re-organised on a strict code of religious observance. Each of his three wives – Elizabeth, Ann, and Margaret who between them bore him eleven children - were devout co-religionists and worked closely alongside him in the godly household and in the parish over which he presided. He cared deeply for the upbringing of his children, catechising them as a matter of course but correcting them when he felt they deserved it. Bruen himself, patient, meek, gentle, just, restrained, sober, modest and unostentatious, became like a beacon of light.¹⁵ Large copies of the Bible were prominently placed in both the hall and parlour of his home for general use. All forms of gambling and oath-taking were forbidden. Bruen on one occasion destroyed the jacks in a houseguest's set of playing cards to render it unusable and burned another's chess set.¹⁶ Drunkenness and waste were both prohibited in the Bruen household.

¹³ *ibid*, p.6

¹⁴ Hinde, *Bruen*, p.44. Patrick Collinson notes that Lancashire and Cheshire, perhaps because of their front-line defence position against rampant Popery, provide some of the most revealing puritan conversion narratives, Bruen's and Richard Mather's among them. (Collinson, *Godly People*, p.517).

¹⁵ Hinde, *Bruen*, pp.175, 192.

¹⁶ *ibid*, pp.119, 117.

In all this great plenty and abundance he would never suffer any wilful waste nor could he endure any wanton or wicked abuse of God's good creatures. His buttery was open and free for any gentleman, serving-man, countryman, so far as they kept themselves within the lists and limits of moderation and sobriety'.¹⁷

Leading Elizabethan puritan William Perkins declared that "surely his house was none other than the very house of God, and for religion he carried the top sail of England".¹⁸ His charity and other good works, fair dealings, support of godly clergy, and hospitality became bywords.

His house was as the common inn or constant harbour of the church and of God's children. [Hinde declared]. Many passengers from London and from Ireland into England, many travellers, horsemen and others out of Lancashire and the farthest parts of Cheshire who would, as they had occasion to come to the courts or fairs of Chester, take up his house for their lodging place, not so much I conceive for the ease and refreshing of their bodies as for the comfort and rejoicing of their hearts in seeing his face, in hearing his voice, in conferring and advising with him, in having a portion in his prayers and a part in his praises unto God with him.¹⁹

Bruen's well-managed, integrated, godly household embraced household and estate servants as well as his own immediate family members and religious observance was its pivot. He himself set its carefully regulated pace, rising before anyone else between 3 or 4am in summer and 5am in winter for his own private devotions "so that by this vigilance and industry he gained the liberty and opportunity most commonly of an hour or two before he rang the bell to wake the rest of his family".²⁰ Prayers, psalm singing, reading a chapter of the Bible together then followed, a practice repeated several times each day. Seven times a day he withdrew to private prayer.²¹ On Sundays the Bruen household – family members and servants alike - walked in procession to Tarvin parish church (a mile from the manor house) singing psalms as they went.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.186.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.128.

¹⁹ Hinde, *Bruen*, pp.185-6. This feature of Bruen's household figures by way of example in Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp.175-7.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp.66-7.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.156.

Tenants and neighbours joined them as they processed. The Bruen family stayed there in between services to consolidate their religious experience by repeating sermons, dwelling on their key points, and by praying and singing psalms.²² “O that every day were either a sabbath day or a fast day”, Bruen declared, “for then I should be well”.²³

Ungodly servants had no place in Bruen’s religiously-ordered family. He cherished those he already had and was always on the lookout for suitable new recruits. Those failing to live up to the high standards demanded of them could not expect to continue in their places.

In a short time he was so well provided and furnished with honest and faithful, godly and gracious servants, both men and women, that he had now, as Paul said Philemon had once, a church in his house. And no marvel that for continual supply there were many that were religious who would willingly offer themselves and make means to be admitted into his house and do him service until they were like ... the host of God. There was not among them [Hinde continued] one idle and unprofitable person.²⁴

Though Bruen’s household was stratified, like all others of his class, according to status and function, this master’s special inner circle of servants consisted chiefly of those who were most conspicuous for their godliness.

Some he made choice of to be near about him for attendance at home and abroad... He allotted them their places according to their skill and knowledge and proportioned their labour to their strength and their wages to their labour. He would often go abroad among them both to see the work and to encourage the workmen, at which time, that both he and they might go about their business with heavenly minds he was wont to raise matter for speech and conference... There was not the meanest amongst them but he would labour to cheer him and encourage him in his service... Yea, he made them sometimes as his companions in his familiar and kind usage of them, sometimes as his counsellors to advise, confer, consult and resolve with

²² *ibid*, pp.210-11.

²³ *ibid*, p.212.

²⁴ *ibid*, pp.55-6. Master-servant relations in the Bruen family are discussed at length in R.C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2010), pp.135-8.

them in matters of conscience or of other importance, sometimes as historians, comforters in afflictions and temptations that he might receive some comfort and refreshing from them...²⁵

Never over-bearing and always ready to listen, Bruen frequently engaged in lively and edifying religious conversation with his servants.²⁶

Within this “inner circle” of servants one, in particular, stood out from all the others and received an extended, appreciative account in Hinde’s celebration of the Bruen household. This was Robert Passfield, “old Robert”, a faithful retainer who had spent much of his life as an estate worker with the family. This old man had a special place in Bruen’s affection.

... Though but a servant, yet being rich in grace his master did so much esteem and affect him that he would often, as conveniently as he could, have him near unto him, he would often go to the hop-yard or threshing store, where conveniently his business lay, to talk and confer with him, and sometimes for his own exercise to take some part and portion in the labour with him also... This he did for their mutual comfort and contentment in provoking one another to holy duties and communicating such things as they had read or heard for increase of godliness and goodness one in another. Such is the nature and temper of humility and sincerity. The master never a whit the more abased because he did not bow himself to the low condition and company of a servant nor the servant ever a jot more proud ... because of this his master’s kind and christian dealing with him. They were both of them gainers not losers.²⁷

Old age and infirmity eventually rendering “Old Robert” unfit for manual labour, the faithful servant was not cast off but lovingly cared for and allowed to sit close to the master’s own table so that they could continue to confer with each other.²⁸

The old servant could neither read nor write, but his illiteracy notwithstanding his deep and comprehensive knowledge of the Bible was remarkable and proved valuable not only to himself

²⁵ Hinde, *Bruen*, pp.62, 64, 56.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.180.

²⁷ *ibid*, pp.59-60.

²⁸ *ibid*, pp.60-61.

but to the whole of Bruen's family. He was so well acquainted with the history of the Bible and the sum and substance of every book and chapter that hardly any could ask him where such a saying or sentence were but he would with very little ado tell them in what book or chapter they might find it. Insomuch that he became as a very profitable index to the family to call to mind what they had learned and to recover what they had lost by slip of memory, and not only so but a godly instructor and teacher of young professors also to acquaint them with the Word and to exercise their hearts unto godliness by the precepts and examples thereof which he constantly did both at home and abroad as he had leisure and liberty so to do.²⁹

What enabled the old man to function as such an invaluable resource was an ingenious *aide-memoire* which he himself had devised and which stimulated his recall of individual parts of the entire Biblical text which he had somehow committed to memory. The special device was a long leather belt which he had subdivided with marks, thongs and knots to correspond to the various books, chapters and individual verses.

This instrument of his own invention he framed and used for the better help of his understanding and relief in his memory in his hearing of the Word preached which he did with so good effect and fruit in observing all the points and scriptures alleged in a sermon and binding them upon the points and portions of the girdle as he heard them that in repeating of the sermon afterwards he himself had great benefit and many other professors much comfort and hope by his handling of his girdle and fingering the points and divisions of it.³⁰

Bruen conscientiously preserved the belt after his old servant's death as a memorial to his piety, industry, and usefulness.

Bruen's godly household – a kind of church in its own right – was emphatically not inward-looking and operating behind closed doors but one that was open, welcoming, and reached out to others. Bruen's godly servants, it is clear, played an active part in these processes. Marriage portions given to some of them enabled them to set up much smaller, godly households of their own. Others, by taking up positions in other families, helped spread the good practices that Bruen had firmly inculcated in them. By these means "his family became a common nursery for the

²⁹ *ibid*, pp.56-7.

³⁰ *ibid*, p.58.

churches of God in the whole country”.³¹ In their humble way Bruen’s servants helped further the extension of the molecular structure of godly households on which Puritanism ultimately rested.

Bruen’s own three marriages which linked him to the Hardware family in Chester and the Foxe family of Rhodes near Manchester were expressions of this deeply ingrained practice of puritan networking. “Marry in the Lord” was the constant injunction of the godly clergy. Bruen was instrumental in arranging a suitable match in about 1599 for his sister Katherine to William Brettergh of Brettergh Hall near Liverpool. They set up in their home the same kind of regime of household devotions which characterised Bruen’s in Cheshire with daily Bible reading, prayers and regular attendance at sermons preached in their local parish church. Their reputation for Puritanism brought the Bretterghs into collision with Edward Norris, Roman Catholic lord of the manor of Speke and Garston. Brettergh used his office as High Constable of West Derby Hundred to prosecute recusants in the parishes of Huyton and Childwall while Norris for his part seems to have targeted Brettergh by encouraging retaliatory riots and cattle maiming.³² Katherine Brettergh died young (in 1601) and, as her brother was to be later, was memorialised in print.³³

Some of Bruen’s networking was simply a function of his reputation for godliness in his own region. “Insomuch that divers gentlemen of the best rank [among them young Richard Grosvenor] did much desire to sojourn under his roof and to table with him for their better information in the way of God and more effectual reclaiming of themselves and their families”. Hinde records an almost constant stream of house-guests coming to the Bruen household for the same reason. The daughter and son-in-law of Thomas Wilbraham of Woodhey, for example, were two others who remained in residence with Bruen for a time. At a later point four gentlewomen from Hatton together with a maidservant – all at first indifferent to religion – lodged with the Bruen household and became caught up in its spiritual atmosphere.³⁴ Times when Bruen himself stayed with his Hardware and Foxe in-laws in Chester and in Rhodes near

³¹ *ibid*, p.65.

³² R.G. Dottie, “The recusant riots at Childwall in May 1600: a reappraisal” in J.I. Kermodé and C.B. Phillips (eds), *Seventeenth-Century Lancashire. Essays presented to J.J. Bagley, Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, 132 (1983), 1-28.

³³ W. Harrison and W. Leigh, *Death’s Advantage Little Regarded and The Soules Solace against Sorrow... whereunto is annexed The Christian Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Brettergh* (London, 1602).

³⁴ Hinde, *Bruen*, pp.87, 115, 130.

Manchester provided other networking opportunities. But Bruen's puritan networking extended much further afield than Lancashire and Cheshire. Facilitated by links between the Cheshire-born clergyman Thomas Pierson who held the church living at Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire and puritan clergy like Christopher Harvey serving at Bunbury in Cheshire, Bruen corresponded with Sir Robert Harley, Pierson's patron. In 1624, for instance, he appealed to Harley to pass on a petition to his father-in-law Secretary Conway on behalf of two Cheshire JPs whose zeal for iconoclasm had landed them in trouble.³⁵

Bruen's principal impact, however, was undoubtedly within his own locality. He brought in and gave financial support to godly clergy and was a leading participant in the preaching Exercises introduced into the diocese of Chester in the 1580s.³⁶ He became conspicuous as an arch opponent of Popery – “the Whore of Rome” – and the time-honoured popular festivals associated with it. Starting with his own private chapel his iconoclasm reached out to Tarvin parish church (where he was patron) and then beyond. “He presently took order to pull down all these painted puppets and popish idols in a warrantable and peaceable manner and of his own cost and charge repaired the breaches and beautified the windows with white and bright glass again”.³⁷ Taking their cue from their master, Bruen's servants extended the iconoclasm to the destruction of popish crosses in other Cheshire parish churches and on highways and they and Bruen himself found themselves on the receiving end of prosecutions by Bishop Vaughan of Chester and, later, by Star Chamber.³⁸ The late Margaret Aston saw Bruen as one of the very few iconoclasts of this period whose mindset could be entered by historians and she and Andy Wood explored in some detail the Star Chamber case of 1613 and the hearing before local magistrates which preceded it. Defiantly defending himself and his supporters as “honest and sanctified men and very godly and most religious”, Bruen justified their actions as “a reformation of divers abuses and superstitions”. The crosses had been “defended and advanced by sundry professed papists and recusants and by such of the common people as are or have been addicted to the Roman religion... and idolatrously worshipped and adored”. Brushing aside local opposition to

³⁵ Jaqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads. The Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990), pp.53-4, 78.

³⁶ The preaching Exercises are discussed in Richardson, *Puritanism*, pp.65-9.

³⁷ Hinde *Bruen*, pp.92, 79.

³⁸ Margaret Aston, “Puritans and iconoclasm, 1560-1660” in C. Durston and Jacqueline Eales (eds), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp.100-3; Hinde on Bruen, *Oxford DNB*.

the cleansing iconoclasm, Bruen's response was simply "their Dagon is fallen".³⁹ Also targeted by Bruen were rustic celebrations of saints' days and traditional country wakes, a campaign in which he sought to enlist support from other members of the local gentry.⁴⁰

III

Bruen's qualities as a good master, caring for his servants' well-being even in their old age, were applauded by Hinde. So were his charity and benevolence and these character traits were held up as model virtues for others to emulate. To the poor and needy he was unfailingly generous, doling out money, food and clothing, as well as Bibles, catechisms and other religious books.

In the dear years he made provision for them almost every day in the week and would many times see them served himself both to keep them in good order and to make an equal distribution according to the difference of their necessities amongst them... [His purse] served as the poor man's box or coffer... And if he saw any willing but not able to pay what they had borrowed he would rather forgive the debt than exact it.⁴¹

He was a model landlord.

He did not grind the faces of the poor by great fines nor crush their bones by heavy rents and racks ... nor break their backs with burdens of oppression in all manner of cruel services. He did not use their labour without hire nor call for their work without wages, nor take the benefit of their travail without any allowance of necessary sustenance which is the sin of many gentlemen amongst us. But in all things concerning their profit, their ease, their peace, their christian comfort and contentment he ever carried himself as a merciful and good landlord towards them. Yea, it was the very joy of his heart to see his tenants prosper and thrive in their estate under him and to

³⁹ Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2016) pp.11, 686-7; The National Archives, TNA STAC 8/21/6 cited in Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People. Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013) pp.200-1.

⁴⁰ Hinde, *op.cit.*, pp.90, 92, 104-5. Tarvin wakes whose celebration Bruen suppressed remained unrestored even at the end of the eighteenth century.

⁴¹ Hinde, *op.cit.*, pp.187-8.

entertain them lovingly and use them kindly as they came unto him.⁴²

A peaceable man himself – “he had rather forgive twenty wrongs than revenge one” – he shut his ears to malicious gossip and became conspicuous as a peacemaker.

If he saw two gentlemen’s servants at strife and variance fearing lest such sparks of contention begun by servants might kindle a fire and flame, as many times they do, betwixt the masters, he would begin to take up the matter with the masters and then appease and pacify the servants with meek and gentle words of wisdom and peace for their better instruction and information.⁴³

In all these ways, as in others, Bruen’s Puritanism was held up as life-informing practice and behaviour and not simply as bookish doctrinal conviction and religious observance; he nurtured his beliefs but then implemented them for others’ benefit as well as his own. The rigour of his church attendance and household devotions have already been noted. This was reinforced in a variety of ways. He would journey thirty miles or more to hear good, uplifting preaching “that he might gather manna where he knew it would be rained down”.⁴⁴ He was an assiduous note-taker of sermons at services and other religious exercises; whole volumes of these still survive.⁴⁵

This conscionable diligence in hearing and observing, writing and recording from the mouth of the ministers whatever they taught and preached unto edification and that with such eagerness of mind and readiness of hand and pen that usually he took the whole substance and matter of their notes, observations and sermons in his book home with him, which he would carefully repeat in his journey to the refreshing of such good people as went along with him.⁴⁶

In his own household and, indeed, parish Bruen took on a quasi-ministerial role and even described himself in a letter to Sir Robert Harley

⁴² *ibid*, p.197.

⁴³ Hinde *Bruen*, pp.166, 174-5.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.101.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.102; Hindle on Bruen, *Oxford DNB*.

⁴⁶ Hinde, *op. cit.*, p.102.

as a “bishop”.⁴⁷ Hinde had no qualms about accepting the importance and value of Bruen’s active exercise of his headship role. “Some may mistake him and me in this business”, he said, “as imagining by his private expounding of the scriptures he did work too much and tread too near upon the office of the ministry”. Such criticism, however, would be completely unjust. “Would to God”, Hinde emphatically declared, “that all masters of families were such ministers in their families...”. Lay ministries could be immensely important and fruitful. It will be remembered that it had been a fellow student, John Brerewood of Chester, who had been chiefly instrumental in steering Bruen in his Oxford days towards the right path. “It cannot be denied”, Hinde insisted, “that the Lord doth sometimes furnish and employ some private persons in this work of winning souls either by enlightening their minds or convincing their judgements”. Even humble servants, he recognised, could minister effectively in this way. “Old Robert” admirably demonstrated the point. “Now if that which I have often heard be true that... a good text-man is a good divine, then may old Robert in our country proceedings be allowed for a divine and a doctor also. He had many other good parts in him, a good gift in prayer and praise, very willing and well able to confer of good things...”.⁴⁸

Inserting frequent quotation from Bruen himself ensured that Hinde’s text had an autobiographical dimension. Recalling the state of religion in Cheshire in his youth Bruen declared

it was a rare thing to have a preacher or to have one sermon in a year, all living profanely in ignorance and in error. A lamentable time and a miserable people of such a time... When I first began to profess religion there was almost none in the whole shire that were acquainted with the power and practice of it. Now, [he rejoiced] the borders of the church are much enlarged, the number of believers wonderfully increased and, blessed be God, every quarter and corner of the country is now filled with the sweet savour of the Gospel.⁴⁹

His own deliberate obstruction of traditional rustic celebrations and sponsoring of puritan evangelism, he was proud to recognise, had played its part in this transformation.

⁴⁷ Hinde on Bruen, *Oxford DNB*.

⁴⁸ Hinde, *op. cit.*, pp.76-7, 18, 57. Richardson, *Puritanism* devotes a whole chapter to puritan laymen and their various roles, pp.74-114.

⁴⁹ Hinde, *op. cit.*, pp.12, 216.

I observed many years together to invite two or three of the best affected preachers in the diocese that spent the most of three days in preaching and praying in [Tarvin] church so as the pipers and fiddlers and bearwards and players and gamesters had no time left them for their vanities but went away with great fretting, and yet multitudes of well-affected people filled the town and the church...⁵⁰

Bruen was no less keen to rejoice in recounting some of the divine judgements which had fallen on his family, servants and tenants. John Robinson, an estate servant, escaped completely unhurt, for example, when in 1601 a metal-rimmed wheel ran over his leg. Similarly a year later Bruen's son John miraculously emerged from an accident with a farm scythe with no more than hairs shaved off his leg. By contrast in 1613 Richard Rogers, one of Bruen's tenant farmers, incurred divine wrath by boasting to one standing near to him

now I will come across and swagger and swear to anger and make mad yonder two puritans. And did so to the great grievance of those two godly persons. And presently the avenging hand of God was upon him so that this wicked fellow was carried home in a cart and within three days died most miserably. All glory to God!⁵¹

Hinde placed particular emphasis on Bruen's own last words as he lay dying.

The Lord of his mercy hath given me so strong evidence of his favour and love in Christ that I am not troubled in mind nor conscience with any doubts or fears nor any other satanical molestations or temptations but rest and wait in patience for the accomplishment of his mercies according to his good pleasure.⁵²

By contrast in the case of Bruen's married sister, Katherine Brettergh, such assurance in death came only after a hard-fought spiritual struggle, dwelt on at length by those who preached at her funeral but largely passed over in silence in Hinde's religious biography of her brother.⁵³ To die well

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.90.

⁵¹ *ibid*, p.143.

⁵² *ibid*, p.223.

⁵³ Harrison and Leigh, *Death's Advantage little Regarded and The Soules Solace*