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The Black Dog of Bungay: Religious Conflict and Supernatural Terror in a Suffolk Parish

In 1577 the market town of Bungay, on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, was riven by a grotesque and unusual event. During a storm, several members of the congregation were killed or injured, apparently by the appearance of the Devil in the guise of a demonic black hound. Anchored by this legendary appearance of “Black Shuck,” this study centres on a microhistorical investigation of the town of Bungay in the years leading up to the ominous events of 1577, through a previously neglected set of sources — two sets of unusually complete and comprehensive churchwardens’ accounts for the two parishes in Bungay, which cover the entire period of the early Elizabethan Reformation. This allows us to appreciate these events in the context of a renewed interest in the 1560s and early 1570s as a time of fractiousness, insecurity, and religious uncertainty. The events of 1577 were perhaps only a dark capstone on a decade or more of severe disputes at the grass-roots, engendered by growing confessional divisions and a crystallising sense of traditionalist versus Puritan cultural identities.

In 1577, the community of St Mary’s Church — a parish in the Suffolk market town of Bungay — witnessed a grotesque and horrifying event. A gigantic storm killed or seriously injured numerous members of the congregation, and the culprit was named in popular reports of the event as Satan himself, in the guise of a demonic black hound, “Black Shuck,” running amok through the church. This event was prominent enough that it featured in national chronicles, and persuaded one Puritan divine, Abraham Fleming, to write a lengthy pamphlet, in which he rationalised the incident as providential judgement against moral decline, kindled by the “fire of our iniquities.”¹ The legend of the “Black Dog of Bungay” remains culturally potent to this day. It is included in books of British folklore and forms a significant part of Bungay’s cultural identity, with an annual “Black Shuck festival” held in the town.² Bungay’s children were long told that the “black dog would have them” if they misbehaved, and the town’s coat of arms depicts the hellish hound on a forked sheet of lightning.³

Christopher Reeve, an historian local to Bungay, has published a study of this incident, borrowing the title of Fleming’s pamphlet — “A Straunge and Terrible Wunder.” Reeve

1. A. Fleming, *A straunge and terrible wunder wrought very late in the parish church of Bongay* (London, 1577).

2. The town of Bungay retains a reputation for attracting those interested in New Age movements, witchcraft, and the occult, because of its connection with the legend. This has prompted some sensationalist news reporting in recent years that would arguably have made even Fleming blush. See S. Baxter, “Inside the Satanist capital of Britain,” *Daily Telegraph* online edition, 11 July 2023.

3. C. Reeve, *A Straunge and Terrible Wunder: The Story of the Black Dog of Bungay* (Bungay: Morrow and Co., 1988), 2.

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touches briefly upon the religious context, before situating it within the wider folklore tradition of apparitions concerning Black Shuck.⁴ This article, however, aims to approach the Black Shuck episode afresh in the light of recent historiography; to explore the lead-up to the horrors of 1577 through a previously neglected set of sources, and to appreciate these events in the context of a renewed historiographical interest in the early Elizabethan Reformation, as a time of fractiousness, insecurity, and religious uncertainty. In the process, we can conclude that the apparition of Black Shuck was preceded by a long-term breakdown in the paradigms of “neighbourliness.”⁵ There has been a growing recognition that inter-confessional relations in early modern England were not usually marked by conflict at an individual level, more often taking the form of efforts at “getting along” and putting differences to one side.⁶ But any form of mutual tolerance had its limits, and moments of social tension could fray the bonds of loose coexistence, as Alexandra Walsham has explored in her work on the “Blackfriars incident” of 1623.⁷ The Bungay case study provides us with a fresh way of investigating where those limits lay.

It has been too easy, as Fred Smith has discussed, to see the 1560s and early 1570s as the mere dying convulsions of a long-dominant Catholic consensus, fast eroded by state coercion.⁸ This attitude, typified by the work of John Bossy on seigneurial Catholicism and the gradual retreat of Catholics from political life into the gentry household,⁹ has been extensively disputed in recent years. A huge volume of work has focused on the reign of Mary I as a time during which a clearly-articulated and cohesive Catholic identity developed. This re-evaluation arguably began with Jennifer Loach’s work on the political motives for Mary’s policies,¹⁰ but it is exemplified by the more recent work of Eamon Duffy, whose 2009 book *Fires of Faith* showed that the Marian counter-Reformation had made substantial inroads into re-Catholicising England through forms of “creative reconstruction.”¹¹ Smith has summarised how recent scholarship has converged on an appreciation of the sheer dynamism of Marian Catholicism and how it provided a plausible foundation for a stable Catholic future.¹² Furthermore, wider political events suggested that the petering-out of parochial Catholicism was not remotely assured. Instead of beholding the triumph of English Protestantism, the 1560s and early 1570s witnessed profound Protestant *insecurity*, with future Catholic restoration frequently seeming plausible. Norman Jones aptly described Elizabethan religious policy as an “unsettled settlement,”¹³ within which Catholics were apprehensive about renewed persecution, yet heartened by Elizabeth’s dislike of religious “enthusiasm.” Some hoped that the Queen might return to

4. Reeve, 41.

5. See K. Wrightson, “The ‘Decline of Neighbourliness’ Revisited,” in *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. N. L. Jones and D. Woolf (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19–49, for an exploration of this concept.

6. W.J. Sheils, “‘Getting on’ and ‘getting along’ in parish and town: Catholics and their neighbours in England,” in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands, c.1570–1720*, ed. B.J. Kaplan, B. Moore, H. van Nierop and J. Pollman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 68–70.

7. A. Walsham, “‘The Fatall Vesper’: Providentialism & Anti-Popery in Late Jacobean London,” *Past and Present*, 144, no. 1 (1994): 36–87.

8. See F. Smith, “The Origins of Recusancy in Elizabethan England Reconsidered,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017), 302. Haigh anticipated this kind of re-interpretation in “From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in Early Modern England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 31 (1981): 129–47. He referred to a kind of “Catholic Whiggery” (130), typified by Robert Parsons, who seeks to defend the novelty of the Jesuit order and to attack conservative-minded clergy who opposed them.

9. J. Bossy, “The Character of Elizabethan Catholicism,” *Past and Present*, 21, no. 1 (1962): 41.

10. J. Loach, “Mary Tudor and the re-Catholicisation of England,” *History Today*, 44 (1994): 16–22.

11. E. Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 5–6.

12. F. Smith, “Reinventing the counter-Reformation in Marian England, 1553–1558,” *The Historical Journal*, 64, no. 4 (2021): 1126–27.

13. N. Jones, *The Birth of the Elizabethan Age: England in the 1560s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 17.

Catholicism — a prospect that encouraged them as much as it terrified Protestants.¹⁴ More concerning still for English Protestants was the uncertainty of the succession, since Mary, Queen of Scots, whom they regarded as profoundly threatening to the English polity, was Elizabeth's potential heir. Stephen Alford commented that this "living connection" to continental Catholicism's ideological challenge seemed acutely to threaten fifth-columnist subversion.¹⁵ After the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, a French invasion, with Mary as figurehead, seemed plausible; in 1559 William Cecil suggested troops be sent to Scotland to pre-empt imminent French attack.¹⁶ This situation improved only gradually, and Cecil's assessments of foreign affairs in 1569 were very bleak indeed. The grassroots vitality of popular Catholicism, coexisting with an influential Puritan faction that believed the Reformation had not gone far enough, should lead us to question how fractious popular politics had become throughout these early years of the Elizabethan Reformation. The events in Bungay provide a perfect illustration of how this kind of rancour fomented.

Our aim is to consider the concept of confessionalisation — how much "Protestant" and "Catholic" identities had hardened into firm confessional barriers at a local level in this divided and uncertain atmosphere, and when and where clashes between those identities spilled over into outright communal discord. Diarmaid MacCulloch argued that laypeople did not begin to "own" the identities and labels of official "churches" until the close of the sixteenth century.¹⁷ But Peter Marshall contended that "precocious confessionalisation" was visible much earlier, even under Henry VIII. Acute awareness of religious divisions generated interest in distinguishing orthodoxy from heterodoxy, and piety was politicised — "for mighty and humble alike ... religious observance became a matter of obedience or disobedience."¹⁸ This is a contested concept, now frequently accompanied with qualifiers such as "confessionalisation from below," to illustrate how ordinary people chose to align themselves with, or define themselves against, the confessional programme imposed from "above."¹⁹ Judith Pollmann notes that only in contexts where Catholics and Protestants encountered each other, or encountered those of other faiths, did they come to question what made them Catholic or Protestant, and what this self-identity meant in terms of culture, social status, and moral beliefs about the world.²⁰ As we shall see, the example of Bungay illustrates a case in which advocates of Protestant reform pushed too far too fast, raising traditionalist ire and provoking institutional pressure and pushback. This eventually generated strange forms of social unrest, as clear religious "parties" coalesced within the town and fought to shape the direction of parochial affairs.

Our lens into examining this intriguing period of local conflict is the existence of two comprehensive sets of churchwardens' accounts and miscellaneous parish papers, associated with the two parishes in the town of Bungay — St Mary's, a former priory and the site of the 1577 apparition, and Holy Trinity. For each parish, a large and unusually complete folio volume collates accounts dating back to long before the Reformation. The comprehensive nature of these records allows us to conduct detailed analysis and explore

14. Jones, *The Birth of the Elizabethan Age*, 19.

15. S. Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–5.

16. Alford, 67.

17. D. MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 338–40.

18. P. Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 4–5.

19. The idea of confessionalisation from "above" and "below" appears extensively in the work of the German scholars who originally designed the paradigm of "confessionalisation" to investigate the dynamics of the German Empire at the turn of the seventeenth century. One could look at the work of Heinrich Richard Schmidt, who champions the "confessionalisation from below" model in *Dorf und Religion: Reformierte Sittenzucht in Berner Landgemeinden der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 1995).

20. J. Pollmann, "Being a Catholic in Early Modern Europe," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. A. Bamji, G. H. Janssen and M. Lavin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 166.

changes in parochial life over time. Local studies of parish papers have somewhat fallen from favour in recent years, frequently for a greater focus on popular print,²¹ which authors such as Alec Ryrie view as a medium through which popular mentalities can be better explored.²² This work, however, can still provide original insights, building on a tradition which arguably began with A. G. Dickens's work on parish registers in Yorkshire.²³ Significant gaps remain for this kind of microhistorical study in the 1560s and 1570s. For Christopher Haigh, who examined churchwardens' accounts in Elizabethan Lancashire, the 1560s were a mere prologue to the growth of Catholic recusancy,²⁴ while the most comprehensive work on sixteenth-century Suffolk, MacCulloch's *Suffolk and the Tudors*, collapses developments from 1536 to 1572 into one chapter, "The Years of Uncertainty," leaving much unanswered at the grassroots level.²⁵ Nevertheless, the work of John Craig on East Anglian market towns — using a similar microhistorical source base including churchwardens' accounts and town borough archives — reveals the potential of these sources to provide significant insight, by helping to build a comprehensive picture of the speed and context of the changes occurring, and to break our dependence on polemics with vested interests in portraying the strength of their own side.²⁶ This article takes one particularly unusual Suffolk town and uses this rich and hitherto neglected source base to bring some clarity to what occurred during MacCulloch's "uncertain years," building on Craig's work on the growth of distinctive religious "parties" at the grassroots level.

Before discussing the churchwardens' accounts, it is helpful to appreciate the town's context and history, and the pre-Reformation precedent for religious dissent. Bungay was a fortified and easily-defended town. Its location, on a narrow isthmus virtually encircled by a meander of the River Waveney, made it a formidable stronghold and gave it a degree of cultural isolation. Numerous castles had been built on the site, though the Norman keep had fallen into disrepair by the sixteenth century.²⁷ The town also hosted a priory of Benedictine nuns, who had obtained licences to appropriate the property of numerous churches in Bungay and the surrounding towns, thus thriving well into the 1530s; its total income in 1535 was £61 11 s. 9¼ d. Visitations in 1520 and 1532 suggested a well-functioning institution, with the bishops' commissaries reporting its condition as *omnia bene*. The priory was suppressed, at latest by December 1537, with the building and revenue granted to Thomas, Duke of Norfolk.²⁸ The associated parish church, St Mary's, remained active.

Curiously, the first signs of religious dissent in Bungay appear as far back as 1428. According to John Foxe, Lollardy had gained ground in the Waveney Valley, and Henry VI sent a six-man commission "in the town of Bungaie in the diocese of Norwiche and

21. Emblematic of this trend is Alec Ryrie's work on Protestantism and literary culture in *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 260–314; or Alexandra Walsham's work on the local effects of counter-Reformation propaganda in *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 235–83.

22. See Ryrie, 297. He describes books as "palimpsests layered with meaning," not just in their physical contents but the meanings others impute to them.

23. See A.G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509–1558* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

24. Haigh's chapter on "The Elizabethan Church in Lancashire," discussing efforts at establishing Anglican hegemony, mentions the 1560s only briefly, and is less than half the length of the subsequent chapters on recusancy. Dickens, 225–7; 247–94.

25. D. MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County, 1500–1600* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 158–91; within this, the 1560s are covered roughly from p. until the end of the chapter.

26. J. Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics: The Growth of Protestantism in East Anglian Market Towns, 1500–1610* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 20016–7).

27. A.L. Suckling, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Suffolk, Volume 2* (London: John Weale, 1846–1848), 119.

28. W. Page ed., *Victoria County History of Suffolk*, vol.2 (London: Constable, 1907), 81–83.

committed them to William Day and William Roe, constables of the town of Bungay.”²⁹ Bungay appears to have been a particular hotspot of Lollard activism within this already-sympathetic county. Foxe records a “John Spire of Bungay” amongst a list of more than seventy “good men and women ... forced to abjure, susteininge suche cruell pen-aunce as pleased then the sayd byshop [William Alnwick] and his chauncelour to lay upon them.” He alludes to a dozen other unnamed Bungay residents who were investigated.³⁰ As Richard Rex has explored, even though there is much debate about whether Lollardy can be seen as the harbinger of Protestantism or as something of a dead end, it is unquestionably true that most people prosecuted for Wycliffite dissidence in the lead-up to the Break with Rome came from areas with long-established traditions of dissent.³¹

No further religious conflict is recorded in Bungay until the 1510s, when two events indicate a probable revival of dormant religious radicalism — a few years *before* Luther published the Ninety-Five Theses. The first is a reference in *Acts and Monuments* to a martyr, “Thomas of Bungay,” a “man of great reverent age,” burnt at Norwich for a determined refusal to receive the sacrament. Foxe claims that Thomas abhorred “the popish kind and sorte of administration” — in other words, he espoused Lollard scepticism towards Catholic administration of the sacraments.³² Thomas’s case is calendared in Robert Parsons’s Catholic commentary on *Acts and Monuments*, which describe him as a craftsman (“artificer”) burnt for the Wycliffite heresy in 1511.³³ This makes explicit the connection with Lollardy, and suggests that Wycliffism held sway amongst the artisanal middle classes decades after the government had first investigated this issue.³⁴ There is some evidence that social status and economic activity intersected with confessional identity more generally in this early part of the sixteenth century. The 1535 will of John Brende, a Bungay merchant of middling wealth, contains an exhortation that his body should be buried “without any other cost” and refers to himself as a “sinner.”³⁵ These kinds of pious and austere sentiments, dismissing many of the usual expenses of a medieval Catholic funeral including almsgiving, were frequently found, often in near-identical language to that of Brende, in the writings of the so-called “Lollard knights” of the fourteenth century, as Andrew Brown has explored in his work on Lollard religious devotion in Wiltshire.³⁶

The other salient event in the 1510s was more unusual and, for religious conservatives, more troubling. On Corpus Christi Day in 1514, five pageants were paraded through the streets “in the honour of the blissyd Sacrament” — representing heaven, paradise, the world, Bethlehem, and hell. As Miri Rubin has discussed, Corpus Christi Day was the “Eucharistic feast” — the festivities and processions were a popular exposition of the importance of Eucharistic piety, and although they were not necessarily tied to a self-conscious religious orthodoxy, they were obvious targets for those who challenged orthodox views of the Sacrament.³⁷ Late that evening, the pageants, which had been set up in the town square (probably for a dramatic presentation or mystery play, using these

29. J. Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, 1563 edition, Book 3 (The Digital Humanities Institute, Sheffield, 2011), 401. The inconsistent spelling of “Bungay” is a feature of Foxe’s text.

30. Foxe, 402.

31. R. Rex., *The Lollards* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 94–101.

32. Foxe, 425.

33. R. Parsons, *An Examen of the Calendar or Catalogue of Protestant Saints, Martyrs, and Consellers, Devised by John Fox, and Prefixed Before His Great Volume, of Acts and Monuments* (London, 1604), 278.

34. Rex, 61.

35. Suffolk Archives, IC/500/1/3/184.

36. A.D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 204–09.

37. M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 243, 354.

representations of “sacred geography” as scenery),³⁸ were violently torn down by an armed band of townspeople, led by Richard Wharton, the Duke of Norfolk’s bailiff. The disturbances were ferocious, with Wharton and his men “arrayed as rioters and in riotous manner.” The language here is interesting, with the concerns seemingly more focused around disorder than heresy; and the incident was heard in the Star Chamber, indicating that the primary concern was public rowdiness and chaos. The matter was privately settled between Wharton and the town, and Wharton paid the costs and charges necessary to repair the pageants.³⁹

The Victoria County History dismisses this incident as mere “disorderly mischief,” arguing that the rioters’ excuses, and their promise to make amends, indicated no deeper religious motivation.⁴⁰ The inhabitants of Bungay had brought numerous complaints against Wharton in the Star Chamber, often centring around jurisdictional disputes between the town, which aspired to be self-governing, and the seigniorial lord (the Duke of Norfolk, through Wharton as his representative). But the sense that these events had a religious dimension, given that the targets were banners associated with the “blissyd Sacrament,” is hard to ignore. This may point to a tendency for the authorities to equate religious deviance with moral turpitude, and to prosecute actions that may have been partly religiously motivated as mere social disorder. Corpus Christi Day celebrations frequently provided an outlet for social tensions. As public, ceremonial articulations of community hierarchies, they could reveal division and misrule as surely as they could unify. In this unruly atmosphere, religious and secular motives combined to cause chaos.

Wharton never admitted his motivations in court, and his own confessional perspective is ambiguous and contradictory. MacCulloch describes how Wharton later became a loyal confidante to Thomas Cromwell, with whom he exchanged gifts and hospitality, and whom he served during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Wharton became a Justice of the Peace for Suffolk in 1537, at the zenith of Cromwell’s power.⁴¹ He was considered reliably Protestant, truculent, and difficult, and was presumably disliked by conservatives. In 1537, a resident of Bungay, Richard Bishop, was reported to Cromwell for advocating a local uprising against Wharton’s arbitrary and capricious authority while the Duke of Norfolk was distracted by the Pilgrimage of Grace.⁴² But equally, others refer to Wharton as a pious *Catholic*. In 1554 the poet George Marshall penned a “compendious treatise in metre” describing the conversion of England to Christianity. This work is polemically Catholic, condemning the “heresies” of Luther and Wycliffe and congratulating the English on the restoration of true religion under Mary. It is dedicated to the “right Worshipfull mayster Richarde Whartun,” despite him having participated willingly in the Cromwellian appropriation of monastic property a scant few years earlier.⁴³

Perhaps Wharton, who kept his job under successive Protestant and Catholic regimes, was a mere careerist, willing to conform to contrasting agendas for personal preferment. Additionally, Norfolk, Wharton’s master, was patron of St Mary’s Church, and the Corpus Christi Day processions were led by parishioners of Holy Trinity. Perhaps a breakdown in relations between the two parishes was a motivating factor. Whatever Wharton’s personal

38. See L. Blair, “A Note on the Relation of the Corpus Christi Procession to the Corpus Christi Play in England,” *Modern Language Notes*, vol.55 (2) (1940): 83–95, for more on the nature of Corpus Christi plays during this era.

39. National Archives, STAC 2/26/456.

40. Page, 26.

41. MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p.229.

42. D. MacCulloch, “Kett’s Rebellion in Context,” *Past and Present* 84, no. 1 (1979): 57.

43. See G. Marshall, “A compendious treatise in metre declaring the firste originall of sacrifice, and of the buylding of aultares and churches, and of the firste receauinge of the Christen fayth here in England” (London, 1554).

beliefs, it remains noteworthy that demonstrations could be raised in opposition to pagantry associated explicitly with Eucharistic devotion. This may indicate anti-clericalism, a sense that the church was corrupt or its rituals a sham, and enduring grassroots sympathies for Wycliffe. Furthermore, the Corpus Christi pageants continued to be a touchstone for conflict, and in 1537, further disturbances during the processions were recorded, with sacramental banners again torn down.⁴⁴ Early on, then, it seems that Bungay's quiescence was skin-deep, that conservative and reformist sentiments coexisted — sometimes within the mind and conscience of the same person — and that a degree of competition may have existed between the town's two parishes. This was not a recipe for communal harmony, and the situation would only worsen as the Reformation entered full swing.

The county of Suffolk has generally been regarded as a firmly Protestant region, where residents had not reacted to the Reformation with hostility, and many had greeted it with enthusiasm. Duffy plays into this perception when he juxtaposes Morebath and its resistance to Reformation, with "Suffolk villages in the Stour valley" in which the Protestant Gospel advanced rapidly.⁴⁵ Nowhere is this better expressed than in *The Breviary of Suffolk*, written in 1618 by Robert Reyce, a local historian, antiquary, and genealogist. Reyce, who claimed to have been educated in Calvinist Geneva,⁴⁶ emphasised Suffolk's "learned ministry," capable of inculcating robust Protestant faith in the masses:

The Lord hath vouchsafed many singular benefits as proper to this country, among which this one is not the least, the great number of religious, grave, reverend, and learned ministers of Gods holy word ... there was never a Bishop in this realm, nay in Europe ... that had so grave, so learned and judicious a ministry as he had.⁴⁷

This relatively co-operative attitude has also been observed in Craig's work on the churchwardens' accounts of Elizabethan Mildenhall, a large, sprawling parish in West Suffolk. Craig observed an overwhelming conformity to Elizabethan ecclesiastical authority, as well as occasional local efforts to go beyond the government's relatively mild initiatives and produce a more robustly Protestant, "godly," parish.⁴⁸

But there are reasons to question whether the course of religious reform in Suffolk ran anything like this smoothly. The complexity of confessional identities in Suffolk, and the endurance of Catholicism, is indicated in the correspondence of Bernardino De Mendoza, the Spanish diplomat who served as Philip II's ambassador to England between 1578 and 1584. Mendoza portrays a Protestant faith gaining limited traction in the county, both surprising and concerning the Queen:

The Queen has met with more Catholics than she expected, and in one of the houses they found a great many images which were ordered to be dragged round and burnt. When she entered Norwich large crowds of people came out to receive her, and one company of children knelt as she passed and said, as usual, "God save the Queen." She turned to them and said, "Speak up; I know you do not love me here."⁴⁹

44. Reeve, 8.

45. E. Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), xv. Admittedly, Duffy also acknowledges the county's diversity; what was true of these villages was not necessarily the case for Suffolk more widely.

46. C. G. Harlow, "Robert Reyce of Preston, 1555–1638", *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, 32, no. 1 (1970), 60.

47. R. Reyce, *The Breviary of Suffolk*, published in a printed transcript from the original manuscript in the British Museum, ed. F. Hervey (London: John Murray, 1902), 21.

48. Craig, 54–55.

49. "Simancas: September 1578," in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain (Simancas) vol.2, 1568–1579*, ed. M.A.S. Hume (London, 1894), 609–618. Accessed through British History Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/simancas/vol2/pp609-618> (accessed 24 March 2022).

Interestingly, Mendoza's account also raised concerns about witchcraft and occultism, directly after referring to the discovery of "popish images." He related a "very curious" event:

A countryman has found, buried in a stable, three wax figures, two spans high and proportionately broad; the centre figure had the word "Elizabeth" written on the forehead and the side figures were dressed like her councillors, and were covered over with a great variety of different signs, the left side of the images being transfixd with a large quantity of pig's bristles as if it were some sort of witchcraft. When it reached the Queen's ears she was disturbed, as it was looked upon as an augury, and great enquiries have been set on foot.⁵⁰

Previous analyses of Mendoza's correspondence have not noted this passage, but in the context of Catholic dissent, its significance is magnified, since distinct connections exist between "popish" subversion and accusations of witchcraft. Norman Jones discussed how the 1563 Witchcraft Act was intimately associated with fears of Catholic priests and dark priestly rituals. He refers to the 1561 Waldegrave conspiracy, where recusants were suspected of practising "magicke and conjuration;" and to the plot led by Arthur Pole and Anthony Fortescue, which conspired to instal Mary, Queen of Scots in Elizabeth's place, with witchcraft apparently utilised to foretell the date of Elizabeth's deposition and demise.⁵¹ In this context, the statement made by the Queen's notoriously brutal priest-catcher Richard Topcliffe — that Elizabeth resembled a "beast raised up on a sudden from hell by conjuring" when she discovered idolatrous pictures hidden in the loft of Euston Hall, a Suffolk country house — takes on new weight.⁵² In an atmosphere where fears of *literal* "conjuring" were rife, the Queen had to adopt a pose of righteous fury against sinister forces. It is easy to appreciate how the legend of the Black Dog of Bungay could have grown out of communal disharmony in this kind of cultural environment.

The Bishop of Norwich, the former Marian exile and zealous Protestant John Parkhurst, also attested to the strength of popular Catholicism at the grassroots. As MacCulloch wryly remarks, "Parkhurst's 'nolo episcopari' was an honest judgement of his own capabilities."⁵³ In his correspondence of August 1560 to the continental Protestant theologian Henry Bullinger, Parkhurst expressed cautious optimism, describing how 'many pious persons are quite satisfied'; and regarding his own diocese, "a few things still remain unsatisfactory, but I hope for an improvement." By April 1562, this had shifted to an ambivalent, cautious, even pessimistic attitude. Parkhurst lamented how his fellow bishops lacked his reformist fervour, rarely corresponding with continental Protestants, and commented that although there were "in England many good and zealous men," there were also "many too cold, and not a few lukewarm, whom the Lord will spue out of his mouth."⁵⁴ By autumn 1569, Parkhurst's failures to impose firm ecclesiastical discipline on his divided diocese had stretched patience beyond its limits, and several members of the Privy Council complained about his "evill governance," darkly and ironically threatening his own "reformation" if he did not take more robust action to deal with both Puritan sectaries and nascent Catholic subversion.⁵⁵

50. "Simancas: September 1578," 609–18.

51. See N. Jones, "Defining Superstitions: Treasonous Catholics and the Act against Witchcraft of 1563", in *State, Sovereigns and Society in Early Modern England: Essays in Honour of A. J. Slavin*, ed. C. Carlton (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 193.

52. Letter from Richard Topcliffe to the Earl of Shrewsbury, 30 August 1578, printed in *Illustrations of British History, Biography and Manners in the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth and James I*, 2nd edition, ed. E. Lodge (London: John Chidley, 1838), 119.

53. i.e. "I do not want to be a bishop" — a refusal to accept episcopal office in the Anglican and Catholic churches. MacCulloch is referring to the idea that as a form of decorum or modesty, a candidate offered episcopal preferment should reply to the offer with "nolo episcopari" the first two times they are asked to serve. See MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, 184.

54. An allusion to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:15–16, which had displeased Christ with its insufficiently zealous faith.

55. National Archives, E 135/25/31, fo.13.

The churchwardens' accounts in Bungay, especially for St Mary's, are comprehensive and thorough, and they confirm many of these insights into the state of East Anglian religion in Elizabeth's early reign, attesting to this growing sense of polarisation, division, and disruption to the rhythms and rituals of parochial life. At first, the changes were sweeping and rapid, but in time — particularly in the 1560s after Elizabeth's accession — they began to meet with increasing resistance.

In St Mary's, the nunnery's dissolution led to almost immediate liturgical changes, as the veneration of St Thomas Becket, seemingly a popular part of local lay spirituality, was attacked. In 1537, money was paid to one John Pack for destroying the "wyndows of Bekyt," and further sums were paid to eliminate references to Becket in the service book, or at least to qualify these in accordance with government priorities ("inprimis payd to Sr Rychard Charnell for correkyng the s[er]vyce of Thomas Bekytt").⁵⁶ Of course the Becket cult had explicitly political overtones in that it could challenge the foundations of Henrician pretensions to ecclesiastical authority, and the smashing of the Becket cult in Bungay was carried out in compliance with wider state legislation, rather than being a unique agenda to this parish. It was at least as much a political act as it was an indication of Protestant reform gaining local confidence. There is little other evidence of significant liturgical change for parishioners during the 1530s. But nevertheless, as Reeve comments, for those personally devoted to the Becket cult and associated miraculous cures, such change was surely difficult to accept.⁵⁷

The suppression of the old priory may also have brought long-lasting fiscal challenges, and difficulties in clerical recruitment, to the parish church. Similar problems can be observed in other case studies in the county of Suffolk. In St Peter's Church, Ipswich, after the dissolution of the Priory of St Peter and St Paul, there are references to how the fabric of the parish church was deteriorating and that essential maintenance had been neglected throughout the 1560s,⁵⁸ while the church was having to pay priests resident at other parishes to give services, indicating a shortage of willing clergy.⁵⁹ In St Mary's too, there was a severe shortage of priests recorded in the mid-1560s, suggesting that the transition from priory to parish church brought a short-term impoverishment to the parish's clerical life.⁶⁰

After Edward VI's accession, changes to the church fabric of St Mary's became more radical, indicating growing confidence in the project of producing a godly Protestant parish. After the 1548 edict decreeing that images and superstitious objects be removed, numerous entries reference compliance:

Item paid to Packe for whityng a tabernacle.

'tem recorded for certain tabernacles⁶¹ and images which were taken owt of the church.

Item paid to Hurnd and his man for takyng down tabernacles.⁶²

56. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.16v-f.16r.

57. Reeve, 9.

58. Suffolk Archives, FB101/E1, f.8r – f.9r.

59. Suffolk Archives, FB101/E1, f.10v.

60. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.35v.

61. "Tabernacle" in this context probably does not refer to the locked boxes in which consecrated communion hosts were kept, as in the more usual religious meaning of this word today. After all, a church would only need one of these. It seems instead to refer to small niches for images, which were likely being whitewashed to remove objectionable decorations. See Suffolk Archives, FC62/E1/1, 1493–4, for a similar reference to the "peynting of [a] tabernacull" associated with the image of a saint in the churchwardens' accounts of the nearby parish of Cratfield.

62. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.24v.

Stained glass windows were removed, and the church walls were also whitewashed. In 1550, the following entries record the removal of both low and high altars, the disposal of their building material, and their replacement with a much plainer communion table:

Item paid to Orlowe Valy and one other laborer for takyng down of the lowe alter and for carriage of the stone and mortar awaye.

Item paid to Bartlett and his man Pumfrett and Larwood for taken down and bering awaye stone and lyme of the high alter.

Item paid to Edward Molle for tymber for comunyon table and for makyng the same.⁶³

It also becomes clear that St Mary's was, for now, generally a loyalist parish, willing to comply with government edicts in order to remain faithful to crown and country. But this did not indicate *enthusiasm* for state directives so much as what Ethan Shagan calls "expedient religion," when describing how outward affectations of reformed belief could be cultivated while indicating little about inward mindsets.⁶⁴ This is made apparent by the fact that Mary's accession almost immediately reversed most of the reforms that had been made. The new communion table was taken down in 1553, and payments were made for a new high altar.⁶⁵ Various images, which had presumably either been newly purchased or had been put into storage during Edward's reign, were erected in the church. For example, in 1558, the accounts record "item paied to Edward Molle and his man for a daies worke for setting uppe the images of St Marie and St John on the rood lofft."⁶⁶ In 1559, as the religious landscape lurched back towards Protestantism upon Elizabeth's accession, these changes were *again* reversed:

Item paid to Molle for takyng downe the images.

Item payd to John Felld for a daes worke in brekyng down the alters.

Item payd to Cotes and Butt for breking the images.⁶⁷

Notably, the same Molle, who set up the images the previous year, was now being paid to remove them again. Additionally, the images were now being *broken up* rather than merely put into storage. Someone was clearly taking no chances, and desired that any future restoration of the parish to its pre-1559 state should become impossible.

In the next few years, Protestant change continued apace. Payments were again recorded to "Molle and hys men for taking down the perke,"⁶⁸ as well as to a mason for removing the holy water stoups built into the church walls near the entrance.⁶⁹ This latter entry seems to go beyond mere compliance and shades into Puritan radicalism. Parkhurst's visitation articles did not inquire after these stoups, and there was no state pressure to remove them. In some parishes stoups were concealed, but, as Duffy has discussed, they were often rapidly

63. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.25r.

64. E. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 270–71.

65. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.27r.

66. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.31v. The dating of 1558, in the last year of Mary's reign, may indicate that these particular images were new acquisitions. It would probably be unusual for the parish to have kept them in storage for the rest of Mary's reign till then.

67. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.32v.

68. An East Anglian dialect word for a rood-loft. See S. A. Cotton, H. E. Lunnon and L. J. Wrapson, "Medieval Rood Screens in Suffolk: their Construction and Painting Dates," *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 43, no. 2 (2014), 220.

69. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.35r.

uncovered when traditionalists seemed ascendant, such as during the 1569 Northern Rising.⁷⁰ Finally, the plain communion table was restored in place of the altar, and the image of St Christopher on the south wall of the church was defaced beyond recognition.⁷¹

Such rapid fluctuations between different confessional positions may have been socially dislocating for the parochial community, who enjoyed little consistency. Additionally, there is evidence that some edicts were not being carried out at all. The rood-loft, which Molle had been paid to take down, was certainly still there eleven years later, as it is mentioned in 1570 as an item that still needed to be removed in order to comply fully with the government's agendas.⁷² It is clearly not so simple as to assume that churchwardens' accounts are always objective texts, and that every task listed in the accounts was carried out and never reversed. These were not straight factual accounts of what had necessarily been done, but records of what the authors wanted future generations — or official inspectors prying into parochial affairs — to see had been done.⁷³

The initial signs of the growing conflict engendered by these changes emerge in 1570, as the St Mary's accounts record the churchwardens being summoned to the bishop's court in Norwich to answer for their part in a recent dispute. The relevant entries read as follows:

Item paid to Richard Kyng for takyn down the font cover which was comaundyd by the Commissarye to be had away.

Item paid for charge at Norwiche to the Clarke at the byshop's court for discharge the appearance of the churchwardens who were so'moynd by the Deane to make certificate of the pullyng down of the font and other thyngs, comaundyd by the commissarye.⁷⁴

These curious entries describe the churchwardens appearing before the court for failing to remove the font cover — and, indeed, the cryptic “other thyngs” suggests further significant non-compliance.⁷⁵ The second entry may imply that the churchwardens had been tasked with pulling down the font in its entirety, perhaps replacing it with plainer basins, as in some more Puritan parishes.⁷⁶ In any case, the churchwardens had not obeyed, at least initially. The vicar of St Mary's, Christopher Smythe, had served since the Marian regime, and there is evidence, as we shall see, that he was sympathetic to conservative viewpoints — meaning that he probably supported his churchwardens' decision to take a firm stand. The seeds for conflict had clearly been sown.

It is worth noting that many changes taking place within St Mary's, aimed at producing a robustly Protestant, “godly” parish, seemingly met with still greater reluctance in the town's other parish, the Church of the Holy Trinity. The fact that two churches in the same town reacted differently, at least in this early period when confessional identities were in flux, indicates that personalities may have played a larger role than social, cultural, or economic factors. One might note that in the incidents surrounding the Corpus Christi Day

70. E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 490.

71. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.36v.

72. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.38v; f.40v.

73. See A. Wood, “Tales from the Yarmouth Hutch: Civic Identities and Hidden Histories in an Urban Archive,” in *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe*, ed. L. Corens, K. Peters and A. Walsham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 213–30, for a case study of how the archive could be used to fashion narratives for partisan purposes.

74. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.40v.

75. This entry is glossed by Reeve in his discussion of the lead-up to the Black Dog affair. But Reeve records the second entry as the churchwardens being asked to ensure the “pullyn down of the font cover” (12–13). Reeve has presumably interpolated “cover” from the fact that the cover is explicitly mentioned in the preceding entry, but it is not present in the original.

76. D. G. Bruggink, “Church Architecture,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. D. K. McKim and D. F. Wright (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 10.

parades, parishioners from Holy Trinity took part in the processions and performances, with no mention of involvement from St Mary's. Holy Trinity certainly continued holding church-ales and similar festivities well into the 1560s and even beyond, which would have been looked upon suspiciously by devout Puritans distasteful of "sports." In 1566, 1567, and 1570 large-scale dramatic performances were held in the churchyard, with money spent on "gone powder," "scaffolds," stages for the performance, and booths for eating and drinking. It seems that one of the plays featured witches as prominent characters, with "gloves for the wyttche" purchased for the performances in 1566 and 1570.⁷⁷ This kind of pantomime is surely just the sort of "profane entertainment" upon which the Puritanically-minded would frown, and by the 1580s unruly entertainments of this kind were certainly being restricted. That these festivities were being carried out in the hallowed ground of the churchyard would have raised Protestant ire even further.

While discussing these games in 1567, the accounts describe acquiring an "image of Our Ladie" from the parish of St Mary's.⁷⁸ This is a striking entry — as one parish discarded evidence of its Catholic traditions, the other sought to provide these artefacts with a safe haven. Clearly, this also shows us that not all images ordered to be "broken up" in St Mary's were actually being destroyed, and that some parishioners were interested in their survival. But the overt conservatism and desire to preserve the medieval past in Holy Trinity is remarkable. One might draw connections to Benjamin Kaplan's work, describing how different confessional traditions could exist side-by-side within communities: a form of "spatial accommodation," preserving pluralism and even tolerance within strictly-policed boundaries.⁷⁹ Of course, in Bungay the two parishes cannot be separated into "Catholic" and "Protestant," with the situation in St Mary's more complex and contested. Still, this evidence underlines how, perhaps even with a degree of mutual understanding, neighbouring parishes could pursue differing agendas. By contrast to their persistence in Holy Trinity, traditional festivals were declining in St Mary's by the early 1570s. In 1572 it is recorded that "the collectors which heretofore were electyd to collect for the Plowgh on Plowgh Mundaye shall now cease and no more to be electyd."⁸⁰ Plough Monday was a festival devoted to the blessing of ploughs for the coming agricultural year, and was condemned by many Protestants as a pagan-inspired fertility rite that encouraged drunkenness and licentiousness.⁸¹ The emphatic statement that these celebrations were to cease immediately indicates a desire to transform the parish's liturgical life and remove elements that, in Abraham Fleming's words, "desecrated" the Church's spiritual mission.⁸²

The conflict brewing beneath the surface in St Mary's leaves overt fingerprints on the accounts in the late 1570s. The two churchwardens (or "church reeves"), Edward Ffylld and John Mannock, seem to have been strongly Protestant. They represented a similar kind of faction to the Calvinist magistrates Craig observes in his study of Thetford — a group of the self-styled "godly," who were keen to champion the cause of Puritanism in what they saw as spiritual warfare against the "froward" and immoral conservative townsmen.⁸³ In Bungay too, they wanted to go beyond official edicts and take the lead in extirpating what they saw as popish frippery. A memorandum from the bishop's court enclosed within

77. Suffolk Archives, 115/E1/1, f.6r.

78. Suffolk Archives, 115/E1/1, f.7v.

79. B.J. Kaplan ed., "Fictions of Privacy: House Chapels and the Spatial Accommodation of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe," in *Reformation and the Practice of Toleration* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 164–203.

80. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.41v.

81. See R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England — The Ritual Year, 1400 to 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 16–17. One particularly objectionable part of the festivities involved young men going door to door to collect money, and ploughing up the ground in front of those houses that refused to donate.

82. Fleming, title page.

83. Craig, 150–1.

the accounts accuses them of having wilfully destroyed the “ptycon [partition] that was between the chancell and the churche ... contrarye to a commandment before sent unto them.”⁸⁴ Of course, to screen off the altar and the sacristy from the body of the church, akin to the medieval custom, seemed redolent to some Protestants of the Catholic priesthood’s pretensions to unjustified authority; to remove these was an important step in breaking down distinctions between clergy and laity.⁸⁵

It is clear that the screen had been vandalised without official sanction, but even more interestingly, the confessional divides are revealed in the pages of the accounts themselves. This kind of hostile dialogue playing out within churchwardens’ accounts has rarely been commented upon by historians, and contrasts strikingly with, for example, the harmonious picture Eamon Duffy paints of the evidence in the accounts of Morebath in Devon, shepherded by its conservative vicar Christopher Trychay.

The memorandum describing the vandalism of the partition was written up by Thomas Edwards, a local shoemaker, who describes the vandalised portion as “very comly and decently made, accordyng to the Queen her maiesties laws.”⁸⁶ Edwards’ will, proved in the Suffolk archdeaconry court, contains what could be viewed as distinctly Catholic language. Although it does not use the full traditional Catholic preamble with its Marian references, the mention of entrusting his soul to the “holye companie” is a probable, if subtle, allusion to the Catholic emphasis on the cult of saints and intercessionary prayer. Seeing that Edwards’s will dates from the early seventeenth century, by which time the implications of this term would have been controversial, this might imply that Edwards was conservative in religious mindset, even though he chose to keep his foot in the door of the parish. Nevertheless, we should remember that the early Elizabethan Church accommodated a wide spectrum of positions, and Edwards might easily have seen himself as loyal to Queen, country, and church — the reference to “the Queen her maiesties laws” perhaps indicating this fundamentally loyalist mentality. At the very least, he evidently disdained the cavalier, iconoclastic destruction of items he considered aesthetically valuable and worthy of preservation.

Edwards’s note has then been underlined, and another party — perhaps one of the churchwardens accused of the act of vandalism — has added a note in the margin. Their passionate statement reads, “Thom. Edwards here lye, for it was full of imagerry not defaced.” Strikingly, the word “lye” is underlined twice, leaving no doubt about the vehemence of the convictions at stake. Clearly, if Edwards believed that the vandalised partition was acceptable and complied with royal statutes, someone else firmly disagreed. This illustrates vividly how the accounts, just like the church itself, had become a battleground — people espousing rival confessional positions sought to ensure that the records told a sanitised and partisan story. The idea of the archive itself as a contested medium, giving us a lens into the existence of hidden sectional debates within a neglected “tacit narrative” (to borrow a phrase from Eric Ketelaar),⁸⁷ links to the recent work of Liesbeth Corens, who has explored how seemingly-neutral official archives frequently concealed institutional biases and distilled disputed narratives into a single “archival truth.”⁸⁸

In any case, the conservative faction in the parish would, for now, win out. An entry records that Ffylld and Mannock had been removed as churchwardens, for their “disobedience and for the spoyle that they before had made and done contrarye to the aseynt of the

84. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.45v.

85. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 117.

86. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.45v.

87. See E. Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives,” *Archival Science*, 1 (2001): 132.

88. L. Corens, “Dislocation and Record Keeping: The Counter Archives of the Catholic Diaspora,” *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe*, ed. L. Corens, K. Peters and A. Walsham, 286.

p[ari]schoners and commandments aforesaid.” It appears that their iconoclastic spree had aroused such animosity that they were dismissed in disgrace, and their replacement was the evidently conservative Edwards, along with a blacksmith named Robert Spylling. After dismissal, Ffylld and Mannock met with the vicar, Smythe, to “talk of divers causes touchinge the churche”⁸⁹ — perhaps trying to persuade him of the wisdom of their religious positions and the need for proactive compliance. The parochial community had become divided into factions with sharply different agendas. Far from the triumph of the Puritan party being inevitable, conservatives seemed determined and organised, having checked the recent Puritan advances and regained the ascendancy. Despite Ffylld and Mannock’s entreaties, in 1578, money is recorded “payd for the replacyng of the roode screene.”⁹⁰ This extraordinary evidence indicates proactive moves to revitalise what had been lost amidst Puritan iconoclasm. The conservative faction within the parish remained dominant, even after the “Black Dog” incident, and was keen to restore the church fabric to the condition they desired.

In the context of these deep rifts within the parish, during a severe storm in 1577, the “Black Dog” incident occurred. Much of our information comes from a pamphlet by Abraham Fleming, a zealously Protestant divine whose writings almost always aimed to present a case that divine judgement was taking place upon sinful mankind. Fleming never crossed the line into outright nonconformity, but he was certainly on the Puritan side of the religious debate in Elizabethan England, having worked as a translator in London publishing houses for several years in the 1570s, where he focused on devotional literature expressing firmly anti-papal sentiments.⁹¹ Although the storm itself is recorded elsewhere, the Black Dog motif features prominently only in Fleming’s polemical work. He exhorts his readers to repudiate the evils of idolatry and throw themselves at once upon divine mercy lest they meet with a similar fate. Fleming describes a “moste horrible similitude” appearing to the congregation in the midst of a storm, a black hound or ‘the divel in such a likenesse.’ The hound bounded through the church and “wrung the necks” of two parishioners, accompanied by “flashes of fire” (perhaps lightning from the storm, or else visual hyperbole conveying the supernatural impression), before suddenly disappearing and reappearing at Holy Trinity Church in Blythburgh,⁹² again causing havoc. Fleming describes the inexplicable injuries to the congregation as unmistakable signs of supernatural intervention, and also claims that physical scars on the fabric of the church are evidence of his tale’s veracity.⁹³

How should we properly interpret these events in the light of confessional divides and disharmony? It seems clear that a real storm occurred, but in a community marked by strong confessional divides, the event became understood in the popular imagination as a diabolical apparition. As Reeve explores, a folklore tradition existed of the Devil appearing in the guise of a hound. Fear of such demons was already prevalent in East Anglia, for example in an account from Peterborough recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, where the “Wild Hunt,” a black huntsman riding with demonic hounds, supposedly pre-saged death. The “Wild Hunt” was deeply rooted in mythology and perceived as lying on the dark borderland between Christian present and pagan past. It appeared in the (explicitly Christian) legends of King Arthur as a sign of preternatural, pre-Christian forces that

89. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.45r.

90. Suffolk Archives, 116/E1/1, f.46v.

91. E. S. Donno, “Abraham Fleming: a learned corrector in 1586–87,” *Studies in Bibliography*, 42 (1989): 200–11.

92. Fleming refers to this village as “Blibery.”

93. Fleming, Section 2 (“The reporte of a straunge and wonderful Spectacle.”).

could ensnare souls.⁹⁴ Pagan imagery of this kind was particularly resonant to Puritans because it could be used to draw connections with contemporary practices that seemed redolent of idolatry, to point a finger at activities and practices that could compromise the moral integrity of the godly community, and to illustrate the consequences of turning away to worship false gods.⁹⁵ Fleming, in his preoccupation with idolatry, may have had a similar purpose in mind. He held up the culturally divided parish of Bungay as a stern admonition against the dangers of lukewarmness in matters of faith, but also against the ways that competing agendas and disunity at the parish level could bring down divine disapproval, and even providential judgement, on the Christian community. Walsham touches on this when she discusses the relevance of the idea of being a “good neighbour” to Christian thinking. Fears of providential intervention against unneighbourly and anti-social religious behaviour often served to keep the peace at the grassroots level.⁹⁶ Fleming certainly alludes to these themes when he describes how the “wonderful example of God’s wrath” in Bungay is meant not only to terrify but to “give us minds mollified and made soft,” so that the Christian community could come together and unite around a godly Protestant faith in an interventionist God active in earthly affairs.⁹⁷

We should also note that Fleming was writing during tumultuous times for the Puritan party. Archbishop Edmund Grindal, regarded as favourable to “godly brethren,” had recently been forced to retire after his refusal to crack down on “excesses of prophesying.”⁹⁸ In this context it might have seemed that the ascendancy of the Puritan cause was threatened. For Fleming, whose writing often contained millenarian themes, deaths in a church were obvious and sensational signs of impending divine judgement. Drawing on local context to make such interventions in national politics was a common practice, as Walsham has explored in the example of the 1581 case of William Withers in the Suffolk town of Walsham-le-Willows. Withers was an eleven-year-old boy who had apparently fallen into a trance and given eloquent sermons, far beyond his years in erudition, inveighing against social immorality. This took place in the context of clashes around Puritan prophesying in the county and the persistence of practices that Protestants believed were profaning the Sabbath.⁹⁹ Likewise, in Bungay the supernatural became a polemical tool to rationalise events and to emphasise the need to cleave to God in profane times.

Bungay is a potent case study in which polarised confessional identities at the parish level had become acutely visible, and the paradigms of “neighbourliness” and practical coexistence that often marked out interconfessional relations had begun seriously to fray. Even before the Reformation, conflict existed over the place of religion in the community. This was only intensified by the pressures of inter-confessional clashes in a relatively large and economically diverse town with two parishes. One, Holy Trinity, maintained a distinctly conservative, perhaps even overtly Catholic, identity well into Elizabeth’s reign. The other, St Mary’s, was riven by divisions between its parochial leadership as to the direction, and desirable extent, of reform. The Black Dog incident powerfully indicates how communal disharmony was fuelled by the parish-level coexistence of conservatives,

94. Reeve, *A Straunge and Terrible Wunder*, 41.

95. See R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 111–17.

96. A. Walsham, *Charitable hatred: tolerance and intolerance in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 272–73.

97. Fleming, Section 2 (‘The reporte of a straunge and wonderful Spectacle.’).

98. P. Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal, 1519–1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), 260–65.

99. A. Walsham, “Out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings: Prophecy, Puritanism and childhood in Elizabethan Suffolk,” in *The Church and Childhood: Papers read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. D. Wood ed., D. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 285–89.

ambivalent or even hostile to the changes the Reformation engendered, with fervent Puritans, who believed that the English church was “but halfly reformed.”¹⁰⁰ In addition, it provides insights into the process of confessionalisation at the parish level. As Marc Forster has discussed, the development of firm and polarised confessional identities in towns and villages was often mitigated by a rough practical religious co-existence, owing to ties of neighbourliness and economic dependence.¹⁰¹ But in spite of these countervailing factors, confessionalisation could also be surprisingly rapid, especially when conservatives and Puritans were in close proximity, and where individual personalities sought to enforce controversial agendas onto the parish. By 1570, religious identities in Suffolk were almost certainly a complex patchwork, with some towns polarised on confessional lines, and others such as Bungay marked by an uneasy coexistence, which could flare suddenly and unpredictably into conflict.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no competing interests.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

100. This is from William Fuller’s “Booke to the queene,” in which he claimed that the Reformation had proceeded “halfly forward and more than halfly backward” owing to Queen Elizabeth’s lukewarm convictions. Quoted in W. Prynne, *The second part of a brief register and survey of the several kinds and forms of parliamentary writs* (London: T. Childe and L. Parry, 1660), 52.

101. M. Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the Villages: Religion and Reform in the Bishopric of Speyer, 1560–1720* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 117–19.