

The Long Reach of New College's Catholic Apologists

In the immediate wake of Henry VIII's act of supremacy, New College was notable among the Oxford colleges for the continuing strength and quality of its humanist Catholic apologists. By the early years of Elizabeth I's reign, most of these had gone abroad or had been imprisoned, and with them went a remarkable tradition of scholarship.¹ Whilst in the short term the college suffered from this loss, the enduring legacy of high quality Catholic scholarship nurtured in the college in the mid-sixteenth century has been much underestimated. A closer account of two of the key apologists and their work shows how they continued to interact with others of their New College circle, and what drove their legacy. It also enables us to reappraise how their collective scholarship has been appropriated in subsequent centuries to produce a narrative of Catholic Englishness and a more balanced understanding of the historiography of the Reformation.

The eminence and power of New College's Catholic scholarship is abundantly illustrated by the fact that five quondam fellows of New College were prominent in the disputations and trials of Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley in 1554–6. Possibly most influential in gathering like-minded fellows around him was Warden Henry Cole (Fellow 1523, Warden 1542–51), who preached the justifying sermon in the University Church before Cranmer was taken to be burnt at the stake. Cole, like others of his day, had tacked with the times and previously 'soon after K.Ed 6 came to the Crown, he was altogether for reformation'.² Nonetheless, once he had ceased to be Warden, possibly removed after a complaint by more Protestant fellows,³ he rose to increasing ecclesiastical prominence under Queen Mary and her Cardinal Archbishop. As Warden Sewell's register of Fellows notes, he was 'One of the Commissioners of Cardinal Pole to reform the University. Named in Cardinal Pole's will, to whom he was Vicar General'.⁴ It is thus likely that it was through Cole that Pole gave manuscripts and books to New College and is recorded as a donor to the Library in 1557.

In the disputations with Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley to prove their heresies, Cole and John Harpsfield (Fellow 1534) were part of a group of 'divines and learned men of both the Universityes, Oxford and Cambridge'.⁵ John Whyte (Fellow 1527), who later preached approvingly of Queen Mary at her funeral, had the job of going round the colleges to get assent that the disputations were to be an academic, University, event, presumably to bolster their legitimacy. Thomas Martyn (Fellow 1540) took part in Cranmer's trial in 1555, famously opening with 'Mr Cranmer you have told here a long glorious tale'.⁶ He left some manuscripts and a significant number of his books to the college library in 1588.⁷ John Harpsfield subsequently preached at Cranmer's disgrading in Christ Church Cathedral, while his brother, Nicholas Harpsfield (Fellow 1536) was almost certainly a witness of events as the likely author of *Bishop Cranmer's Recantacions*, which chronicles the last months of Cranmer's life.⁸

From this base of distinguished scholars and administrators, it is clear that the college continued to gather together fellows with strong Catholic sympathies. But Warden Sewell's register shows how relatively quickly this group was dispersed in the early years of Elizabeth I's reign:

¹ Penry Williams, 'From the Reformation to the Era of Reform, 1530–1850', in *New College Oxford 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford: The Warden and Fellows of New College, 1979), pp. 44–71, at pp. 46–51.

² Anthony Wood, *Athenæ Oxoniensis* (London: Printed for Tho. Bennet, 1691), vol. 1, col. 155. Wood was a pupil at New College School, and this copy is held in the school archive.

³ Williams, 'From the Reformation', p. 48.

⁴ Warden Sewell's Register, New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 3968, f. 104.

⁵ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), vol. 2: *The Seconde Volume of the ecclesiasticall Historie, containing the Acts and Monuments of Martyrs* (London: John Daye, 1583), p. 1452.

⁶ Wood, *Athenæ Oxoniensis*, vol. 1, col. 175.

⁷ William Poole, '[The 1588 Donations to New College Library of Thomas Martin, Lawyer and Recusant](#)', *New College Notes* 4 (2013), no. 3.

⁸ Diarmaid McCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 585.

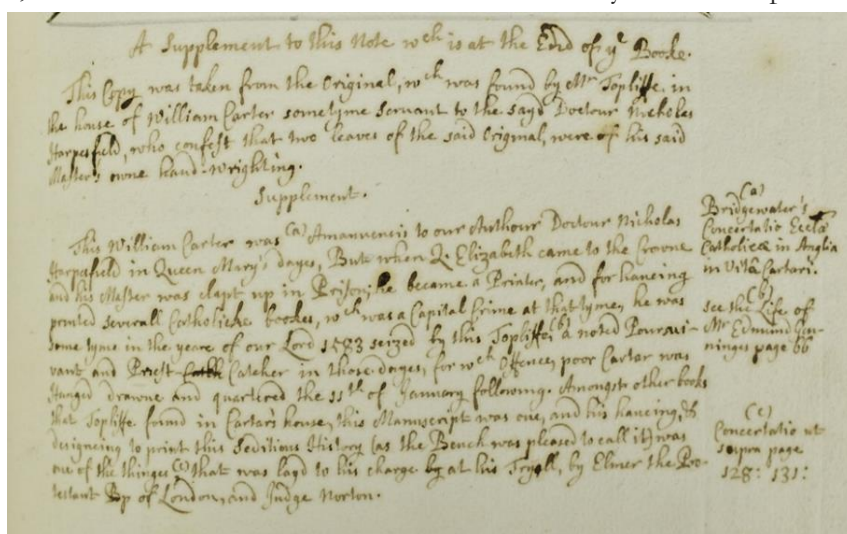
seventy-one fellows and scholars left the college between 1558 and 1566.⁹ Among these, and those who had already left the college for ecclesiastical preferment under Queen Mary, were John Fowler (Fellow 1555), Thomas Harding (Fellow 1536),¹⁰ John Martiall (Fellow 1551), Nicholas Sander (Fellow 1548), Thomas Stapleton (Fellow 1554), and John Rastall (Fellow 1549), all of whom went into exile at Louvain from where they wrote and published polemics against the English Reformation.

The continuing intellectual interconnection of this group of New College scholars is significant. Sander's work *De origine ac progressu schismatis anglicani* (1585) and Thomas Stapleton's life of Thomas More in *Tres Thomae* (1588), for example, are both indebted to Harpsfield. Stapleton overtly uses material from Nicholas Harpsfield's *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*. Sander calls Harpsfield 'that great light of all England',¹¹ and his *De origine* is essentially a Latin redaction of Nicholas Harpsfield's *Treatise on the Pretended Divorce between Henry VIII and Catharine of Aragon*. This latter was written at the end of Mary's reign and, in essence, sharpened the aim of Harpsfield's earlier *Recantacions*. Like the *Recantacions*, which were not printed until 1877 from a manuscript held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the *Treatise* was not printed in Britain until 1878, but was circulated by manuscript, two of which are held in the college library.¹²

Nonetheless, during and immediately after his lifetime, Harpsfield's reputation as a formidable apologist became firmly established. His life of Thomas More, probably written around the time of Cranmer's trial, was compiled in close collaboration with More's son-in-law, William Roper, and has been reckoned by historians to be the first complete and accurate biography of More, even if some of it verges on the hagiographical. Along with the *Treatise*, and his *Historia Anglicana ecclesiastica*, manuscripts of these works were entrusted on Harpsfield's death in 1575 to his amanuensis, William Carter with the idea that they would eventually be published or at least circulated by copy.¹³ However, Carter and his 'Catholike bookes' were seized by Richard Topcliffe,

Elizabeth I's notorious torturer and 'a noted Pursuivant and Priest-Catcher', and Carter condemned to be 'hanged drawne and quartered'. This account of Carter's fate comes from the 'supplement' to a life of Harpsfield, scrappily written on a few smaller pages inserted into the front of New College's MS 311B. Notwithstanding its obvious repugnance to the Elizabethan regime,

Harpsfield's *Historia Anglicana ecclesiastica* was obviously considered seriously influential and dangerously authoritative enough to be read by and retained for the Queen: 'That same original



New College Library, Oxford, MS 311B

⁹ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 9749, *Registrum Protocolorum*, 1553–8.

¹⁰ Harding, rather touchingly, left £10 in his will to New College in the event of a Catholic restoration. See his entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of Biography*: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12264>>.

¹¹ Nicholas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, trans. David Lewis (London: Burns and Oates, 1877).

¹² New College Library, Oxford, MS 311A and MS 311B. I am indebted to William Poole's note on these manuscripts, 'Two Copies of a Clandestine Manuscript in Late Seventeenth-Century New College', *New College Notes* 1 (2012), no. 11, which includes an extract from *The Oxford Dictionary of Biography*'s entry drawing attention to Sander's use of Harpsfield's work.

¹³ Mark Rankin, 'Richard Topcliffe and the Book Culture of the Elizabeth Catholic Underground', *Renaissance Quarterly* 72 (2) (2019), 492–536.

written book by Doctor Nicholas Harpsfield I did find in this William Carter's custody, which the Queen's majesty hath seen & hath read of, & her highness did command me to keep, which I have extant still for her majesty's service. Ric. Topclyffe'.¹⁴

Apart from the life of More, the only work of Harpsfield's which seems to have been widely available during his life time is *Dialogi sex contra summi pontificatus, monasticae vitae, sanctorum, sacrarum imaginum oppugnatores, et pseudomartyres*. Published in Antwerp in 1566, it runs to around 1,000 pages and attacks two major Protestant works of the period: *Historia ecclesiae Christi*, also known as the *Magdeburg Centuries*, and notably John Foxe's book of protestant martyrs, *Acts and Monuments*. In an index of the power of Harpsfield's arguments, it was taken so seriously by Foxe that a good deal more material had to be researched and added in Foxe's second edition in order to rebut Harpsfield's assertions. As Harpsfield's reputation began to grow, his *Historia Anglicana ecclesiastica*, which had clearly been circulated in manuscript copies, was finally published in 1622 and 'became one of the foundations of English Catholic interpretations of the Reformation'.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the ongoing Catholic sympathies of some of the New College fellowship remain clear over the course of the further religious tumults of the seventeenth-century. For example, the college doubtless recognised the controversial nature of its collection of pro-Catholic literature and guarded it carefully: what seem to be particularly inflammatory titles were not allocated a shelf mark in the library and thus kept withdrawn from circulation, or perhaps at least away from the prying eyes of official representatives of Cromwell's puritan protectorate.¹⁶

After the Restoration, as William Poole has noted, Harpsfield's *Treatise* was sufficiently in demand in the late seventeenth century for the college almost certainly to have commissioned one or both manuscript copies, since they do not appear in the Benefactors Book. And records show they were actively borrowed by fellows.¹⁷ Anthony Wood, in the late seventeenth century, records seeing a manuscript copy of the *Treatise* in the college library, which is clearly MS 311A, judging by his verbatim quotation of the note of its provenance at the end of the volume, which is slightly different from MS 311B.¹⁸

Harpsfield's work continued to be celebrated and quietly proliferated in Catholic circles into the eighteenth century. In 1707, the Roman Catholic antiquary Charles Eyston made a copy and wrote to his son about the importance of it, concluding 'this Manuscript was lent me by Mr. Thomas Hildesley, R.S.J. in Com̄ Oxon̄, uncle to your Aunt Eyston, who gave me leave to write it out upon this condition, that I should never lend it to any one so as that it may be transcribed by any body else, for he designs, if ever he lives to see the times more favourable, to print it'.¹⁹ Eyston would have known through reading Wood's extracts that New College also had a manuscript of the *Treatise*. He attempted, apparently unsuccessfully, to see the college version. In the same letter to his son, he writes: 'I have, within this year and half, made four journeys to Oxford to compare a greater number of passages, but was always put off with this civil excuse, that the Librarian was at London, or somewhere else out of town, and had not left the key of the Manuscripts behind him'.²⁰ Was this a careful ploy to ensure the college was not drawn into religious and political controversy, or simply an indication of the early eighteenth-century insouciance endemic in the University at the time? Eyston eventually saw one of the college manuscripts in 1719 according to a memorandum in the front of his copy: 'I saw the New College

¹⁴ Topcliffe's annotation in his copy of G. Pollini, *L'istoria ecclesiastica della Rivoluzione d'Inghilterra, divisa in libri Quattro*. . . (Roma: Presso Guglielmo Facciotti, 1594), p. 666, held in the Old Library, University of Exeter, cited by Thomas Merriman, 'Unremarked Evidence against Anderegg's Conjecture', *Notes and Queries* 60 (3) (2103), 407–410.

¹⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Nicholas Harpsfield: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12369>>.

¹⁶ See Jason Morgan's discussion of this in '[Maria Regina Angliæ: A Gift for a Tudor Queen](#)', *New College Notes* 10 (2018), no. 4.

¹⁷ Poole, '[Two Copies](#)'.

¹⁸ Wood, *Athenæ Oxoniensis*, vol. 1, col. 172.

¹⁹ The letter from Charles Eyston is reproduced in Nicholas Pocock's edition of Harpsfield's *Treatise* (London: Camden Society, 1878), pp. 3–6, quoted at p. 6.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 5.

copy of this book by my brother Robert's interest with Mr. Greenway, a fellow of that house. It was shown me by Mr. Pyle, a fellow also of the same college'.²¹ Whether or not the librarian was following an official college policy, Eyston clearly had to be persistent and perhaps had to use clandestine Catholic connections to see the manuscript.

There is a further unremarked link between Eyston and the college manuscripts. The scrappily written note of the *Life and Character of Doctor Nicholas Harpsfield*, probably dating from the second half of the seventeenth century²² and inserted at the front of MS 311B, was clearly copied by Eyston and appended to the letter to his son. Although a margin note in the insert references Bridgewater's *Concertatio Ecclesiae Catholicae*,²³ this is only a source for what otherwise appears to be an anonymous short biography. So it would seem that Eyston definitely saw MS 311B and copied out the account of Harpsfield's life. Perhaps another missing link here is the antiquarian and Jacobite Thomas Hearne, who could also well have copied out the biography and passed it on to Eyston. Hearne lived most of his life at St Edmund Hall and looked at the college manuscripts in 1719 (with Eyston?) and again in 1725. He noted he had acquired his own copy of a manuscript of the *Treatise* from 'a Gentleman of very eminent Virtues, who died in 1721'. That this was Charles Eyston is certainly proved by Hearne's diary entry for 9 November 1721.²⁴ All this points to a very detailed and lively interest in Harpsfield as an authoritative, even enjoyably subversive, buttress to a Catholic community that still felt very much under threat from the Protestant establishment.

In further evidence that Harpsfield remained a significant name in the shadowy English Catholic culture of the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope, from a family of Catholic recusants, refers erroneously in a note in *The Dunciad* on 'De Lyra' (Bk I, l. 153) to 'Nich. de Lyra, or Harpsfield . . . a very voluminous commentator, whose works . . . were printed in 1472'. In fact he probably meant Nicolaus de Lyra (c. 1270–1349), but the name Harpsfield obviously sprang to mind. The error is then perpetuated in Elwin and Courthope's edition of Pope's works (1871–89): 'Pope's date for De Lyra is wrong. He alludes to Nicholas Harpsfield, Fellow of New College, Oxford, a vehement opponent of Henry VIII.'s divorce from Queen Katharine, and author of a voluminous Ecclesiastical History of England.'²⁵

That Harpsfield's name and work continued to be known in the nineteenth century should not surprise us. Following the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 and growing integration of Catholics into public life, there began to be a wider recognition of his contribution to historiography outside partisan Catholic circles. For example, Christopher Wordsworth in his *Ecclesiastical Biography* draws heavily on Foxe for his largely Protestant Reformation subjects, but includes a life of Thomas More from a manuscript he found in Lambeth Place Library. He adduces convincing evidence that this is Harpsfield's work.²⁶ Agnes Strickland (or at least her sister Elizabeth who did most of the historical research), writing in the mid-century, clearly had read a Harpsfield *Treatise* manuscript and, quoting from it, uses it to imagine a rather touching insight into Queen Katharine's character in her *Lives of the Queens of England*.²⁷ But her narrative overlay shows all the more, by contrast, the serious historical intent of her Harpsfield source.

²¹ Quoted in Nicholas Pocock's notice of the first printed edition of the *Treatise*, in *The Academy* 215 (17 June 1876), 577–9, at p. 577.

²² This is supported by the handwriting, and that one of the sources it references is dated 1641.

²³ John Bridgewater, *Concertatio Ecclesiae Catholicae in Anglia aduersus Calvinopapistas et Puritanos sub Elizabetha Regina* (Trier: Henricus Bock, 1588).

²⁴ Thomas Hearne, *Reliquiae Hearnianae: The Remains of Thomas Hearne*, ed. Philip Bliss, 2 vols. (Oxford: James Wright, 1857), vol. 2, p. 475: 'On Sunday Morning died Charles Eyston, of East Hendred in Berks, esq. a gentleman of eminent virtues, and my great acquaintance'. Presumably Hearne's copy was a fresh one taken from the Eyston copy, since Eyston's was still in the hands of the family in 1872 when the third report of the *Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* was published.

²⁵ Edward Bensly, *Notes and Queries* (series 12), 11 (237) (28 October 1922), 357.

²⁶ Christopher Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical biography; or Lives of eminent men, connected with the history of religion in England; from the commencement of the Reformation to the Revolution* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1810), vol. 2, p. 45.

²⁷ Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), vol. 4, p. 141

In 1875 the Catholic historian and writer, Lord Acton, published extracts from both Harpsfield's *Life of Sir Thomas More* and from the *Treatise*. He does not acknowledge from which manuscripts he took his extracts, but refers to Wood and Hearne knowing the value of the *Treatise*, which means he must certainly have known of the New College manuscript(s). Rather oddly, Acton claims the *Treatise* would have been published by Wood or Hearne 'if it had been less technical'.²⁸ Acton's motives in publishing extracts, then, are clearly designed to popularise Harpsfield's broader arguments. At a time when new Catholic dioceses had recently been established in England and of increasing questions across Europe about the Pope's secular power, there was a popular need for many English Catholics to emphasise their Englishness. They were keen to adopt a narrative of continuity with the ancient church in England, which had been erroneously interrupted by Henry VIII's marital problems. Such anti-ultramontanism was often apparent in Acton's editorship of the Catholic periodical *Home and Foreign Review*, and brought him into conflict with Cardinal Wiseman, the first Archbishop of Westminster. He will certainly have seen how disseminating the principal arguments of Harpsfield's *Treatise* could be helpful to his cause.

As a result of a correspondence between Lord Acton and Nicholas Pocock, sometime Fellow of The Queen's College Oxford, the first publication of Harpsfield's entire *Treatise* was in 1878, edited from four manuscripts: the two in New College, Eyston's, and a fourth from the Grenville Library in the British Museum. Pocock had previously done a critical edition of Gilbert Burnet's *History of the Reformation*,²⁹ and was developing a reputation as a more objective interpreter of the Protestant view of the Reformation. In his preface to his edition of the *Treatise*, he asserts that much of Harpsfield's narrative which 'would have been pronounced as fiction fifty years ago if this manuscript had then been published has been amply verified by the publication of the State Papers of the reign of Henry VIII'.³⁰ Nonetheless, some of his opinions should come with caveats. In an article on the *Treatise* in *The Academy*, he discusses other sources for the subject of Henry's divorce, including Nicholas Sander's *De origine* and Joachim Le Grand's reference to a manuscript by Thomas Harding.³¹ He curiously ignores the intellectual interconnectivity of these former New College fellows, and wrongly calls them 'three independent contemporary witnesses of the way in which the marriage ceremony was performed'.³²

Despite Lord Acton's extracts and substantial references to it in the nineteenth century,³³ it was not until 1932 that Harpsfield's *Life of Sir Thomas More* was published, probably driven by the growing impetus for More to be canonised in 1935 on the four hundredth anniversary of his execution. Although modern historians have plenty of sources for More's life, it is testimony to the enduring value of Harpsfield's scholarship, notwithstanding his partisan stance, that many of the facts he relates are acknowledged to have been carefully supported by evidence from More's own writings. And, in a more popular twist which the serious scholar Harpsfield would surely have found hard to imagine, Robert Bolt's 1960 drama about More, *A Man for all Seasons*, draws *inter alia* upon Harpsfield's biography.³⁴

Recognising Nicholas Sander's connection with New College, Stephen C. Watney presented the college library in 1944 with a copy of a 1610 edition of Sander's *De origine et progressu schismatis Anglicani* together with an accompanying note on the author written by Sir John Watney

²⁸ Harpsfield's narrative of the divorce [from *Life of sir Thomas More and A treatise on the pretended divorce between Henry viii and Catharine of Aragon*], ed. Lord Acton (London, [c. 1875]), p. [3].

²⁹ *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England by Gilbert Burnet, D.D.*, ed. Nicholas Pocock, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865).

³⁰ *A Treatise on the Pretended Divorce between Henry VIII. and Catharine of Aragon, by Nicholas Harpsfield, LL.D.*, ed. Nicholas Pocock (London: Camden Society, 1878), p. viii.

³¹ Joachim Le Grand, *Histoire du divorce de Henry VIII. roy d'Angleterre, et de Catherine D'Arragon*, 3 vols. (Paris: Chez la Veuve d'Edme Martin, Jean Boudot, & Estienne Martin, 1688).

³² *The Academy* 215 (1876), 579.

³³ See for example, T. E. Bridgett, *Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More* (London: Burns & Oates, 1891).

³⁴ John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 192–4.

(1834–1923), who was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. ‘Graver historians’, wrote Sir John, ‘have been satisfied if they found a fact told by him, and it is not improbable that the reason why his countrymen dealt so harshly with him is founded on their convictions that his authority was too great should be overturned by any means except those who some of them too readily adopted “scurrilous railing”’.³⁵ His comment is certainly indicative of Sander’s strong and lengthy influence as a Catholic historian of the Reformation, but also of a gradual rebalancing of his reputation in the face of attacks by equally partisan Protestant historians.

In contrast to much of Harpsfield’s work which Topcliffe’s manuscript haul effectively prevented from contemporary publication, Sander’s works were widely published and translated abroad, notably *The Roocke of the Church* (1567) and *De Visibili Monarchia Ecclesiae* (1571), in his lifetime. After his death in 1585, a fellow priest, Edward Rishton, edited and oversaw the publication of *De origine*. It was a runaway success. Between 1585 and 1628 it was issued in six Latin editions, translated into French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, and Spanish, as well as being turned into a school play performed in Louvain in 1624.³⁶ Like Harpsfield’s *Treatise*, its claim of Henry and Anne Boleyn’s incest made it a dangerous text to own in the late sixteenth century and, as we have seen with Harpsfield’s work, Richard Topcliffe was zealous in collecting up copies. Nonetheless over the course of the seventeenth century it continued to be widely circulated abroad and its influence continued to be felt to be dangerous. It was a French translation in the mid-1670s that stirred the English ecclesiastical establishment into action with Gilbert Burnet’s *The History of the Reformation of the Church in England*, which he started in 1679.³⁷ Burnet makes the focus of his task clear: ‘When Sanders’ History was published in France, it had so ill an effect there, that some of our best divines were often called on to hasten such an answer to it, as might stop the course of so virulent a book’.³⁸

Burnet’s last volume of his *History* came out in 1714 and continued to dominate eighteenth-century ecclesiastical writing. But by the nineteenth century there is evidence to show recognition of the importance of Sander’s work as an historian, rather than as simply a polemicist. This supported the desire of Catholics in England to prove their English roots for reasons already discussed, as well as an interest in closer integration with Rome by some post-Oxford movement Anglicans. In 1868, an article in *The Saturday Review* (a London weekly newspaper established by high church Anglican A. J. B. Beresford Hope) recommended Sander’s *De origine* ‘as presenting a more discriminating account of the various disturbances in Church and State than can be found in so small a compass anywhere else. We hope someday to see it translated into English’. The writer goes on to say that the recent release of state papers of the time³⁹ ‘tend to verify Sanders’s facts, even in cases where he was thought to be lying most outrageously’.⁴⁰

In 1877, the year before Harpsfield’s *Treatise* was published by the Camden Society, Sander’s *De origine* was finally published in English, translated by David Lewis.⁴¹ Not untypical of the ecclesiastical currents of his time, he was an Anglican convert to Roman Catholicism. But even a contemporary review, clearly not sympathetic to Lewis’s outlook or scholarship, acknowledges that Sander’s historical facts are accurate when compared with state papers. The reviewer praises Sander for his honesty, if not his impartiality.⁴² At the very least, as the late nineteenth-century Jesuit historian J. H. Pollen pointed out, there was a general sense of Sander’s role in enabling

³⁵ Sir John Watney, *Supplement to the memorandum on The Sanders Family*, New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 2815. I am indebted to Jennifer Thorp for drawing my attention to this in the college archives.

³⁶ Christopher Highley, ‘“A Pestilent and Seditious Book”: Nicholas Sander’s *Schismatis Anglicani* and Catholic Histories of the Reformation’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (1–2) (2005), 151–71, at p. 154.

³⁷ Nicholas Sander, *Histoire du schisme d’Angleterre*, trans. François de Maucroix (Paris: André Pralard, 1676).

³⁸ *The History of the Reformation . . . by Gilbert Burnet*, ed. Pocock (1865), ‘The Introduction’, vol. 3, p. 18.

³⁹ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII.*, arranged and catalogued by J. S. Brewer under the direction of the Master of the Rolls (London: Longman, 1862–4).

⁴⁰ Anon., ‘Sanders on the English Schism’, *The Saturday Review* 26 (3 October 1868), 464.

⁴¹ Sander, *Rise and Growth*, trans. Lewis (1877).

⁴² James Gairdner, *The Academy* 289 (17 November 1877), 465–6.

historians to reach for a more objective understanding of the Anglican reformation: 'no history of a violent strife . . . can be truly appreciated without carefully examining the question from the points of view of each of the contending parties'.⁴³

After this flurry of publishing activity and a general diminution of religious controversy, Sander's legacy seems to have retreated to relatively limited Catholic circles during the twentieth century.⁴⁴ But more recent appraisals of both his and Harpsfield's work have affirmed their scholarly intent, and pinpointed more precisely their enduring value. Felicity Heal, for example, has observed that Harpsfield and Sander wrote for a predominantly clerical elite and could not compete in populist terms with Foxe. Their work, she argues, was 'valuable no doubt as source texts for polemic and preaching'.⁴⁵ Just as Lord Acton recognised, it was probably 'too technical'. Seen in this light, and now largely detached from the partisan designations of former eras, Harpsfield's and Sander's contributions as serious Catholic theologians and historians of the Reformation take on new importance. Even if they did not achieve 'the appropriation of a national history for the English Catholic community',⁴⁶ their work can still be viewed as a valuable balance to centuries of a national Protestant narrative of the Reformation. Not only this, but the way their work was circulated and published certainly offers the contemporary reader 'some insight into the power of history as a tool of controversial writing'.⁴⁷

In reassessing the influence of New College's sixteenth-century Catholic scholars we can see an evolving and continuing pattern in which their work has been appropriated to the needs and cultural outlook of successive generations; initially within the recusant Catholic community, but then more widely. First, a good many of former fellows went into exile and formed a powerful scholarly community of apologists in Louvain, interconnected, of course, by their college links. And, as we have seen in the case of Sander, through this network they could still draw on manuscripts of those who were left behind in England. Second, the heady religious controversies of the seventeenth-century, culminating in the ascent to the throne of James II as an openly Catholic monarch, served to fuel a need for sympathisers and scholars, even antagonists, to be able to turn to a Catholic narrative of the Reformation: hence, in all probability, the commissioning and clandestine circulation of the New College Harpsfield manuscripts. Third, prominent Catholic antiquarians in the eighteenth century continued to work at securing their narrative of the Reformation by proliferating and contextualising Harpsfield's and Sander's work in Catholic circles. Fourth, although it is not surprising that Harpsfield's and Sander's texts finally appeared in print in the nineteenth century as part of the Catholic emancipation, the corroboration of their facts with then newly published state papers served to give wider recognition to their inherent scholarship. Their work also proved fruitful support for 'high church' Anglicans and English Catholics looking to affirm a continuing English catholicity which they saw as having been upset by mere political expediency. Fifth, although growing ecumenism and secularism have largely diminished the ferocity of such Protestant-Catholic debate in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Harpsfield's and Sander's work and their subsequent readership still continue to find their place in modern study of the historiography of Reformation.

Robert Gullifer
Director of the New College School Foundation

⁴³ J. H. Pollen, 'Dr Nicholas Sander', *The English Historical Review* 6 (21) (1891), 36–47, at p. 47.

⁴⁴ See for example, 'Some letters and papers of Nicolas Sander, 1562–1580', contributed by John B. Wainwright, in *Publications of the Catholic Record Society* 26 (1923), 1–57.

⁴⁵ Felicity Heal, 'Appropriating History: Catholic and Protestant Polemics and the National Past', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (1–2) (2005), 109–132, at p. 130.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 130.