

Biography:

Dr Eilish Gregory is the Little Company of Mary Postdoctoral Fellow in the Centre for Catholic Studies at the University of Durham. She is an early career researcher of religion and politics, primarily in early modern British history. Eilish has held various Associate Lectureship posts in history, including at the Open University, University of Reading, and Anglia Ruskin University; she was Associate Professor in early modern history at the New College of the Humanities at Northeastern, London; a tutor for the Oxford Department for Continuing Education; and was the Postdoctoral Research Associate for the Royal Historical Society. She has published extensively in early modern history, including for *The Seventeenth Century* journal, and edited collections for Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, and Brill Press. Her article ‘Catherine of Braganza during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis: Anti-Catholicism in the Houses of Commons and Lords, 1678-81’ was *proxime accessit* in the *Parliamentary History* journal 2021 Essay Prize. Her first monograph *Catholics during the English Revolution, 1642-1660: Politics, Sequestration and Loyalty* was published by Boydell & Brewer Press in 2021, and her edited collection with Professor Michael Questier, *Later Stuart Queens, 1660-1735: Religion, Political Culture, and Patronage* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2023.

Abstract:

This essay examines how Catholics experienced changes to the religious and political landscape during the Interregnum. Since the later sixteenth century, Catholics had faced legal sanctions because of their religious nonconformity, with Elizabethan and Jacobean laws augmenting these restrictions. The reality for Interregnum Catholics was complex. Catholics were prohibited from practising their faith, and they faced suspicions from officials and locals that they were promoting ‘popery’ that threatened to subvert the peace and stability in the precarious republican regimes. Additionally, the scattered nature of the relevant Catholic archives, combined with Catholics avoiding making explicit references to their faith, has meant that Catholics have been largely absent from historiographies for this period. This essay, therefore, seeks to revise this assessment by demonstrating that through using different archival materials and methodologies we can integrate Interregnum Catholics into the broader narrative of how the Church in England was contested in the mid-seventeenth century.

Keywords:

Anti-Catholicism, memory, politics, loyalty, sequestration, Interregnum

‘Catholics in the Interregnum’

In 1660, acting as a figurative spokesman for the Catholic community, Sir Kenelm Digby drafted a letter to the newly restored King Charles II for liberty of conscience for Catholics. Digby remarked how ‘there have bin of late yeares many sharpe lawes enacted’ against Catholics, and that they humbly petitioned the king ‘to be freed’ from these laws, especially as they knew that he was granting a ‘gratious hearing to all sects and professors of new opinions, under the nation of tender conscience’, hoping that, through his ‘goodnesse’, he would show similar favour to them.¹ In April 1660, Charles had affirmed in the Declaration of Breda that: ‘We do declare a Liberty to Tender Consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matters of Religion, which do not disturb the Peace of the Kingdom’, although this gesture was to be short-lived due to opposition from the Cavalier Parliament.² Digby’s comment about the ‘sharpe lawes enacted’ against Catholics primarily referred to the June 1657 ‘Act for convicting, discovering and repressing of Popish Recusants’, which reinstated recusancy laws against all those ‘suspected or reputed to be Papists, or Popishly affected’, who were presented at the local assizes or quarter sessions to swear the Oath of Abjuration, or risk the forfeiture of their estates until they complied.³ Although it is unclear whether Digby gave this petition to the king, Digby’s manuscript reveals how Catholics appraised the 1650s, and how they reflected upon the experiences they had endured under the republican regimes.⁴

On the surface, Catholics in the Interregnum presents a similar picture to how Catholics had confronted the Church in England since the later sixteenth century. Catholics had faced legal sanctions because of their religious nonconformity, which included refraining from attending weekly religious services, and taking Anglican communion. Elizabethan and Jacobean laws augmented these restrictions, with the 1606 Oath of Allegiance enforced, in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, upon Catholics to demonstrate their loyalty to the monarchy

¹ British Library, Add. MS 41846, ff. 76-78.

² Charles II, *King Charles II. His declaration to all his loving subjects of the Kingdom of England. Dated from his Court at Breda in Holland, the 4/14 of April 1660* (Edinburgh, 1660); D. T. Witcombe, *Charles II and the Cavalier House of Commons, 1663-1674* (Manchester, 1966), pp. 4-10.

³ C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* [hereafter *A & O*] (3 vols., London, 1911), ii, pp. 1170-80; Eilish Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution, 1642-1660: Politics, Sequestration and Loyalty* (Woodbridge, 2021), pp. 62-5.

⁴ For more on Sir Kenelm Digby’s activities during the 1640s and 1650s, see Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*, chap. 6; R. T. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby: The Ornament of England, 1603-1665* (Cambridge (MA), 1956).

by denouncing papal authority to depose monarchs, while sequestration and compounding was heavily administered during Charles I's Personal Rule in the 1630s.⁵

Nonetheless, the reality for Interregnum Catholics was complex. Catholics were prohibited from practising their faith, and they faced suspicions from officials and locals that they were promoting 'popery' that threatened to subvert the peace and stability in the precarious republican regimes. Yet, compared to the extensive studies of the Elizabethan and Stuart periods by some illustrious scholars – who have assessed how Catholics confronted challenges to their faith and everyday life, and engaged with domestic and European debates on different concepts of liberty of conscience – Catholics in the Interregnum have received scant scholarly attention by historians.⁶ The majority view is still that the English Revolution was a 'theological crisis, [and] a struggle over the identity of British Protestantism'. Perhaps it is not surprising that Catholics seem to have been largely absent from the attempts at a settlement in England, and indeed across the Three Kingdoms.⁷ This is partly due to the scattered nature of the relevant Catholic archives. Additionally, because Catholics, as much as in earlier times, had every reason to avoid making political commitments which would bring them into jeopardy, they understandably avoided explicit references to their faith. A certain amount of lateral thinking is needed in order to assemble a picture of how Catholics experienced the Interregnum and Restoration. Geoff Baker's monograph on the Catholic royalist William Blundell described how Blundell and his family adapted to changes throughout the mid- to late-seventeenth century, making great use of the extensive Blundell papers held at the Lancashire Record Office.⁸ Recently, my monograph *Catholics during the English Revolution, 1642-1660* sought to remedy this gap in the historiography by closely examining the innovative ways in which the Catholic gentry adapted to changes in the sequestration and compounding process, and how they utilised their networks with influential

⁵ Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*, introduction; Caroline Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, 1983); Keith J. Lindley, 'The Lay Catholics of England in the Reign of Charles I', *JEH* 22, no. 3 (1971), pp. 199-221.

⁶ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975); Peter Lake, 'Antipopery: the structure of a prejudice', in *Conflict in Early Modern England*, eds. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (Harlow, 1989), pp. 72-106; Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2006); idem, *Catholics and Treason* (Oxford, 2022); Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists* (Woodbridge, 1993); idem, *Charitable hatred: tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester, 2006); Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745* (Woodbridge, 2009); idem, *Making the Imperial Nation: Colonization, Politics, and English Identity, 1660-1700* (New Haven, 2023).

⁷ John Coffey, 'Religious Thought', in *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, ed. Michael J. Braddick (Oxford, 2015), p. 447.

⁸ Geoff Baker, *Reading and politics in early modern England: The mental world of a seventeenth-century Catholic gentleman* (Manchester, 2010).

Protestant relatives, neighbours, political allies, and government agents to protect the long-term interests of their estates.⁹ Equally, the second volume in the forthcoming series *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism* will attempt to address some of these omissions in the historiography of seventeenth-century Catholic history.¹⁰

What this short essay proposes is that far from there being a lack of material on Catholics in the Interregnum, there is an abundance of relevant documentation in county record offices and national archives, including parochial records, State Papers, personal papers, and printed works. This material can tell us how Catholics existed in their local communities, and how they engaged in ideological discussions about their faith. Crucially, Catholics need to be viewed alongside nonconforming groups, including the Levellers, Baptists, Quakers, and Socinians, who advocated liberty of conscience, and were in dialogue with dissenting groups in Europe, including in the Low Countries and Italy.¹¹ Recently, Fiona McCall's edited collection has shown how the relationship between religion and society can be examined at parochial level across Britain.¹² Catholics themselves were not isolated from negotiations for liberty of conscience; on the contrary, they were an integral part of these conversations.

One approach that can help enhance our knowledge on Catholic experiences of the Interregnum is by scrutinising the mnemonic impact of the civil wars and Interregnum. Matthew Neufeld, Edward Legon, and Imogen Peck have shown how 'seditious memories' served as points of resistance for figures who wanted to counteract efforts by royalists to remember the regicide and the 'good old cause', and that Catholics also proved their loyalty at great risk to the Stuart cause, including the five Pendrill brothers who helped Charles II escape after the battle of Worcester in 1651.¹³ Peck has established how war memorials and

⁹ Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*.

¹⁰ John Morrill and Liam Temple, eds., *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, volume 2: 1641-1745* (Oxford, forthcoming).

¹¹ Recent works include: Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, 2010); Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell's England* (London, 2011); Kate Peters, 'The Dissemination of Quaker Pamphlets in the 1650s', in *Not Dead Things: The Dissemination of Popular Print in England, Wales, Italy, and the Low Countries, 1500-1820*, eds. Roeland Harms, Joad Raymond and Jeroen Salman (Leiden, 2013), pp. 211-228; Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page and Joel Halcomb, eds., *Church Life: Pastors, Congregations, and the Experience of Dissent in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2019); Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (New York, 2019); John Coffey, ed., *The Oxford History of Dissenting Traditions. Volume I: The Post-Reformation Era, 1559-1689* (Oxford, 2020).

¹² Fiona McCall ed., *Church and People in Interregnum Britain* (London, 2021).

¹³ Matthew Neufeld, *The Civil Wars after 1660: Public Remembering in Late Stuart England* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 37; Edward Legon, *Revolution Remembered: Seditious Memories after the British Civil Wars* (Manchester, 2019).

tombstones challenged how the wars were commemorated, observing that royalist ‘victors’ were more candid about their loyalty to the Stuarts after the Restoration.¹⁴

Catholic memories of the Interregnum were an important aspect of Restoration politics. William Sheils has remarked that professions of loyalty to the Stuarts were common to Protestants and Catholics alike after the Restoration ‘for contemporary political or ideological purposes’.¹⁵ For example, the memorial tombstone for Sir Philip Constable of Everingham, Yorkshire, who was buried in Steeple Barton, Oxfordshire, in 1664, having moved to live with his daughter Katherine and son-in-law Edward Sheldon, reads: ‘Here Lyeth Sr Philip Constable of Everingham in the County of Yorke Barronet, whose whole estate was confiscated by the usurpers for his loyalty to King Charls [sic] the first’ [**photo**]. The inscription emphasises the losses that Constable had suffered when his estates were confiscated in the wake of the November 1652 ‘Additional Bill for Sale of several Lands and Estates forfeited to the Commonwealth for Treason’, although references to his Catholicism are omitted.¹⁶ Although Constable was aided by powerful family, friends, and agents who prevented the permanent loss of his estates during the Interregnum, he was listed as one of several gentlemen who had suffered for his loyalty to the Stuarts published in a catalogue during the Rump Parliament.¹⁷

Contemporary Catholic accounts of their experiences of persecution during the Interregnum were published at the Restoration. Roger Palmer, earl of Castlemaine, the husband of Charles II’s mistress, Barbara Palmer, later duchess of Cleveland, published *The Humble Apology of the English Catholicks*. The work proved controversial. It reminded readers that Catholic royalists had supported the Stuarts throughout the wars and during their exile in Europe, firmly on the basis of their religion. *The Humble Apology* proclaimed that ‘of all the Calumnies against Catholicks we have admired at none so much, as that their Principles are said to be inconsistent with Government, and they themselves thought ever prone to Rebellion’.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, Castlemaine’s accounts were met with derision by Protestants,

¹⁴ Imogen Peck, *Recollection in the Republics: Memories of the British Civil Wars in England, 1649-1659* (Oxford, 2021), see especially chaps. 2 and 4.

¹⁵ William Sheils, ‘English Catholics at war and peace’, in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, eds. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester and New York, 2006), p. 138.

¹⁶ Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*, pp. 142-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-3, 162-6, 190-1; *A Catalogue of the Lords, Knights and Gentlemen (of the Catholick Religion) that were Slain in the late Warr in Defence of their King and Countrey* (s. 1., 1653). See Hull History Centre, DDEV 68/248.

¹⁸ Roger Palmer, earl of Castlemaine, *To all the royalists that Suffered the for His Majesty, and to the rest of the Good People of England. The Humble Apology of the English Catholicks* (London, 1666), p. 2; William Lloyd, *The Late Apology in behalf of the papists re-printed and answered in behalf of the royalists* (London, 1667) [this work is often referred to by the alternate title *Catholique Apology*].

including William Lloyd and Edward Stillingfleet, with Castlemaine arguing that mainstream Catholic politics was legitimist, while Lloyd counteracted this by insisting that the overthrow of the monarchy was caused by the promotion of ‘popery’.¹⁹

The Irish Rebellion and its aftermath had a significant impact upon Catholics living across the Three Kingdoms, especially after Irish Protestants – the ‘New English’ – recounted their sufferings of the atrocities, inciting fears that Irish Catholic rebels were being aided by their co-religionists living in England and Wales.²⁰ What has not been considered at length is how English Catholics reacted to the news of the Irish Rebellion, especially as they were more likely to condemn the rebels because of their Irishness, despite being co-religionists.²¹ One way we can ascertain this is through the collection of Irish relief money in the parishes, which, as Bethany Marsh has shown, was organised by officials and churchwardens to help Irish refugees.²² The Exchequer and Commonwealth Exchequer Papers held at the National Archives contain lay and clerical taxation records of Irish relief money collected for this period. While admittedly incomplete, these surviving records reveal that Catholics voluntarily contributed to these levies. John Caryll esquire of West Harting, Sussex, claimed in compounding petitions submitted in 1645 and 1646 that he was ‘much in debted by Lending 500l gratis for ye Service in Ireland’, to demonstrate his loyalty and to differentiate himself from Irish Catholic rebels, although there is discrepancy in the records of whether he gave this money in 1641 or 1644 after he had already been sequestered.²³ Ulick Burke, 2nd earl of St. Albans and 5th earl of Clanricarde was exempted by the House of Lords from sequestration for much of the first civil war ‘on account of his services in Ireland’, although his Somerhill House estate near Tonbridge, Kent was sequestered in 1645 for ‘being a papist’.²⁴ The way in which Catholics defined themselves politically across the Three Kingdoms is certainly a valid topic for future research.

Catholics were certainly divided during the Interregnum on what course to take as they sought liberty of conscience from the republican regimes, with ‘Francophile’ and

¹⁹ R. A. P. J. Beddard, ‘Palmer, Roger, earl of Castlemaine (1634–1705)’, *ODNB*, xlii, pp. 519–22.

²⁰ Keith J. Lindley, ‘The Impact of the 1641 Rebellion upon England and Wales, 1641-5’, *Irish Historical Studies* 18, no. 70 (1972), pp. 155-9. The publication of the 1641 Irish depositions have aided our knowledge of how Catholics were viewed in this period, see Aidan Clarke et al ed., *1641 Depositions* (12 vols., Dublin, 2014-present); <<https://1641.tcd.ie/>> [accessed 22 December 2022].

²¹ Lindley, ‘The Impact of the 1641 Rebellion’, p. 158.

²² Bethany Marsh, ‘Lodging the Irish’: an examination of parochial charity dispensed in Nottinghamshire to refugees from Ireland, 1641-1651’, *Midland History* 42, no. 2 (2017), pp. 194-216.

²³ Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*, pp. 129-31; TNA, SP 23/73/531; TNA, SP 23/174/240.

²⁴ Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*, p. 155; *Journal of the House of Lords* (42 vols., London, 1767-1830), vi, p. 53; vii, p. 602.

‘Hispanophile’ factions endeavouring to strike a deal with the Independents, albeit with different intentions.²⁵ The Jesuits were willing to consult with the Independents in 1647 in the hope that some concessions could be made for Catholics in the aftermath of the civil wars, only for their efforts to be thwarted by the papacy.²⁶ Christopher Gillett has recently shown that the Brudenell-More negotiations for toleration formed part of a wider potential political realignment among Catholics and Protestant factions in this period, influenced by the works of Cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron, and François Véron.²⁷ The Catholic faction, the Blackloists, headed by Thomas White *alias* Blacklo, has received close attention in recent years.²⁸ Dubbed by Matthew Poole as the ‘Papists of the New Model’, White’s controversial 1655 treatise, *The grounds of obedience and government*, recognised the legitimacy of the Cromwellian regime but argued that government should only be run by public consent, and could be deposed if deemed tyrannical.²⁹ The Blackloists inspired Catholic author John Austin who wrote the three-part political series *The Christian Moderator* under the pseudonym William Birchley; he outlined the contemporary sufferings of Catholics, while also providing a rare contemporary account of the Catholic experience of the sequestration and compounding process under the Rump Parliament.³⁰ Austin’s work was clearly copied and circulated among interested Catholic parties; the Constable of Everingham papers hold a contemporary handwritten copy of the ‘Humble Petition of the Roman Catholikes’ which was printed in full in the second part *The*

²⁵ Alexandra K. Tompkins, ‘The English Catholic Issue, 1640-1662: Factionalism, Perceptions and Exploitation’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2010), pp. 118-19.

²⁶ Thomas H. Clancy, ‘The Jesuits and the Independents: 1647’, *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 40 (1971), pp. 67-90.

²⁷ Christopher P. Gillett, ‘Catholicism and the Making of Revolutionary Ideologies in the British Atlantic, 1630-1673’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Brown University, 2018); idem, ‘Probabilism, Pluralism, and Papalism: Jesuit Allegiance Politics in the British Atlantic and Continental Europe, 1644-50’, in *Jesuit Intellectual and Physical Exchange between England and Mainland Europe, c. 1580-1789*, eds. James E. Kelly and Hannah Thomas (Leiden, 2018), pp. 235-60; idem, ‘Political Theology’, in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism volume 2: 1641-1745*, eds. John Morrill and Liam Temple (Oxford, forthcoming).

²⁸ B. C. Southgate, ‘“That Damned Booke”: *The Grounds of Obedience and Government* (1655), and the Downfall of Thomas White’, *Recusant History* 17, no. 2 (1984), pp. 238-53.

²⁹ Stefania Tutino, *Thomas White and the Blackloists: Between Politics and Theology during the English Civil War* (Aldershot, 2008); Matthew Poole, *Nullity of the Romish Faith* (London, 1666), as quoted by Simon Johnson, ‘“Papists of the New Model”: the English Mission and the Shadow of Blacklow’, in *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England*, eds. Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton (Farnham, 2012), p. 220.

³⁰ [William Birchley], *The Christian Moderator: or, Persecution for religion condemned, by the light of nature. Law of God. Evidence of our own principles* (London, 1651-53). For further information on Austin’s essays, see Eilish Gregory, ‘John Austin and the Catholic response to the English Commonwealth’, *Seventeenth Century* 36, no. 4 (2021), pp. 597-621.

Christian Moderator, and at least one copy of *The Christian Moderator* was listed among the personal library of the Constables.³¹

We need to situate these intellectual discussions amid the ambiguity caused by the 1650 ‘Act for the Repeal of several Clauses in Statutes imposing Penalties for not coming to Church’, otherwise referred to as the ‘Toleration Act’, in which the Rump Parliament repealed statutes and acts on religious uniformity, requiring instead that people ‘diligently resort to some publique place where the Service and Worship of God is exercised’.³² Although Catholics were not mentioned in this act, the legislation exposed the Rump Parliament’s uncertainty about what stance to take with Catholics.³³ There is substantial untapped sources relating to the Catholic community in the mid-seventeenth century. The Belson papers, available as copies in Berkshire Record Office, are housed in Georgetown University Archives, Washington D.C., and have material relating to scientific, philosophical, and religious debates among Blackloists including White himself, John Belson, and John Sergeant.³⁴ Adam Marks has described how active the Catholic colleges in exile were in collaborating with the exiled Stuart court and European Catholic states, and how their communication networks aided the Stuart cause.³⁵ The efforts of Abbess Mary Knatchbull have been documented by William Sheils and Mark Williams;³⁶ while strikingly, the Clarendon Papers at the Bodleian Library contain extensive material on the frictions between Catholics and those in the exiled Stuart court, especially when Catholics demanded liberty of conscience upon the restoration of the king in exchange for their services and money.³⁷

What this essay suggests is that by using different archival materials and methodologies we can bring aspects of the Catholic community in the Interregnum to light and integrate it into the broader narrative of how the Church in England was contested in the mid-seventeenth century. As recently observed by Andrew Foster, while research on the mid-seventeenth

³¹ [William Birchley], *The Christian Moderator: The second part; or, Persecution for religion condemned by the light of nature. Law of God. Evidence of our own principles. With an explanation of the Roman Catholick belief...* (London, 1652); Hull History Centre, DDEV 68/248, f. 36, ‘The Humble Peticon of the Roman Catholiques’, c. 1649-60; DDEV 68/6, ‘Catalogue of books’, c. late 17th century.

³² *A & O*, ii, pp. 423-4.

³³ Gregory, *Catholics during the English Revolution*, pp. 59-61.

³⁴ Berkshire CRO, D/EBt series. In Georgetown University Archives, the papers are re-catalogued as the Milton House papers.

³⁵ Adam Marks, ‘The Scots colleges and international politics, 1600-1750’, in *College communities abroad: Education, migration and Catholicism in early modern Europe*, eds. Liam Chambers and Thomas O’Connor (Manchester, 2018), pp. 115-41.

³⁶ Sheils, ‘English Catholics at war and peace’, p. 147; Mark R. F. Williams, *The King’s Irishmen: The Irish in the Exiled Court of Charles II, 1649-1660* (Woodbridge, 2014), p. 154.

³⁷ Bodleian Library, Clarendon MS 58-68.

century Church in England is difficult due to losses in parochial records, 'we have also made gains in material kept largely in central repositories', and this is true too for Catholic archives and material on their experiences of religion in the Interregnum.³⁸

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³⁸ Andrew Foster, 'What happened in English and Welsh parishes c. 1642-62? A research agenda', in *Church and People in Interregnum Britain*, p. 38.

the Lord General Monck, to be communicated to the Lord President of the Council of State, and to the officers of the army under his command. Edinburgh: s. n., 1660.

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