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The Cambridgeshire Committee for Scandalous Ministers 1644-45
edited by Graham Hart (Cambridge: Cambridge Records Society, 2017), vol. 24.

Review for *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
by Dr Rebecca Warren

With this publication, Graham Hart has drawn on his detailed knowledge of the mid-seventeenth century clergy in the Diocese of Ely to produce an exemplary edition of the record book kept by the Cambridgeshire Committee during the first Civil War, which listed their examinations and ejections of ‘scandalous’ clergy from the county’s parishes. This volume is a welcome addition to the already-published records of the Lincolnshire and Suffolk Committees for Scandalous Ministers, edited by Sir Francis Hill and Clive Holmes respectively.¹

During the 1640s, the eastern counties of England rapidly became a Parliamentary and puritan stronghold and, with the Godly in power, vigorous attempts were made to remove not only the architectural trappings of pre-war Laudianism, but also its personnel. In March 1644, the Earl of Manchester - as Major-General of the Eastern Association of Counties and thus the *de facto* regional governor - was authorised to eject those parish ministers and Cambridge fellows who were found guilty of opposing Parliament, or adhering to Laudianism, or being morally delinquent. Manchester established several county committees to carry out this work, of which the Cambridgeshire Committee was one, and the results of their efforts over the succeeding twelve months were written up in their record book. As Hart notes, however, the content of the surviving book includes only the articles against those thirty ministers who were ejected; those whose questioning did not result in their removal were not recorded. Regrettably, the book also omitted records of the hearings themselves and, in all but one instance, the defences put forward by the accused ministers.

¹ J. W. F. Hill (ed.), ‘The Royalist Clergy of Lincolnshire’ in *Reports and Papers of the Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society* (new series), vol. 2 (1), (1938, published 1940); C. Holmes (ed.), *The Suffolk Committees for Scandalous Ministers 1644-46* (Ipswich: 1970).

The original text transcribed by Hart consists of the articles of complaint against ministers, followed by the formal notices of their sequestrations and/or ejections. To set these records into greater context, the author has added a cogent and extensive introduction, which explains the background to Parliament's moves against the Laudian church before examining Manchester's specific agenda in purging the ministry in Cambridgeshire. He moves on to discuss in detail the individual members of the Committee, the charges made against ministers and the range of deponents involved in the hearings. As ever with such manuscripts, there are many pitfalls in drawing conclusions from their contents, and the author has been careful to discuss the reliability of the evidence he has transcribed and to trace out the history of the book itself including, as he says, 'the fascinating story of [its] survival against the odds'.² He concludes the volume with an extensive appendix of notes on the parishes and personnel of those involved in each of the recorded ejections.

This is an important and interesting book, both for scholars and a more general readership, not least because its detail and interpretation transcend its local focus. As an addition to the available published corpus of evidence (from Suffolk and Lincolnshire) on the purge of the ministry by the Parliamentarians, its value is greater than its limited geographical scope. Moreover, Hart's excellent explanatory texts provide a wider understanding of the actions of the Godly in this complex and often misunderstood period. In exploring Cambridgeshire's experience, he makes more accessible the sequence of events taking place nationally. Furthermore, this volume provides a treasure trove of intimate detail on the dynamics of small parochial communities in Cambridgeshire, which is of great interest to both religious and local historians alike. The flash points of antagonism between Laudian incumbents and those who opposed them become only too clear in the lists of accusations. Most intriguingly, some entries appear to record, perhaps verbatim, the actual words spoken between minister and parishioners. At Fen Ditton, for example, the Laudian minister Samuel Collins was accused of telling his congregation that 'a surplice could not make a preist,

² G. Hart, *The Cambridgeshire Committee for Scandalous Ministers 1644-45* (Cambridge: CRS, 2017) p23.

but a preist might make a surplice, and though the surplice be gone, yet 6 ells of Holland would make another'.³ Such entries draw the reader straight into the parochial experience of small villages to illuminate the larger catalysts of religious upheaval and discontent during the Civil War.

As a publication, this volume is an attractive package, with clearly laid-out text, ample spacing and helpful cross-referencing between the original material and the explanatory appendix. Hart's introduction is comprehensive without being wordy, although the separation of his discussion on the 'charges made against ministers' from that on 'why ministers were ejected' seems awkward and leads to an element of repetition. Nevertheless, one of the pleasures of this volume is the deceptive simplicity of his writing, which is elegantly spare in its articulation but never lacking. Moreover, the excellent footnotes to the original material cover a wide range of disciplines, including scriptural references, archaic vocabulary, legal points, clarifications of terminology and Committee procedure, numerous biographical details and Hart's own interpretations of otherwise unclear events. Of particular note is the extent of his information on those most difficult subjects to research in this period, the laymen - especially those yeomen and minor village figures, whose records are few and names confusing and repetitive. For being able to provide detail on these men and women alone, Hart deserves commendation. Overall, then, this is a fine example of scholarly editing of a fascinating and important manuscript.

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³ *ibid.* p101.