

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 30 - History
Title of case study: Increased public understanding of political mobilisation in the English revolution
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Publications analysing political mobilisation during the English revolution, widely disseminated through sales of the book <i>God's Fury, England's Fire</i>, reviews, and in public engagement activities, have shaped public understandings of how popular support for radical politics can be mobilised. The book's central arguments have made a significant contribution to contemporary political and social debates and have shaped the work of programme makers and other creative artists. The widespread use of the book in teaching in higher education and at A Level in the UK and internationally means that it has played a central role in shaping student understandings of this key period of English history.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>In 2004, Professor Mike Braddick, of the University of Sheffield's Department of History, took up a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship to research popular politics and the communication of political ideas during the English revolution. In the course of that grant he also took up a fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. This gave rise to a monograph--<i>God's Fury, England's Fire</i> (2008) [R1]. In 2008-9 he took institutional study leave and received an AHRC grant in order to complete 5 related scholarly articles.</p> <p>The key research contribution is a reinterpretation of the role of popular politics in shaping the course of the English revolution. Previous studies examined political 'allegiance', and sought social correlations for that allegiance, often relating that sociological analysis to larger arguments about the social basis of parliamentary democracy, and its origins. <i>God's Fury</i>, by contrast, examines political <i>engagement</i>, focussing on the issue of <i>political mobilisation</i> rather than class allegiance [R1]. This analysis has a sociological basis (of class and gender identities, but also for example networks and technologies of communication), but pays much closer attention to discourse and meaning [R4]. This allows an explanation of how political ideas and arguments intersect with social interests, producing successful or unsuccessful political mobilisation. It offers a new way of relating ideological and social factors in political development and also deals with a number of empirical problems—in particular the fluidity of civil war allegiances, which makes it difficult to find stable correlations between social interest and political affiliation [R1, R2, R3, R5].</p> <p>Moreover, this period of traumatic political crisis was also one of intense intellectual creativity. Braddick's account shows how the process of mobilisation produced innovative political thinking, connecting the history of intellectual creativity with the social history of the war [R2]. In doing so it offers a history of ideas which takes fuller account of social, cultural and political history: such histories are often written with reference only to the texts of influential writers.</p> <p>These central arguments give a fresh perspective on other debates in the field. For example, they suggest that quiescence in the face of Charles I's rule without parliaments during the 1630s should be seen as an active attempt to engage with the king's policies, and that the eruption of active opposition after 1637 reflects this active political culture rather than a breach with a dutiful subjection [R1]. It also extends recent arguments that religious debates had an intrinsic political significance, contributing to a reconsideration of influential arguments that these events were really 'the last of the wars of religion' [R5].</p> <p>Finally, and most broadly, <i>God's Fury</i> does not insist that there was a single meaning to be derived from these events. Instead, by comprehending the complexity of this historical event, the narrative provides a resource which can inform our understanding of contemporary political mobilisations. There has been a strong reaction in the last 30 years against histories which attempt to shoe-horn past experience single-mindedly into explanations of current social and political conditions. This has given rise to an emphasis on multiplicity of perspectives and a refusal to try to impose meaning on past events. This has been condemned as a refusal to attribute any meaning at all to the past, <i>God's Fury</i>, by contrast, draws on a distinction made by John Burrow in his history of historical writing since the Greeks. He distinguishes between an 'apocalyptic' style of</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

writing (in which the course of events is seen as leading to a particular end point) and a civic history (in which events are analysed in order to provide resources for ongoing political and social debate). *God's Fury* is of the latter kind. This aspect of the argument has prompted some productive controversy about how to write history, and how it acquires relevance to the present.

3. References to the research

- R1. *God's Fury, England's Fire: a new history of the English civil wars*, Allen Lane, 2008, pp. xxvi + 758 pp. (submitted to REF 2014)
- R2. 'Mobilisation, anxiety and creativity in England during the 1640s' in John Morrow and Jonathan Scott (eds), *Liberty, Authority, Formality: political ideas and culture, 1600-1900*, Imprint Academic, 2008, 175-93.
- R3. 'History, liberty, reformation and the cause: Parliamentary military and ideological escalation in 1643', *ibid.*, 117-34 (submitted to REF 2014)
- R4. 'Introduction: the politics of gesture', in Braddick (ed), *The politics of gesture: historical perspectives*, Past and Present Supplements, New Series, 4, Oxford University Press for the Past and Present Society, 2009, 9-35 (submitted to REF 2014)
- R5. 'Prayer Book and Protestation: Anti-Popery, Anti-Puritanism and the Outbreak of the English Civil War', in Charles W. A. Prior and Glenn Burgess (eds), *England's Wars of Religion, Revisited*, Ashgate, 2011, 125-45.

4. Details of the impact

This body of work, in particular the monograph, has reached large public audiences, and it has had identifiable impacts on public discourse, the creative sector, education, and the economy. The book and its central arguments have been widely disseminated. It sold 17,700 copies during the census period [S1] and was widely reviewed in the national press: *Financial Times* (23/2/08), *The Observer*, *The Guardian* (8/3/08), *The Times* (14/3/08), *The Telegraph* (5/4/08), *THE* (28/2/08), *The TLS* (15/5/08), *The Spectator* (1/3/08), *The Literary Review* (02/08), *History Today* (02/08), *The Herald*, *The Oxford Times* (12/06/08) and *The Tablet* (20/3/08). It appeared in annual round-ups in the *The Observer* (21/12/08), *The Guardian* (28/11/08, 29/11/09), *The Times* (4/12/08), *The Telegraph* (28/11/08) and *The Times Literary Supplement* (27/11/09), as well as paperback reviews in *The Guardian* (7/2/09), *The Observer* (8/2/09) and *The Telegraph* (1/4/09). Two articles by Braddick popularising central aspects of the interpretation, on John Lilburne and Samuel Hartlib, were published in *BBC History* (circulation 69,000), and the research informed the lead review (2000 words) he wrote for *The Times Literary Supplement* (circulation 35,000) on Gerrard Winstanley published on 30/06/10. *God's Fury* is widely cited as a core text for those outside higher education interested in the civil wars (for example in Parliament's 'living heritage' reading list) [S6] or in seventeenth-century English society, and is a point of reference in media reviews of other books (e.g. *The Guardian*, 20/08/08).

Impact on public discourse: The book's central arguments have impacted on public debate. The analysis of civic engagement, the relationship between religion and politics, and the collapse of shared meaning in political debate have become points of reference in political blogs: see, for example, the discussion by Anthony Painter, MP, on laborlist.org (7/7/10) about how the problems of contemporary democracy cannot be addressed simply by institutional reform: '*One of the remarkable things about Michael Braddick's "God's Fury, England's Fire" ... is the deep sense you get about English society in the early-to-mid seventeenth century. Of particular interest is the way in which he describes English civic life of the time. The most surprising aspect is the degree of civic activism in Stuart England.*' Another post reflected on the importance of shared meaning and social order in the context of a discussion about religion, politics, violence and civil discourse in contemporary American politics (Chicago Boyz, 3/08/11): '*I was reading Michael Braddick's history of the English Civil War, "God's Fury, England's Fire." It's a huge, complicated work. The footnotes alone almost constitute a book of their own. There's a lot of things that could be said, but if I were to put into nutshell one possible lesson to draw from Braddick's history, it would be this: the descent into societal chaos is accompanied by a breakdown in the meaning of the terms of mutual political discourse*' [S7]. A post by Desert Beacon (10/05/12) cited Braddick's writing on social and religious reform in post-reformation England in a comment on the relationship between religious and secular reform in the debate about gay marriage: '*suffice it to say that one school of thought*

Impact case study (REF3b)

held that a “nation’s salvation” was defined by how closely the body politic mirrored the Visible Church’ [S8]; while Martin Kelly blogged (31/12/12) about fears of the effects on trade of constitutional upheaval in Scotland, and Alex Salmond’s response to those fears: ‘At the moment, I’m reading *God’s Fury, England’s Fire*, Michael Braddick’s fascinating account of the English Civil Wars. Professor Braddick goes into great detail about just how badly trade decayed during the constitutional upheavals of the 1640s, and how frequently those who were concerned by it expressed their fears’ [S9]. The book was cited by Paul Blomfield, MP, in the course of a public debate about the impact of government policy on research in the Arts and Humanities, as an example of the kind of work that was being jeopardised (Hansard, 3/11/10). This range and diversity of impacts demonstrates the public resonance of a book which adopts the approach of a ‘civic history’, in contrast to an apocalyptic history arguing for a single significance of the events narrated.

In this context *God’s Fury* has also prompted public discussion about forms of historical writing and the relevance of the past to the present. Keith Thomas, writing in the *Guardian*, was critical of its ‘disconcertingly postmodernist’ conclusion. This was picked up in the blog @Number 71. In five posts Dan Hartland discussed a number of other reviews and posts relating to *God’s Fury* and other works of seventeenth-century history (<https://thestoryandthetruth.wordpress.com/tag/michael-braddick/>). While claiming that it was not ‘postmodern’, he argued that although the book refused to draw any contemporary parallels it was possible to do so, giving the example of its relevance to issues at stake in a Newsnight disagreement between Michael Portillo and Ian Hislop about whether critical comment on the holders of power was damaging to the political process, demystifying legitimate authority, or an essential feature of an engaged political society. The originality of Braddick’s approach was noted positively in a number of prominent media reviews: Claire Tomalin wrote “*Michael Braddick’s God’s Fury, England’s Fire (Allen Lane) ... is altogether an original and remarkable piece of historical writing, and should become a classic*” (*Guardian* Christmas book round-up, 28/11/09); Dan Jones wrote “*You could call it a brilliant postmodern history if it wasn’t so, well, readable*” (*Daily Telegraph*, paperback review, 1/04/09); and Colin Gardiner wrote “*Braddick tells the story with the freedom of the poet and the creative power of the historian*” (*Oxford Times*, 12/06/08).

Impact on the creative sector: Alongside this debate, *God’s Fury* had demonstrable impact among programme makers and authors. Broadcast TV programmes which draw on its arguments include an episode of ‘History Cold Case’, BBC2, in which Braddick advised on the depiction of the political engagement of ordinary people and common soldiers in the Civil War; and a series on the English monarchy presented by Lucy Worsley on BBC4, in which he was interviewed on how to interpret quiescence to Charles’s rule during the 1630s, and the development of resistance to his rule following the Scottish rebellion in 1637. The arguments about political engagement with Charles’s rule during the 1630s lie behind his role as historical consultant which shaped the content of a major documentary filmed about the Pilgrim Fathers, to be broadcast during 2014 (Steeplechase films for PBS and BBC, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities) [S2]. The *Oxford Times* (12/06/08) noted that *God’s Fury* ‘*may be read as an excellent companion*’ to accounts of the pilgrims’ migration, since it explains the roots of such a radical rejection of English religious and political life and the later remigration of key figures from the Americas during the civil war. A phrase from the book was used as the title of a poem (‘The extravagant promise of Macaria’) read by Tony Walton at the Hay Festival on 30 May 2008 and published on the *New Statesman* blog. The poem uses Braddick’s description of a utopian tract in order to prompt optimism about the potential of political mobilisation to improve the conditions of social and political life:

A hundred years before the Enlightenment’s dawning,
This was the first new morning of the thirst of mankind
For a new kind of life, a better way of living: [S10]

Impact on education: Together with publications R2-R5, *God’s Fury* has had a significant impact on the teaching of early Stuart history and the English revolution, a subject commonly taught throughout the English-speaking world. Braddick has undertaken substantial speaking engagements and other promotional work, including talks to A-level audiences and the Historical Association.

The book has become a standard teaching work in higher education. It is on the reading list for

Impact case study (REF3b)

courses at over 24 universities in the UK, US, and Canada, and is included as a core text at (a selection): the University of Wales (Newport), University College London (UCL), University of Chester, Cardiff University, University of Chicago, University of Arkansas, and Wilfrid Laurier University (Ontario). A senior lecturer at UCL reports that *“God’s Fury has transformed students’ ability to get to grips with a complex and contentious topic. It is valued not just as a highly readable introduction for the uninitiated, but also as a book which offers an historiographically rich analysis, and sparkling new ideas, without resorting to crude simplifications or obsolete grand narratives.”* [S5]

God’s Fury has also had an impact on the teaching of Civil War history at secondary level, through talks by Braddick and the inclusion of the book as an A Level text at schools including South Craven (North Yorkshire) and Sir Roger Manwood’s (Kent). Feedback gathered from St Mary’s Catholic High School, Chesterfield, where Braddick gave five lectures during the census period to local sixth formers studying the seventeenth century, demonstrates that his ideas affected the views of the audience about the subject and contributed to their understanding of the value of the study of history. According to the organiser, *“We are keen to enrich the learning of our students and add extra rigour where we can. Professor Braddick’s lecture [on mobilisation and the choosing of sides in 1642] fits perfectly with their study ... and gives them an invaluable insight into how History can be delivered at a higher level. He entertains them with his dry sense of humour, and is very approachable after the lecture. Several of our students have actually gone on to read History at Sheffield, partly due to the inspirational speaking of Professor Braddick. The visit is always valued by our students; some have even referenced it in an exam and in a University interview”* [S3]. Students from Brookfield School, in Chesterfield, also attend these lectures. Their teacher commented *“They all found [Braddick’s] lecture informative and entertaining. They felt it was a valuable experience in the light of making their decisions about Higher Education”*.

Braddick gave this lecture to 12 patients at Rampton Hospital (a high-security hospital in Nottinghamshire), and the co-ordinator wrote that *“Patients’ commented on Mike’s congenial manner, his passion for history and how his exciting delivery of the seminar fostered genuine curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Through his aptitude for promoting learning in a stimulating manner Mike contributed to developing social proficiency and personal development of patients. For a long time after the seminar series ended patients reflected with pride and appreciation on their unique learning experiences.”* [S4]

Economic impact: The book has had an economic impact, both through the TV programmes to which it contributed and more directly through the books sold. The direct commercial value of book sales is difficult to calculate since details of wholesale pricing are in some respects commercially sensitive. However, Braddick’s editor confirms that these sales have probably generated turnover of around £250,000 for the publisher, and significant further turnover for retailers [S1].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. Publisher, Penguin (evidence of sales and turnover)
- S2. Production Co-ordinator, Steeplechase films (impact of *God’s Fury* on creation of documentary film)
- S3. Teacher, St Mary’s Catholic High School, Chesterfield (impact of arguments about popular politics on A level teaching)
- S4. Former Education Coordinator at Rampton Hospital (evidence of impact on patients of presentation about popular politics in the English revolution)
- S5. Senior Lecturer, University College London (use of *God’s Fury* in University teaching)
- S6. Houses of Parliament guide to researching the Civil War (<http://tinyurl.com/lnDms4I>).
- S7. Subotai Bahadur’s comment on Chicago Boyz (<http://chicagoboyz.net/archives/23649.html>).
- S8. Desert Beacon’s post on gay marriage (<http://tinyurl.com/n8f28wc>).
- S9. Martin Kelly’s blog (<http://tinyurl.com/o562fxg>).
- S10. Tony Walton’s poems and comment (<http://tinyurl.com/p9rbqx2>).