

*John Stow and nostalgic antiquarianism**Patrick Collinson*

John Stow might have anticipated Peter Laslett by 350 years, calling his *Survey of London The World We Have Lost*. While Stow never employed the expression 'Merry England', his preoccupation with 'that declining time of charity'¹ makes his book the most extended treatment of the Merry England refrain in all English literature: a mythical story about a world enjoying plenty, but attentive to want, a socially harmonious world consolidated and sweetened by charity, a festive world, in which generosity spilled over freely from the full cup of seasonal pastimes, an open world, and, above all, a religious world. Stow's *Survey* poses on almost every page the questions which all Merry England studies are bound to address.² Did Merry England ever exist? And if it did, are selective memories of its fall, or demise, to be trusted? For the myth of the life of Merry England depends upon the companion myth of its death. Later ages placed Merry England in the very years in which Stow lived and constructed his partly mythical London, while still later generations located it in epochs which Stow never lived to see. As Sir Keith Thomas has explained, Merry England was always the day before yesterday.³ In Victorian fiction, it was associated with the stage coach in its last days, before steam put an end to it, as, for example, in Thackeray's *The Newcomes*: 'The island rang, as yet, with the tooting horns and rattling teams of mail-coaches; a gay sight was the road in merry England in those days.'⁴

Ian Archer has written on the Elizabethan London which Stow somehow failed to notice in his chapter, 'The nostalgia of John

¹ Stow, *Survey*, II.89.

² Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994).

³ Keith Thomas, *The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England*, The Creighton Trust Lecture 1983 (1983).

⁴ W. M. Thackeray, *The Newcomes*, ed. D. Pascoe (Oxford, 1996), p. 108.

Stow'.⁵ But it is not my intention to compare Stow's nostalgic perceptions with reality. This essay has the more limited aim of scrutinizing and nuancing what might be called Stow's selective nostalgia, relating it to a religious position and religious attitudes which were evidently in a process of evolution throughout the forty years of his antiquarian activity. To this I shall add two contrasted points of contemporary reference: Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall*, where present-tenseness contrasts with the past-tenseness of Stow's constantly reiterated 'of old time'; and William Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent*, where the crudest Anti-Romanism stands in stark contrast to Stow's religious conservatism. And yet, not only did Lambarde's *Perambulation* provide Stow with the model for his *Survey*. Stow referred to Lambarde as 'my loving friend': a touching tribute to the latitude of shared antiquarian enthusiasm.⁶

I

Although Stow's nostalgia is suffused throughout his text, including the ward-by-ward itinerary of the city which accounts for its bulk, its most explicit and intense expression comes in his descriptions of 'Orders and Customes', 'Sports and Pastimes', the military musters held at midsummer (the Standing and Marching Watches), and the section headed 'Honor of Citizens, and worthinesse of men in the same'. These self-contained cultural-historical essays depended on the *Descriptio Nobilissimae Civitatis Londoniae* which prefaced William Fitzstephen's life of Thomas Becket, which Stow also prints in full as an appendix, 'the said Author being rare'.

Stow's Fitzstephen was not only 'rare'. He wrote in the late twelfth century, so that while we are distanced from the first edition of Stow's *Survey* by four centuries, rather more than four hundred years separated Stow from Fitzstephen. Yet Stow compresses the centuries. Having quoted Fitzstephen at length on orders and customs, 'the estate of things in his time', Stow writes: 'whereunto may be added the present, by conference whereof, the alteration will easily appeare'. The implication is of a world which had remained more or less static until a vaguely defined moment which seems to

⁵ Ian Archer, 'The nostalgia of John Stow', in David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington (eds.), *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1576-1649* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 17-34.

⁶ Stow, *Survey*, 1.1; II.253.

correspond to the years of Stow's own childhood, the 1530s. The great changes which he alleges, and regrets, had all or mostly happened in his own lifetime, not in the four centuries which distanced him from his rare author. Now, no more than Stow was Fitzstephen a kind of historical camera, recording a series of accurate images of the real London of his day. His *Descriptio* was an early rhetorical exercise in praise of famous cities, a long tradition culminating in the many cartographical and literary descriptions of Renaissance cities, of which Stow appears to have had no knowledge, or none which he discloses.⁷ So Stow's principal source is itself an unrealistic, rose-tinted picture of the London he thought he had lost.

Fitzstephen's London is made the occasion for some of Stow's sharpest complaints about the new London. According to Fitzstephen, the only plagues to afflict the city, 'solae pestes', were immoderate drinking and frequent house fires. Stow thought that in these respects there had been some improvement, since the poor could no longer afford strong beers and wines and most new building was in stone and tile. But now there were new 'enormities', especially encroachments on highways, lanes, and common ground, and the problem of heavy, uncontrolled traffic: 'for the world runs on wheeles with many, whose parents were glad to goe on foote'.⁸ What Fitzstephen recorded, or alleged, about the great men of his time keeping house in the city, 'as if they were Citizens and free men of London', provoked Stow's lament for the decline of that charity 'of olde time given', recalling what he himself had seen as a child, over the garden wall: Thomas Cromwell's servants doling out bread, meat, and drink to as many as two hundred persons every day, 'for he observed that auncient and charitable custome as all prelates, noble men, or men of honour and worship his predecessors had done before him'.⁹

Above all, it was Fitzstephen who inspired Stow's fervently nostalgic calendrical rehearsal of traditional customs and pastimes, all supplied in the past tense. This festive calendar was more civic,

⁷ Xavier Baron, 'Medieval traditions in the English Renaissance: John Stow's portrayal of London in 1603', in Rhoda Schnur (ed.), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Hafniensis: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 120* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1994), pp. 133-41.

⁸ Stow, *Survey*, 1.83-4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.84-9.

less religious and liturgical, than the structure of the festive half of the year described by Hutton in his *Rise and Fall of Merry England*, or by Eamon Duffy in *The Stripping of the Altars*.¹⁰ But it began with Christmas, lords of misrule in every great house, presiding over 'fine and subtle disguisinges, Maskes and Mummeries', everyone's house and the parish churches decked with holly, ivy, bays, and 'whatsoever the season of the yeare aforded to be greene'. This sort of thing went on until Candlemas. The only springtime custom which Stow described was the practice of fetching twisted trees or withies out of the woods into people's houses, which must have been what in other parts of the country was called 'palming'. Then to Mayday and Maytime, a wholly secular celebration.

I find also that in the moneth of May, the Citizens of London of all estates, lightly in every Parish, or sometimes two or three parishes ioyning together, had their severall mayings, and did fetch in Maypoles, with diuerse warlike shewes, with good Archers, Morice dauncers, and other deuices for pastime all the day long, and towards the Euening they had stage playes, and Bonefiers in the streets.¹¹

Midsummer was marked by standing and marching watches, as many as two thousand men and more processing through the streets 'all in bright harnes', with drums and fifes, trumpeters on horseback, together with pageants and morris dancers. Here Stow's chronology is more exact. The Midsummer Watch came to its historical climax on 8 May 1539, when as many as fifteen thousand citizens dressed up and marched from London to Westminster 'in three great battailes'. But boom was followed by bust. Henry VIII – ostensibly considering the heavy cost to the citizens, but also security – suppressed the watch, which was briefly but abortively revived in 1548. This was a matter close to Stow's heart. In his *Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* he had recorded that in 1564, 'through the earnest suite of the armourers', a standing watch was held at midsummer (no marching), which he implied was a poor show, but as chargeable as the marching watches of the past. This was repeated in 1565 and 1567, but Stow has no reference to the watches after that; nor, as Ian Archer has pointed out, to the lord mayor's inaugural show which filled the vacuum left by the midsummer watches, leaving the quite

¹⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992).

¹¹ Stow, *Survey*, 1.91–9.

misleading impression that now there were no more costly and spectacular shows to liven up London's streets.¹²

One thing conspicuously missing from Stow's mostly secular London calendar is the feast of Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi celebrations in provincial towns and cities such as Coventry, Beverley, and York, and the great play cycles performed in the context of the feast, were a cultural manifestation of a manufacturing and trading society composed of crafts, which were in competition, the plays serving, in Mervyn James's words, to defuse the 'tension between social wholeness and social differentiation', while sometimes occasioning the very conflict they were intended to prevent.¹³ Stow's silence on the subject is a reminder that while the economic fabric of London, no less than that of provincial towns, was one of crafts and guilds, its political structure was composed of wards; and that the great London play cycles (now sadly lost) had no basis in the city guilds and no connection with Corpus Christi, but were organized and controlled by the city fathers, and performed by professional actors, often for the entertainment of royalty.¹⁴ Stow reproduces Fitzstephen's account of summer and winter sports and pastimes, including skating, and merely adds 'these or the like exercises haue beene continued till our time', specifying stage plays, with a few meagre details. 'Of late time in place of those Stage playes, hath beene vsed Comedies, Tragedies, Enterludes, and Histories, both true and fayned: For the acting whereof certaine publike places haue beene erected': which, notoriously, is all that Stow tells us about the theatre of Shakespeare's early and triumphant years. In 1598 he had mentioned two of those 'public places': the Theatre and the Curtain. But in 1603 even those names were deleted.¹⁵

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.99–104; John Stow, *A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* (1570 edn), fos. 402r, 405v; (1587 edn), pp. 327, 330, 334; Archer, 'The nostalgia of John Stow', pp. 24–5. But see Lawrence Manley's essay on Stow accompanying Ian Archer's 'Of sites and rites' in *The Theatrical City*, pp. 47–8. There is a lavish description of an early seventeenth-century lord mayor's show in Thomas Middleton, *The Triumphs of Truth: A Solemnity Vnparallelled for Cost, Art, and Magnificence, at the Confirmation and Establishment of that Worthy and true Nobly-minded Gentleman, Sir Thomas Middleton, Knight, in the Honorable Office of his Maiesties Lieutenent, the Lord Maior of the thrice Famous City of London* (London, 1613).

¹³ Mervyn James, 'Ritual, drama and social body in the late medieval English town', in M. James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 16–47; Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen: the communal year at Coventry, 1450–1550' in Peter Clark and Paul Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700: Essays in Urban History* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 57–85.

¹⁴ This point was clarified for me by Professor Caroline Barron.

¹⁵ Stow, *Survey*, 1.93; II.236.

Stow's nostalgia reached its apogee in his account of the festivities associated with two other religious feasts of the dog days of high summer, St John the Baptist's Day and Saint Peter's Day, together with their preceding vigils, when

in the Euenings after the Sunne setting, there were vsually made Bonefiers in the streetes, euery man bestowing wood or labour towards them: the wealthier sort also before their doores neare to the said Bonefiers, would set out Tables on the Vigiles, furnished with sweete breade, and good drinke, and on the Festiuall dayes with meates and drinks plentifully, whereunto they would inuite their neighbours and passengers also to sit, and bee merrie with them in great familiaritie, praying God for his benefites bestowed on them. These were called Bonefiers aswell of good amitie amongst neighbours that, being before at controuersie, were there by the labour of others, reconciled, and made of bitter enemies, louing friendes, as also for the vertue that a great fire hath to purge the infectyon of the ayre.¹⁶

The doorways of houses were festooned with green branches and flowers, while glass lamps with oil in them burning all night hung on branches of iron curiously wrought, each carrying hundreds of lights. Here was the ever seductive myth of community.

We may notice some other striking examples of nostalgic memory in the walkabout chapters of the *Survey*. There is a memorable description of Houndsditch, a row of almshouses for poor bedridden folk, each with a little garden plot behind, the sick old pensioners as visible through their windows as a rather different class of person in modern Amsterdam, 'a clean linnen cloth lying in their window, and a payre of Beades to shew that there lay a bedred body, vnable but to pray onely'. And there devout men and women would go on Fridays, to bestow their charitable alms. But more recently the whole area had been taken over by brokers and dealers in second-hand clothes, which, remarked C. L. Kingsford, was what the district was still known for in 1908.¹⁷

There is a horror story of what happened to the Priory of Christ Church, called Holy Trinity, in Aldgate, which had come into the possession of Sir Thomas Audley. The great church was demolished, and there was such a glut of stone that any man in the city could have a cartload brought to his door for sixpence or sevenpence, carriage included. The church of the Crutched Friars had become a carpenter's yard, a tennis court, and a glass factory. St Mary Spittle

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.101.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.128; II.289.

in Bishopsgate Ward had been 'an Hospitall of great reliefe'. But now, in its place, were 'many faire houses builded, for receipt and lodging of worshipfull persons'. Much of the great complex of buildings which made up the Austin Friars had been demolished, and the marquess of Winchester had sold the monuments of noblemen and the paving, which had cost thousands of pounds, for a hundred, 'and in place thereof made fayre stabling for horses'.¹⁸ It looks as if Margaret Aston's essay on 'The Dissolution and the sense of the past' could well have been written without reference to any text other than Stow's *Survey*.¹⁹

A strong moral is drawn from the strange story of Moorfields in the sixteenth century, first drained and enclosed, then opened up again for archery practice and other forms of recreation, but then re-enclosed, with gardens and summer houses, 'in worse case than euer . . . not so much for vse or profite, as for shewe and pleasure, bewraying the vanity of mens mindes, much vnlike to the disposition of the ancient Cittizens, who delighted in the building of Hospitals, and Almes houses for the poore, and therein both employed their wits, and spent their wealthes in preferment of the common commoditie of this our Citie'.²⁰

But as Stow walked from ward to ward, parish to parish, it was the wanton destruction of tomb monuments which made a constant, distressing refrain. At St Michael's Cornhill, where Stow's father and grandfather were buried, the tombs of two notable citizens having been pulled down, 'no monument remayneth of them', 'notwithstanding their liberality to that Church and Parrish'. St Botolph's in Billingsgate once had 'many fayre monuments', now 'al destroyed by bad and greedy men of spoyle'. The tombs in St Magnus the Martyr at the foot of London Bridge were 'for the most part utterly defaced'. The Franciscan church of the Grey Friars, rechristened Christ Church by Henry VIII, was stuffed with notable burials, of which Stow lists no less than 138, including the foundress, Edward I's queen, Queen Isabel, the consort of Edward II, a daughter of Edward III, the wife of Robert the Bruce, and Sir Thomas Mallory. 'All these and fieve times so many more haue bin

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I.143-4, 148, 166-7, 176-7.

¹⁹ Margaret Aston, 'English ruins and English history: the Dissolution and the sense of the past', in M. Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (1984), pp. 313-37.

²⁰ Stow, *Survey*, II.76-8.

buried there, whose Monuments are wholly defaced.' In Shoreditch church the vicar had stripped all the memorial brasses from the graves, the action either of 'a preposterous zeale, or of a greedy mind'.²¹ Stow told John Manningham that he had omitted many new monuments from his *Survey*, 'because those men have bin the defacers of the monumentes of others, and soe thinkes them worthy to be deprived of that memory whereof they have injuriously robbed others'.²²

II

If we attempt to dissect Stow's nostalgic antiquarianism, what do we find? First, and most simply, the values of an old man, seventy-three years of age when the *Survey* was first published, someone who lived in the past, had no enthusiasm for the present, and no words for the future. Stow had spoken with 'some ancient men' who had seen King Richard the Third and who could describe his physical appearance, 'comely enough, onely of low stature', and he passed this on to Sir George Buck in the seventeenth century, just as in the next millennium I may tell my grandchildren about the tiny and nearly globular Queen Victoria whom my father saw with his own eyes, riding in a coach in Hyde Park in the late nineteenth century.²³ As a child, Stow had walked every day to the fields beside the Tower to buy a halfpenny-worth of milk, which was three pints in summer, a quart in winter, 'alwayes hot from the Kine, as the same was milked and strained'.²⁴ By the time he wrote, the countryside had retreated far down the Mile End Road, beyond Whitechapel. I myself grew up on a Suffolk farm where I rode on the backs of gentle carthorses, fed the pigs, and took part in the harvest with everyone else in the village. That farm no longer exists. The ponds in which I used to fish and catch newts have long since dried up. Old men hate change.

Stow was an historical ecologist before his time. All the old open spaces were filling up, the fields where the Stow family's milk had come from 'let out for Garden plots, Carpenters yarges, Bowling Allies, and diuerse houses thereon builded'. No more than forty

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.197, 207–8, 212, 319–22; II.75.

²² R. P. Sorlien (ed.), *The Diary of John Manningham* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), p. 154.

²³ George Buck, *The History of the Life and Reigne of Richard the Third* (1647), p. 79.

²⁴ Stow, *Survey*, 1.126.

years before he wrote, Hog Lane which ran to the north towards Bethlehem Hospital (and nowadays Liverpool Street Station) had been lined with elm trees, 'with Bridges and easie stiles to passe ouer into the pleasant fieldes, very commodious for Citizens therein to walke, shoote, and otherwise to recreate and refresh their dulled spirites in the sweete and wholesome ayre', which was now 'made a continuall building throughout'.²⁵

Such nostalgia for the raped and now distant countryside is a potent urban myth, symbolized by all that greenery allegedly brought in at Christmas and in the month of May, and it is impossible to say how many sixteenth-century Londoners were consciously moved by it. As for Stow's account of May morning, partly suggested by Fitzstephen's lyrical description of twelfth-century London's rural setting, and perhaps by the poets whom Stow knew so well, from Chaucer to Lydgate, this certainly reads like a pleasant fiction: 'Euery man, except impediment, would walke into the sweete meadowes and greene woods, there to reioyce their spirites with the beauty and sauour of sweete flowers, and with the harmony of birds'.²⁶

Stow took particular exception to the creation of the East End. He objected to the encroachment of 'filthy cottages' and other 'purpresures' on what had once been open and common fields, making an 'unsauery and unseemly' passage into the city from that direction.²⁷ And he was equally disturbed by the abandonment of the great houses within the walls on the east side of the city, creating more slums and equally destructive of old-style community. For example, Northumberland House, two minutes' walk from Stow's own house by Aldgate pump, and once the town house of the Percies, had first been converted into a complex of bowling alleys and dicing houses, but then, when the competition of other unlawful gaming houses proved too severe, it was opportunistically developed as small cottages, 'for strangers and others'.²⁸ But it was none of Stow's business to tell us how the underlying problem of immigration and overcrowding was being created, addressed, and managed, which is the contested preoccupation of our modern historians of early modern London: Pearl, Foster, Rappaport, Archer, Boulton.²⁹

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.126–7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II.72.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.149.

²⁹ Valerie Pearl, 'Social policy in early modern London', in H. Lloyd-Jones, B. Worden, and V. Pearl (eds.), *History and Imagination: Essays in Honour of H. R. Trevor-Roper* (1981), pp. 115–31;

Stow was less exercised by ribbon development along the roads leading towards Hoxton and Hackney, and thoroughly complacent about the growth of the newly fashionable London to the west, beyond Temple Bar and along the Strand into Westminster. The expressions used in those passages are 'faire buildings', 'diuers fayre houses', 'diuers fayre Tenements lately builded'.³⁰ But as we gather from some of the most spine-chilling passages in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, inhabitants of Aldgate were not necessarily well informed about what went on in St Martin's Lane.

The ecological strand in Stow's *Survey* weaves its way in and out of three related themes and preoccupations: open and enclosed, public and private, innocence and sophisticated corruption. 'Of olde time', on holy days, and after evening prayer, the youths of the city had exercised themselves at their masters' doors with cudgel play, while their sisters danced for garlands 'hanged thwart the streetes': 'which open pastimes in my youth, being now suppressed, worser practises within doores are to be feared'. What, asked Stow, am I to say about the daily exercises in the long bow, 'now almost cleane left off and forsaken? I ouerpass it: for by the meane of closing in the common grounds, our Archers for want of roome to shoote abroad, creepe into bowling Allies, and ordinarie dicing houses, nearer home, where they have roome enough to hazard their money at vnlawfull games: and there I leaue them to take their pleasures.'³¹

The development of part of the churchyard of St Botolph's Bishopsgate to create Petty France, a collection of houses let out to French immigrants, was, reported Stow, the work of some citizens 'that more regarded their owne priuate gaine, then the common good of the Cittie'. And then, much closer to home, there was the shocking story of how Thomas Cromwell, without a by-your-leave, had encroached twenty-two feet into Stow's father's garden, in the course of the operation moving a garden house out of the way on rollers 'ere my father heard thereof, no warning was given him'. A symbol of the new age was the ambitious house built in Bishopsgate

F. F. Foster, *The Politics of Stability. A Portrait of the Rulers in Elizabethan London* (1977); Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989); Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991); Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987).

³⁰ Stow, *Survey*, II.74, 98, 101-2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I.95, 104.

and known for generations as 'Fishers Folly', about which 'men haue not letted to speake their pleasure'.³²

What all this added up to was a catastrophic collapse of age-old and traditional charity, which in Stow's perception seems to have been equivalent to the end of citizenship and community as he had known it. Ian Archer has dealt thoroughly with this matter. Hospitality, together with face-to-face, informal, charity may have been in decline in Stow's lifetime. It is impossible to say. But 'there can be no doubting the huge surge in philanthropic giving in the sixteenth century', a 'massively increased participation in giving to the poor', and this is a finding which could never be inferred from Stow.³³

III

Was the taproot of Stow's nostalgic antiquarianism religious, the attitude of an essentially unreconstructed English Catholic, as it were a denizen of the pages of Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars*? A good case can be made for a strong link between antipathy to the Reformation and all that flowed from it and what might be called the antiquarian bug, and it is made by Richard Cust for certain Midland antiquarians, such as the Leicestershire gentleman Sir Thomas Shirley, and the Staffordshire chorographer Sampson Erdeswicke, Stow's exact contemporary. Catholic antiquarians compensated for their exclusion from many areas of public life by celebrating their ancient lineage with elaborate armorial displays, in their houses and parish churches, where they erected tombs which were assertive genealogical and heraldic statements. Here was the summoning up of the ghost of a past world to redress the unequal balance of the new. Lord Lumley up in County Durham is another good example of the same phenomenon.³⁴

Stow, as a London citizen, whose trade was tailoring, and whose greatest adventure into public life was as a conner of ale, was not, to be sure, moved by the same grandiose motives as an Erdeswicke or a Lumley. His friend William Camden makes a more relevant point of

³² *Ibid.*, I.164, 179, 165-6.

³³ Archer, 'The nostalgia of John Stow', p. 27.

³⁴ Richard Cust, 'Catholicism, antiquarianism and gentry honour: the writings of Sir Thomas Shirley', *Midland History* 23 (1998), 40-70; Mervyn James, *Family, Lineage and Civil Society: A Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region, 1500-1640* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 108-10.

reference. Camden's dislike of what he once called 'protestantes effervescentes' runs through his *Annales* of Elizabeth like bindweed.³⁵ And the Preface to his *Britain* contains this affirmation:

There are certaine, as I heare who take it impatiently that I have mentioned some of the most famous Monasteries and their founders. I am sorry to heare it, and with their good favour will say thus much, They may take it as impatiently, and peradventure would have us forget that our ancestoures were, and we are of the Christian profession when as there are not extant any other more conspicuous, and certaine Monuments, of their piety, and zealous devotion toward God. Neither were there any other seed-gardens from whence Christian Religion, and good learning were propagated over this isle, howbeit in corrupt ages some weeds grew out over-ranckly.³⁶

The 'weeds' were not some polite deference to Protestant prejudice. Camden was some kind of Protestant, who had suffered for his convictions in Catholic Oxford, not to be sure at the stake but perhaps by what some would regard as a worse fate, failure to gain a fellowship at All Souls, which, in a letter to Archbishop Ussher, he attributed to 'defending the religion established'.³⁷ This takes us into the problematical, and perhaps unprofitable, business of determining what religious labels it may or may not be appropriate to pin on representatives of the generation whose lives were intercepted and diverted by the Protestant Reformation.

An exception to prove the rule of the linkage between antiquarianism and a conservative religious outlook is the very unproblematical William Lambarde. But if Sir Thomas Shirley was compensating for a present which had deprived him of his past, Lambarde as a newcomer to Kent was creating for himself his own instant heritage. In what has been written about his *Perambulation of Kent*,³⁸ not enough has been made of Lambarde's virulent and even, in Camden's phrase, effervescent, Protestantism, no doubt because

³⁵ Patrick Collinson, 'One of us? William Camden and the making of history', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 8 (1998), 139–63, and esp. 156.

³⁶ William Camden, tr. Philemon Holland, *Britain* (1610), 'The Author To The Reader'. This preface, including this statement, addressed to an English rather than a continental readership, appeared for the first time in 1610.

³⁷ Thomas Smith (ed.), *V. Cl. Gulielmi Camdeni et Illustrium Virorum ad G. Camdenum Epistolae* (1691), pp. 246–8.

³⁸ I cite the 1596 edition of *A Perambulation of Kent: Conteyning the Description, Hystorie and Customes of that Shyre*, first published in a limited edition of 600 copies (intended for the Kentish gentry?) in 1576. Lambarde was republished in 1826, an edition reprinted in facsimile and edited by Richard Church (Bath, 1970).

attention has been concentrated on his Anglo-Saxon interests and learning, evidenced, for example, in Lambarde's extensive discussion of the Kentish law of gavelkind, and in the extent of his indebtedness to other Anglo-Saxon scholars, and especially to the mysterious Laurence Nowell.³⁹ But anti-popery is a very conspicuous feature of the *Perambulation*, apparent in such small details as a comment on the foundation of the nunnery of Minster in Thanet, with the foundress 'instructed belike by some Monkish counsellor'.⁴⁰

Lambarde's longest continuous narratives were accounts of gross popish superstition. Such was the sensational story of the Maid (or Nun) of Kent, whose exploits had been engineered by 'the enimie of mankinde and Prince of darknesse', the bishops, priests, and monks with closed eyes winking, the Devil and his agents 'with open mouth laughing at it' (more than a thousand words); the conjuring Rood of Boxley (1,500 words): 'if I should thus leave Boxley, the favourers of false and feyned Religion would laugh in their sleeves, and the followers of Gods trueth might iustly cry out and blame me'.⁴¹ John Bale, who also combined a genuine and learned passion for antiquity with an Ian Paisley-like hatred of all forms of monkery and popish superstition, could hardly have done better.

Lambarde pulled all the stops out when his chorographical itinerary brought him to Canterbury and to the great monasteries of Christ Church and St Augustine, 'two irreligious Synagogues' 'harborowes of the Devil and the Pope'. It was no wonder that Canterbury, like Walsingham, was now 'in a maner waste', since that was where God in times past had been blasphemed most. Lambarde's attitude to ruined abbeys differs from Camden's:

In which part, as I cannot on the one side, but in respecte of the places themselves pitie and lament this generall decay, not onely in this Shyre, but in all other places of the Realme also: So on the other side, considering the maine Seas of sinne and iniquitie, wherein the worlde (at those daies) was almost wholly drenched, I must needes take cause, highly to praise God that hath thus mercifully in our age delivered us, disclosed Satan, unmasked

³⁹ Robin Flower, 'Laurence Nowell and the discovery of England in Tudor times', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 21 (1935), 47–74. Flower's misidentification of Nowell is corrected in Retha Warnicke, 'Notes on a Court of Requests case of 1571', *English Language Notes* (Boulder, Colo., 1973), and in her *William Lambarde; Elizabethan Antiquary 1536–1601* (1973). See ch. 4, 'The antiquary'.

⁴⁰ *A Perambulation*, p. 99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187–94, 227.

these Idoles, dissolved their Synagogs, and raced to the grounde all monuments of building erected to superstition, and ungodlynesse.⁴²

Lambarde's 'pitié and lament' were not crocodile tears. Paradoxically, he, and that hot Protestant Bale, bitterly regretted the dispersal of the monastic libraries and the loss of their manuscripts, an aspect of the religious alteration which the conservative Stow never mentions.⁴³ But it appears that Lambarde would have been the last to complain if Canterbury Cathedral had been turned into a quarry: which is what happened to St Augustine's. The flip-side, as it were, of Lambarde's fierce anti-popery was the account, in his second edition, of the fleet riding at anchor at Chatham, 'these most stately and valiant vessels', 'such excellent ornaments of peace, and trustie aides in warre', 'this triumphant spectacle'.⁴⁴

Lambarde regarded the murder of Thomas Becket as an unlawful crime, but asked 'whether such a life deserved not such a death'?⁴⁵ In stark contrast, John Stow's interest in Becket was as a person of honour, wisdom, and virtue, a local boy made good, following Fitzstephen with the marginal comment: 'A Shiriffes clarke of London became Chancellor of England, and Archbishop of Canterburie'.⁴⁶

This brings us back to Stow's religion. There is not any doubt that he regretted the 'preposterous' zeal which had made a holocaust of so much of London's past, and that he deplored all acts of iconoclasm, especially when they were as senseless as the decapitation of the images of Lud and other ancient kings which had 'beautified' Ludgate, the act of those who 'iudged every Image to be an Idoll'.⁴⁷ Stow's detailed account of the regularly repeated acts of unlawful violence perpetrated against the images on the cross in Cheapside leave us in no doubt where he stood on that matter. In 1581 the target was 'the image of the blessed virgin, at that time robbed of her son, and her armes broken, by which she staid him on her knees: her whole body also was haled with ropes and left likely to fall'. In 1595 repairs were carried out, and in the year following 'a new misshapen son, as borne out of time, all naked was laid in her armes, the other images broke as afore'. But then, in 1600, between

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 296–8.

⁴³ I owe this point to Dr Thomas Freeman.

⁴⁴ *A Perambulation*, pp. 346–50. Lambarde provides a list of all ships present in December 1596, the 'Estate of the Navie Royall', forty vessels.

⁴⁵ *A Perambulation*, p. 305.

⁴⁶ Stow, *Survey*, 1.105. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.38.

the two editions of the *Survey*, the image of Our Lady was yet again defaced 'by plucking off her Crowne, and almost her head, taking from her her naked child, and stabbing her in the breast etc.'. 'Thus much for the crosse in west Cheape'.⁴⁸

What mordant pleasure Stow derived from the story of St Andrew Undershaft, the church round the corner from his home! The shaft after which the church was named was the principal maypole of the city which had not been set up since the racial riots of the 'evil' May Day of 1517, and it hung on iron hooks under the eaves of neighbouring houses. In 1549, the curate of the parish of St Katherine Christ Church, a certain 'Sir Stephen', preaching at Paul's Cross, denounced the shaft as an idol and demanded that the quaint and in his perception superstitious names of such churches be altered. According to Stow's account, this man was a fanatical extremist who had once preached out of an elm tree in his chuchyard. The effect of the sermon was that the neighbours over whose doors the shaft had hung for thirty-two years, after a good dinner, hauled the thing down and sawed it up for firewood. 'Thus was this Idoll (as he tearmed it) mangled, and after burned.' Soon afterwards there happened the 'commotions' of the summer of 1549, in the midst of which, with martial law in force, a man from Romford, the local bailiff, was hanged for incautious words spoken to the same curate. The summary execution happened on Stow's very doorstep. This was a gross miscarriage of justice and the victim was a popular figure. Stow tells us that the villain of the piece immediately left London and was never heard of again.⁴⁹

All this was consistent with the views of a non-effervescent Protestant, which is what Hugh Trevor-Roper supposed Stow to have been. But had that always been the case? C. L. Kingsford knew that there was more to it than that, but was swayed by a somewhat anachronistic view of Elizabethan religion typical of the time in which he wrote: 'Whatever lurking sympathy he might have felt for the old faith was lost in the deep loyalty of a true Elizabethan'.⁵⁰ That sounds more like Lambarde.

We must deal with another, and still more questionable reading of Stow. Barrett Beer, in an article based on a reading of successive

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.266–7. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.143–5.

⁵⁰ H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'John Stow' in *Renaissance Essays* (1985), pp. 94–102; Kingsford's Introduction to the *Survey*, 1.xxx.

editions of Stow's *Chronicles*, regarded Stow as a representative and detached layman, the man in the street, who viewed the Reformation 'from the outside'. Beer even suggested that Stow 'never really grasped the significance of the religious revolution through which he lived'.⁵¹

There is no need to make things up. There is some evidence. In February 1569, Stow came under suspicion as a closet Catholic. The circumstances are obscure but had to do with Stow's possession of a manifesto circulated by the Spanish ambassador on behalf of the duke of Alva. Although Stow was called to answer before the lord mayor, this would probably not have happened if he had not been shopped by his younger brother Thomas, with whom Stow was on the worst possible terms. Thomas knew about his brother's books and papers and suspected him of dabbling in witchcraft. 'I will make all the world know what artes he practysythe.'⁵² A few days after Stow's court appearance, he was visited by what might be called the bishop of London's thought police, and his library and papers were searched. After his chaplain had reported on what was found, Bishop Grindal sent a report to the Privy Council and wrote to William Cecil in his own hand, which suggests that the matter was taken seriously.⁵³

Historians have not made very much of this episode. There has been a tendency to focus on Stow's collections of chronicles and other papers, and what Grindal's chaplain chose to call 'phantasticall popishe bokes prynted in the old tyme', pretty harmless stuff. But the chaplain paid little or no attention to this material, whereas he prepared a catalogue of 'such bokes as have been lately sett furth in this realme or beyonde the seas for defense of papistrye'. These, he claimed, declared Stow to be 'a great fautor of papistrye'. The chaplain was quite right. The books in question were not old and fantastical but a fairly complete library of the up-to-date Catholic literature of the English Counter-Reformation. There were over thirty titles, including Bishop Bonner's Catechism and *Homilies*,

⁵¹ Barrett L. Beer, 'John Stow and the English Reformation, 1547–1559', *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 16 (1985), 257–71.

⁵² Stow, *Survey*, I.xvi–xviii, lvi.

⁵³ Bishop Edmund Grindal to Sir William Cecil, 24 February 1568(9), enclosing a letter from Thomas Wattes to Grindal, 21 February 1568(9), together with 'A Catalog of such unnlawfull bookes as were founde in the studye of John Stowe of London'; BL, MS Lansdowne 11, fos. 4–8. The catalogue was printed by John Strype in his *Life of Edmund Grindal* (Oxford, 1821), pp. 516–19.

Richard Smith's *A Bouclier of the Catholike Fayth* (1554) and his *Defence of the Blessed Mass* and *Assertion and Defence of the Sacramente of the Alter* (both 1546), Bishop Stephen Gardiner's *Explication and Assertion of the True Catholique Fayth Touchyng the Sacrament of the Aultter* (Rouen, 1551), Bishop Thomas White's sermon on the real presence (1554), Miles Hogarde's *Displaying of the Protestants* (1556), and two much more recent imports from Catholic presses overseas, Thomas Stapleton's translation of Bede (1565), in effect a retort to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and Thomas Dorman's book against Bishop Jewel, *A Proufe of Certeyne Articles in Religion* (1564). This does not sound like the bedside reading of a man who never really grasped the significance of what was going on in the Reformation. These were apologetical and polemical works, not books of devotion. What made Stow such a dedicated student of the doctrine of the real presence?

If Bishop Grindal's chaplain had paid closer attention to Stow's own papers and manuscripts, he might have been alerted to a kind of diary which finished up in a Lambeth Palace Library MS, a document of considerable interest if we are trying to pin Stow down, religiously, and a source of the utmost importance for the religious history of London in the 1560s.⁵⁴

This piece of contemporary history suggests a fascination with religious weirdos, of whom early Elizabethan London afforded several examples, including two inmates of Bedlam, John More, who claimed to be Christ; and William Jefferey, who had appointed himself More's apostle, Saint Peter; and the self-confessed usurer, Richard Allington, who recounted on his deathbed many strange visions, with devils 'lyke puppets, they came up and downe my chamber'. 'And maisters, I can not tell of what religion you be that heare, nor I care not': 1,600 words of this.⁵⁵ For the year 1562, Stow records the summary arrest of a priest for preparing to say mass in Lady Cary's house in Fetter Lane, the hauling of the priest to prison with the crowd baying for his blood, 'mokyng, derydyng, cursyng, and wyshyng evyll to hym', 'well was he or she that cowlde get a plucke at hym or gyve hym a thumpe with theyr fyst or spyt in his face' – and note, says Stow, the priest had not actually said mass but was only dressed and ready for it; the ladies of quality who had been

⁵⁴ James Gairdner (ed.), *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles With Historical Memoranda by John Stow the Antiquary, And Contemporary Notes of Occurrences Written by Him in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, Camden Society, n.s. 28 (1880).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 117–21.

present themselves arraigned 'amongeste theves and mowderars'.⁵⁶ Here Stow's sympathies are not in much doubt. When, in the following year, the Marian bishops were removed from their imprisonment in the Tower to more comfortable quarters, Stow records that the preachers at Paul's Cross and other places fed the flames of popular prejudice, preaching 'as it was thowght of many wysse men' 'very sedyssyowsly', and he particularly mentions William Baldwin, the author of the satire *Beware the Cat*, whose sermon had demanded that the bishops 'and othar papestis' be hanged in Smithfield. Although he had assisted him in early work on his abridgement of the *Chronicles*, Stow seems to have taken pleasure in the fact that Baldwin died of the plague a week after this provocative sermon. When Sir Thomas Lodge as lord mayor grew a beard, the first to have done so, it was thought of 'mayny people' very strange':⁵⁷ beards were Protestant things. By now we begin to appreciate that Stow's 'all men', 'mayny people', 'many wise men', are confessionally loaded rhetorical devices, resembling Camden's use of similar expressions in his *Annales* of Elizabeth.

Stow's account of the Paul's Cross sermons of these years is strikingly mordant. A lengthy report of a robustly anti-Catholic performance by William Cole, the archdeacon of Essex, is ironically prefaced 'Poynts of Devinitie'; another of Cole's sermons, which likened priests to apes – for both were bald, the priests before, the apes behind – was headlined 'A Noate of Divinitye'.⁵⁸

Then comes Stow's invaluable and colourful account of the vestiarian disturbances of 1566 which launched the Elizabethan puritan movement: Robert Crowley barring the entry of a funeral into St Giles Cripplegate, 'saynge the churche was his . . . whereof he wold rule that place and wold not soffer eny suche superstycious rages of Rome ther to entre'; a radical sermon preached at St Magnus the Martyr by a Scot, 'wyth very byter and vehement words agaynst the quene not here to be named'; the same Scot's conformist capitulation, appearing in a surplice, whereupon 'a sertayne nombar of wyves threw stons at hym and pullyd hym forthe of the pulpyt, rentyng his syrplce and scratyng his face'; the women of St Margaret's Fish Street shouting 'ware horns!' at the bishop; women (again) loading the non-conformist preachers with bags and bottles, sugar and spice, as they passed over London Bridge to custody in the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 127.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 133.

country. It is significant that this narrative puts centre stage the gross and radical disorder of 'womanish brabbles'.

And then follows Stow's spin on the actions of those radical Protestants whose response to the vestments crisis was to reinvent the secret, privy churches of Mary's reign: 'About that tyme were many congregations of the Anabaptysts in London, who cawlyd themselves Puritans or Unspottyd Lambs of the Lord.'⁵⁹ We know about these people from other sources.⁶⁰ They did not call themselves Puritans, and they were certainly not Anabaptists.

There is no more informative account of the divided religious scene which was the sequel to the fires of Smithfield, and it is clear on which side of the fence Stow stood in these still inchoate 1560s. His religion was probably not very different from that of the undertaker and diarist, Henry Machyn, whose Catholic sympathies have never been in doubt.⁶¹ But he was the religious opposite of the great Protestant chronicler John Foxe, who gloried in the repudiation of the religious past, and who suppressed evidence of religious division among Protestants and of those radical tendencies which Stow gleefully exposed. Were Stow's memoranda intended as a riposte to the *Acts and Monuments*?⁶²

In the years which followed, if Stow did not become a Protestant, he learned to be discreet. His *Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles*, which began to appear from the press in 1565, contains none of the tendentious observations on the religious events of the mid-1560s which he had privately recorded. His practice in recounting for public consumption events close to his own time was, as with his use of Fitzstephen in the *Survey*, to incorporate other chronicles in his possession, and one of these, now contained in MS Harley 540, was conservative in outlook.⁶³ It characterized Katherine of Aragon as 'a blysyd lady and a good', and told the story of the punishment of two women who had said that she and not Anne Boleyn was rightfully

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–44.

⁶⁰ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London and Berkeley, 1967; Oxford, 1990), part 2, ch. 3, 'London's Protestant underworld'.

⁶¹ J. G. Nichols (ed.), *The Diary of Henry Machyn Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, From A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563*, Camden Society, 42 (1848).

⁶² I owe this point to Dr Thomas Freeman.

⁶³ C. L. Kingsford (ed.), *Two London Chronicles From the Collections of John Stow*, Camden Miscellany 12, Camden Society, 3rd ser. 18 (1910). Stow also employed a chronicle, more Protestant in tone, MS Harley 530, together with MS Harley 194, edited by J. G. Nichols as *The Chronicles of Queen Jane and of Two Years of Queen Mary*, Camden Society, 48 (1850).

queen.⁶⁴ Stow omitted these details from his *Summarie*. The early editions of the *Summarie* gave an upbeat account of the accession of Mary Tudor, and of her restoration of the old religion. 'In this tyme the people shewed themselves so ready to receive their old religion, that in many places of the realme, understanding the quenes plesure, before any law was made for the same, they erected agayne theyr aultars, and used the Masse and latin service, in such sorte as was wont to be in kyng Henries tyme.' These passages too were dropped from later editions.⁶⁵

There is further self-censorship in the *Survey* itself. When Stow quotes the epitaphs inscribed on pre-Reformation tombs, he turns them into theologically innocuous statements, mere monuments, omitting the lines which invite prayers for the dead or refer to the doctrine of purgatory. The full texts can be found in the original MS of the *Survey*, MS Harley 538. Thus, the nine lines quoted from the tomb of John Rainwell, fishmonger, in St Botolph's Billingsgate (1446) end with an 'etc.', omitting five more, where we find: 'Wherfore now agre / To pray unto God that reynethe eternally / His soule to embrace and take to his mercy.' Only in MS Harley 538 do we find these words from the epitaph for Robert Dalusse and his wife, buried in St Martin in the Vintry in the days of Edward IV: 'Pray for us, we yow pray. / Lyke as you would be prayed for another day'; and, from the lengthy epitaph in St Anthony's Budge Row for Thomas Knowles, a former mayor, and his family, the formula: 'We may not pray, hartely pray ye / For our sowles pater noster et ave; / The sonner owre paynes lessed may be, / Graunt vs the Holy Trinitie.'⁶⁶

If there is any sense in which John Stow was converted, if not exactly to a religion known as Protestantism, to the Protestant Church of England, he doubtless underwent, as with so many of his generation, a process of conversion by conformity. There is no evidence that he was ever a recusant and copious evidence on almost every page of the *Survey* to continuing commitment to the fabric and the social and mystical community of London's parishes. But when Stow refers, as he sometimes does, to churches having been recently

⁶⁴ Kingsford, *Two London Chronicles*, pp. 7–8.

⁶⁵ Stow, *A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* (1565), fos. 222v, 224. Stow's version of the spontaneous return of Catholic practice under Mary can be compared with the Yorkshire story told in A. G. Dickens (ed.), 'Robert Parkyn's narrative of the Reformation', *English Historical Review* 62 (1947), 58–83, reprinted in Dickens, *Reformation Studies* (1982), pp. 287–312. It may be no less indicative of where his sympathies lay. Compare later editions of the *Summarie*.

⁶⁶ These omissions were noted by Kingsford: Stow, *Survey*, II:309, 326, 327.

rebuilt or refurbished, one should not be misled. In every case it appears that the improvements to which he refers were not at all recent, and had been carried out before the Reformation, a watershed which he probably never ceased to regret.⁶⁷ Later editions of his *Summarie of Chronicles* included laudatory obits for Archbishop Parker, whom he calls 'my especial benefactor', and for Bishop Jewel, 'a most eloquent and diligent preacher, but a farre more painfull and studious writer, as his workes remaining witness'.⁶⁸ It sounds as if Stow's library had been reconstructed since Bishop Grindal's chaplain visited it in 1569. However, one is bound to conclude from this investigation of religious opinions and attitudes, expressed and suppressed, that John Stow's *Survey of London* was born out of the old religion and its values, roughly adapted to fit the new suit of clothes which we almost have to call, however anachronistically, Anglicanism.

IV

In 1602, one year before Stow's second edition, another survey was published by a fellow member of the Society of Antiquaries, Richard Carew: *His Survey of Cornwall*.⁶⁹ Carew was not unaware that the world is a changeable place. In his Preface he wrote: 'the state of our cuntry hath vndergone so manie alterations, since I first began these scriblings, that in the reviewing, I was driuen either likewise to varie my report, or else to speake against my knowledge'. Given what he called 'the ceaselesse revolution of the Vniverse' it would be marvellous if any part of it 'should retain a stedfast constitution'. But having stated the problem, Carew immediately put it behind him, declaring that what he called, significantly, his '*Eulogies*' would plot Cornwall 'as it now standeth'.⁷⁰

So Carew provided a huge present-tense snapshot of his native

⁶⁷ Examples in *ibid.*, 1.194 (St Peter Cornhill, 'lately repayred, if not all new builded'), 202 (All Hallows Lombard Street, 'lately new builded'), 297 (St Michael Wood Street, 'a proper thing, and lately well repayred'), 314 (St Peter in Cheap, 'a proper Church lately new builded'). I have been helped with this point by Dr Julia Merritt.

⁶⁸ Stow, *Summarie of Chronicles* (1587 edn), pp. 370, 350; John Stow, *The Annales of England* (1592), dedicatory epistle addressed to Archbishop Whitgift. The 1601 edition of the *Annales* included for the first time a generous obit for Archbishop Grindal (pp. 1174–5).

⁶⁹ Richard Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall. Written by R. Carew of Antonie, Esquire* (London, 1602). There is a modern, somewhat abridged, edition by F. E. Halliday (1953, repr. 1969). All references here are to the original edition.

⁷⁰ Carew, *The Survey*, 'To the Reader'.

county. There is a great deal of historical material in his *Survey*, much more than one would suspect if one relied only on F. E. Halliday's modern abridgement. In particular, Carew's pages are stuffed with genealogy. But for anything in the past Carew was reliant on other authorities, many of whom were of the most shaky kind, and his amateurishness as an antiquarian was an embarrassment even to himself. Making what he confessed to be 'a great leap' from King Arthur and his knights to a man who died in 1507, he admitted: 'which conuinceth me an vnworthy associat of the antiquary Colledge'. He tells us about Conan who conquered Brittany and, having settled it, wrote to Dionethus, king and duke of Cornwall, asking him to send over 'some Maidens' to marry with his people. The result was that St Ursula and her 11,000 virgins were shipped over but on the way miscarried, 'as their wel known history reporteth'. Not that Carew was incapable of the sceptical irony with which the Tudor antiquarians often presented historical myths. Another doubtful detail of Cornish history was not to be questioned 'unlesse you will, withall, shake the irrefragable authoritie of the round tables Romants'.⁷¹

So there is a past as well as a present tense in Carew, as misty as the sea-fret around Tintagel, which excited him with as much romantic awe as any traveller might have felt in the age of Wordsworth and Walter Scott. But the difference with Stow is that the past was not brought critically to bear on the present, as a better time. Carew too was a nostalgic writer, but his nostalgia was one of celebration of the present, of which he paints a very rosy picture. Take, as an emblem of this upbeat writer, his description of the view from the coastal path at Fowey, well supplied with seats for tired walkers and summer-houses 'for their more priuate retrait and recreation': 'In passing along, your eyes shall be called away from guiding your feete, to descry by their fardest kenning, the vast Ocean sparkled with ships, that continually this way trade forth and backe to most quarters of the world', nearer to home the fishing boats 'houering on the coast', and closer still 'the faire and commodious hauen'.⁷² Actuarially speaking, there was no better place to live than Carew's Cornwall. 'For health, 80 and 90 yeres age is ordinary in euery place, and in most persons, accompanied with an able vse of the body and his sences.'⁷³ He does tell us that Cornish houses were

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 61v, 77.

⁷² *Ibid.*, fo. 133r.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, fo. 63r.

infested with rats, 'a brood very hurtful for deuouring of meat, clothes and writings', but he romanticizes even this nastiness, describing 'their crying and ratling, while they daunce their gallop gallyards in the rooffe at night' – from which we gather that these were plague-carrying black rats.⁷⁴

One would never suspect that Cornwall, especially in the 1590s, was full of grinding poverty. To be sure there comes the moment when Carew says: 'We must also spare a roome in this Suruey to the poore', but he then tells us that if it were not for the whole shiploads of Irish poor brought over 'yeerley, yea and daly', there would be no problem. Carew, who was a magistrate and had been sheriff, launches into a conventional diatribe against rogues and vagabonds, complaining that what was given to them was 'robberie of the needy impotent', but on the subject of what he calls honest poor parishioners he has nothing else to say, except that no-one in Cornwall needed to starve, since there was always plenty of shellfish available for the gathering.⁷⁵

Rather, 'let me lead you from these impleasing matters, to refresh yourselues with taking view of the *Cornish* mens recreations, which consist principally in feastes and pastimes'. And there follows, after a contrived debate about church ales and feasts, whether allowable or not (and Carew clearly approved of these things), the richest description of the sporting life which we have for any part of early modern England: miracle plays and what are called 'three men's songs', 'cunningly contriued for the ditty and pleasantly for the note', football – or rather hurling and of two different kinds, one peculiar to east Cornwall, the other to the west – and Cornish wrestling, 'more delightful, and less dangerous' than hurling, which, when ended, 'you shall see them retirng home, as from a pitched battaile, with bloody pates, bones broken, and out of ioynt, and such bruises as serue to shorten their daies; yet al is good play, and neuer Attourney nor Crowner troubled for the matter'.⁷⁶

John Stow would have set all this in the past and would have lamented the passing of so much honest manliness. But Carew puts it in the present, which causes problems for the historian of traditional culture. His account of the Cornish miracle play, or 'gwyar', to which 'the Country people flock from all sides, many miles off' is not only the best, it is the only description we have

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 22r.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, fos. 67, 68r, 31r.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fos. 68r–76r.

before more modern times of any play in performance, with the actor followed around the stage by the prompter, or ordinary, who tells him his lines.⁷⁷ But was the old drama still alive and well in Cornwall in 1600, when it had been suppressed almost everywhere else? The leading authority on the Cornish play text known as the *Ordinalia* finds it remarkable that in a county which only forty years earlier had been in active rebellion against the new religion, the high sheriff should record the performance of the old religious plays, with all their 'devils and devices', to be sure without much sympathy, but with perfect equanimity.⁷⁸

The problem of the gwary and its fortunes as the sixteenth century turned into the seventeenth is tied up with the fact that the plays were written and performed in the Cornish language, which was itself in terminal decline. Carew's somewhat distant and condescending attitude towards the common people was accentuated by the fact that he himself seems to have known little Cornish (whereas he wrote an essay for his friend Camden on 'The excellencie of the English tongue'),⁷⁹ and was not sympathetic towards it, alleging that if a stranger who was lost were to ask the way, he would be told, in Cornish, 'I can speak no Saxonage', which was perhaps all the Cornish the man knew. Carew's Cornish phrase book knows nothing about postillions struck by lightning, but does include the Cornish for 'ten thousand mischiefs in thy guts'.⁸⁰

Yet this did not prevent Carew from supplying the most detailed and knowledgeable accounts of how the Cornish people made their living, including 6,000 expert words on the subject of tin-mining. While the men were down the mine, 'the women and children in the West part of *Cornwall*, doe vse to make Mats . . . which for their warmthe and well wearing, are carried by sea to *London* and other parts of the Realme, and serue to couer floores and wals'.⁸¹ And there were no barriers between Carew and his subject, either linguistic or social, when it came to fish and fishing, which he loved.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 71v–2r.

⁷⁸ Jane A. Bakere, *The Cornish Ordinalia: A Critical Study* (Cardiff, 1980), p. 14. Bakere suspects (p. 13) that Carew had not himself witnessed the 'gwary' in performance, and that his story is apocryphal. But she draws on town records for evidence of plays (unidentified) in performance in several places (pp. 15–22), as does A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall, Portrait of a Society* (1941), pp. 435–6. See also Roger Longworth, *The Cornish Ordinalia: Religion and Dramaturgy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), Brian Murdoch, *Cornish Literature* (Cambridge, 1993).

⁷⁹ The best modern edition of William Camden's *Remaines of a Greater Worke, concerning Britaine* (1605) is by R. D. Dunn (Toronto, 1984).

⁸⁰ Carew, *The Survey*, fos. 55r–56v. ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 7v–19r.

His model may have been Pliny, but he also wrote from the richest personal experience, from digging lugworms for bait to the netting of pilchards. The particular taking of divers kinds of fishes (and he lists more than thirty), is almost as divers as themselves. 'I will . . . shew you, what they are, when they come, where they haunt, with what baite they may be trayned, with what engine taken, and with what dressing saued.' Fourteen pages on: 'But you are tired, the day is spent; and it is high time that I draw to harbour.'⁸²

Carew does not tell us, but a report drawn up in the same decade does, that in many places in west Cornwall the clergy, Protestant preaching ministers, were often the victims of physical assault, afraid to poke their noses out of doors.⁸³ On matters of religion, Carew was to the right of Lambarde, but a little to the left of Stow, and perhaps close to where Camden stood. It was not from the pope that Cornwall had received its Christianity. Vicarages had been created by the impropriation of benefices by the religious houses 'in more corrupt ages'. If the English bishops would only keep fast to their first institution, they would easily close the mouths of those 'who would thrust vpon vs their often varying discipline'.⁸⁴ On the whole, Cornwall, church as well as state, worked very well, and there was no better place to live, especially beside Carew's delightful and ingeniously devised fish pond at his ancestral Antony.

Is it possible to be nostalgic about the present, as well as about the past? The proof that it is is in Carew's *Survey of Cornwall*, which covers its subject with a thick, rich gloss which is just as deceptive as the regretful, nostalgic varnish which Stow applied to London. My exploration of these works of late Tudor antiquarianism, Stow, Lambarde, and Carew, suggests that we should not trust any one of them as a simple description of its subject. All three need to be taken with a healthy pinch of postmodernist salt. But that should not in any way diminish our enjoyment of what Hayden White would assure us are three charming fictions. And if that appears too large a concession to make to postmodernism, perhaps we are entitled to say that Kent, Cornwall, and, above all, John Stow's London were, in Benedict Anderson's phrase, so many imagined communities, the product of three very different imaginations.

⁸² *Ibid.*, fos. 28r–35r.

⁸³ 'The lamentable estate of the mynistry in Cornewall', Westminster Abbey Muniments, Monument Book 15, fo. 84.

⁸⁴ Carew, *The Survey*, fos. 81r–82r.