In the winter of 1664, Richard Lewis of Brecknockshire testified about aspects of his recent past to a special commission concerned with accounting for particular public funds collected during the 1640s and 1650s. In his testimony, Lewis admitted that he had taken up residence around a decade earlier in the rectory attached to Llangattock parish, the previous occupant having been sequestered for delinquency. According to Lewis, over the next several years he collected the tithes and revenues connected to the rectory, handing over an agreed portion to the local Committee for the Ejection of Scandalous Ministers and another to the ejected clergyman. In a summary he declared that during his residence at the rectory he had “justly paid all that was due from him without any gayn.” Lewis then quoted several clauses from the Indemnity and Oblivion Act that, he claimed, relieved him from any liability for the tithes he had collected before 1660. The last line of the document in which his testimony appears (probably written in his own hand) suddenly shifts the focus of his account from his past fiscal probity to his long-standing political allegiance. Lewis

declares that “he now is and ever heretofore from the time of his birth and nativitie
hitherunto was a sure and faithfull subject and trewe man of our Soveraigne Lord the
King that now is.” The climax of Lewis’s testimony is thus a vow of lifelong fidelity to
the Stuart monarchy before, during, and after a period sometimes referred to as the
“late troubled times.”

Why Lewis chose to conclude with such an affirmation is uncertain, but clearly
he believed that it would help his case. Lewis evidently wanted the representatives of
the Court of Exchequer to interpret his past actions through the lens of his confessed
resilient royalism. Obviously, the return of the monarchy in 1660 had made it politi-
cally expedient for men such as Lewis to recall their experiences during the Inter-
regnum as if, all along, the return of Charles Stuart had been their heart’s greatest
hope. The Restoration, its settlements, and their political consequences made some
kinds of personal stories about recent events more useful than others.

The events of the immediate past were, however, more than simply a pile of
rough-cut logs that individuals such as Lewis could fashion into useful representations
for political exculpation. The past exerted a force that would shape and orient the
experience of men and women in post–Civil War England for many years afterward.
Working through that past would involve a series of both ongoing and episodic nego-
tiations—within individual minds, among individuals, and within and between
groups and collectives—concerning how best to move forward through the reality
that the past had made of the present.

A key aim of this issue of the Huntington Library Quarterly is to examine cases
of ordinary people in early modern England working through the reality of the past.
The phrase “working through” the past is more commonly used in the field of psycho-
analysis than in historical scholarship. Nonetheless, Dominick LaCapra has sug-
gested that it is appropriate language for any approach to the past that seeks to confront
problems while simultaneously attempting to counteract denial, unthinking repeti-
tion, and damaging repression. At the heart of working through the past is the effort to
achieve a certain perspective on it, one that provides a degree of control over and
responsible action toward the renewal of life in the present. The essays in this special
issue show that comparable efforts were part of everyday life in early modern England,

---

2. TNA, E 113/1 (Brecon), Testimony of Richard Lewis, February 1664.
3. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Matthew Neufeld, The Civil Wars after 1660: Public
   Remembering in Late Stuart England (Woodbridge, U.K., 2013).
4. On the structured nature of temporal experience, see David Carr, Time, Narrative, and History
5. Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommenda-
tions on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II),” in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological
Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911–1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique, and
“Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten (Weitere Ratschläge zur Technik der Psychoanalyse, II),”
even if the actors would not have understood their efforts in the way LaCapra has suggested.

Our understanding of the complex ways in which history was constructed and contested in England between 1500 and 1800 owes a great debt to a convergence of aims and methodology among historians and literary scholars who became influential at the turn of the twenty-first century. To a significant degree, the propensity of scholars of literature to historicize fictional texts, and the greater willingness of some historians to acknowledge the fictive component of historical writing, were consequent on increased attention to the role of narrative in history. A special issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* edited by Paulina Kewes, entitled *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, epitomizes the fruitfulness of this interdisciplinary collaboration. Following in the new directions that studies in historical culture have taken, the present issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* features work on aspects of the uses of the past in early modern England. The essays foreground the growing interest in non-textual and non-elite reconstructions of the past in early modernity. Their focus is less on the problem of determining the truth about the past, whether in historical writing or fictional literature, and more on what the past meant for early modern people, and on the way it impinged on a range of social and cultural practices.

My purpose in this introduction is to make the case for a more capacious approach toward the historical in early modern England. I will argue that broadening the focus of study from histories to the past, as the essays in this special issue do, offers a better opportunity to recapture some of the variety and depth of engagements with times past that were undertaken by Englishwomen and Englishmen across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such an expanded and expanding field of inquiry ought to encompass the literary and the non-textual, elite and popular narrations, along with reconstructions of both the momentous and the quotidian. Additionally, it will be beneficial for students of “the past of the past” to remember that the past was both a malleable resource and an incontrovertible reality for early modern people. As the title of this introduction suggests, the past could be put to work by individuals and communities, but the past also worked itself out in multiple ways within and through them. Before I outline the intellectual pneuma of this issue, it will be useful to distinguish it from the one that animated *The Uses of History* and from the prospectus for further study outlined in Fritz Levy’s afterword to that volume. I will then go on to a brief account of recent developments within the history of the past, especially as these concern early modern England.


The Objectives of The Uses of History in Early Modern England

The general aims of The Uses of History reflect a cautiously positive appropriation of the poststructuralist challenge to established epistemological and disciplinary boundaries separating fictional literature from historical writing. Put simply, Kewes sought to bring together for comparative analysis genres, historical periods, and problems that earlier generations of scholars treated separately. Most obviously, three of the contributions directly concern the historical or political implications of fictional literature, including the eighteenth-century novel. Furthermore, essays in the volume on Foxe's Book of Martyrs, Milton's ideological disputes with the Levellers, and late Stuart secret histories are written by scholars based in literature departments. Similarly, the chronological range of the subject matter extends well beyond the long-standing boundary in literary studies between the Renaissance and Restoration periods, suggesting that "early modernity" did not end in 1700, let alone 1660. Related to this implication of cultural continuity across the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is the volume's incorporation of religious historiography—evidence of a characteristic postrevisionist receptiveness to the polemical power of religious languages and reasoning from the Renaissance to the early Enlightenment era.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, along with the essays on Foxe's Book of Martyrs, The Uses of History features four essays on confessional historiography from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

While shedding a great deal of light on the wide variety of literary genres through which history was reconstructed and represented in early modern England, the volume is overwhelmingly centered on the cultural products of either educated or affluent writers—that is, England's social and cultural elites. Moreover, the agenda for future research outlined by Fritz Levy's thoughtful afterword suggests that the works of such individuals will remain the primary focus of scholarship on perceptions of the past in early modernity. For example, Levy notes that to achieve a better grasp of the entire scope of writing about the past, much research remains to be done on the admittedly vast corpus of published "histories." Furthermore, when discussing the "utility of history," Levy refers exclusively to written works. Given that many of the essays in the

volume cross lines of genre, period, and discipline, it is not surprising that he would restate the question of boundaries, particularly those between history and other kinds of writing. Interestingly, Levy also suggests that the long-standing problem of historical evidence and "truth-in-history"—a problem that has vexed early moderns and scholars coming to terms with post-modernity—will continue to be a key concern of researchers. In other words, studies of the uses of history will remain largely within the Renaissance problematic of accounting for the emergence of new ways of accumulating knowledge about the past. Henceforth, Levy argues, they will have to broaden their focus from the secular and factual to include the sacred and poetic.

For Levy, the convergence of literary and cultural historians working on the uses of history in early modern England appears ultimately to have increased the volume of material they need to analyze in order to understand changes in historical thought. More kinds of literature will need to be considered, but for the most part in the same way as before. I would like to suggest, by contrast, that there has recently been a remarkable shift in the way many scholars approach early modern encounters with the historical, and that this has dramatically transformed the understanding of the uses of history in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

**The Presence of the Past and Early Modern England**
Since the mid-1990s, it has become increasingly common within the humanities and social sciences to encounter discussions about the presence and power of the past. Very often the key word in such discussions is "memory," usually accompanied by the descriptors "collective," "social," and "cultural." Why have such kinds of memory, and remembering, generated such a flurry of interest? One reason is suggested by the efforts of modern nation-states, and groups within them, that have grappled with what are deemed regrettable and tragic parts of their past: the republics of Germany and South Africa are probably the two most familiar examples. But the women and men who witnessed the twentieth century’s epic conflicts are gradually passing away, provoking a concern over a rapidly receding past, heightened by the pace of social and technological change. The commitments of identity politics, furthermore, have inspired increasing investigations of past injustice. Until recently, however, there have

16. On this development, see Alon Confino, "History and Memory," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 536–541.
been few studies of the ways in which early modern communities addressed the problem of a difficult past.19

The growing interest in social and cultural ways of remembering is something early modernists can and should welcome, although not uncritically.20 Some scholars, for example, accept the utility of thinking about non-individual ways of remembering for understanding a historical period or process, while distinguishing such collective encounters or engagements with the past from the goals and outcomes of professional historical writing. It is argued that the former is primarily concerned with finding a present-centered role for an aspect of or from the past, while the latter seeks to uncover the truth about the past. History must not, therefore, be confused with memory.21

Yet it has long been argued that memory mattered for history in early modern England. Both elite and popular perceptions of the past greatly influenced how the English conducted public affairs. These perceptions can even explain why and how some individuals chose to intervene politically at certain times or in relation to particular issues.22 This argument has recently been provocatively recapitulated by Jonathan Scott.23 According to Scott, both personal and public memories of the violence and upheavals of the recent past explain (indeed, almost overdetermine) the responses of the political nation to events after 1660. Restoration England was, in Scott’s estimation, a “prisoner” of its public memory of the late civil discords.24 Moreover, Scott’s emphasis on the importance of public memory underlines his conviction that concerns over dangers of popery and arbitrary government had a unifying power in Eng-


lish political culture across what might be called the “short seventeenth century” (1618–89). By contrast, Grant Tapsell and George Southcombe have recently argued that while Restoration England was understandably obsessed with defining the authority of the monarchy in terms of the past, particularly the civil wars, the impact of “England’s troubles” qualitatively transformed the political and religious context after 1660.

Tapsell and Southcombe are not unique in putting remembering and memory at the center of their analysis of early modern England. As I will show, since the publication of *The Uses of History*, memory appears to have overtaken history in studies focused on early modern English perceptions and applications of the past. While it might be tempting to suggest that this shift represents the belated acceptance of an academic fad among early modernists, the main trends of this work indicate that historians are using memory to rethink enduring historical problems in innovative ways. In particular, attending to perceptions and uses of the past can help explain significant cultural change and violent conflict. It just so happens that similar problems have been, to this point at least, the main concern of many working within cultural and social memory studies.

Early modernists who have recently applied the frameworks of social or cultural memory have for the most part focused on the experience and representation of two significant moments of change and conflict—the British Reformation and its putative seventeenth-century descendant, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. On the other hand, much recent work examines how and why the memory of these events was employed in the construction of identity or as a resource for ideological debate. For example, a number of works published after *The Uses of History* examine how the Reformation and those invested in its success reconstructed England’s past along either proto-Protestant or anti-Catholic lines. Jennifer Summit’s award-winning monograph shows how the archives and libraries assembled by scholars seeking to vindicate the new political and religious order essentially invented much of what would become England’s “Middle Ages.” The textual tools ostensibly devised to help the future to know the past, and to foster continuity between “now” and “then,” in fact erased much of what had been and foregrounded the discontinuity wrought by religious change.

Diarmaid MacCulloch’s recent article, though not invoking social or cultural memory,

25. This is a concern shared by the contributors to *The Uses of History*; see above, p. 486.
demonstrates how one seventeenth-century scholar, Robert Ware, literally invented a famous anecdote about Elizabeth I to bolster the standing of bishops in the post-Restoration Protestant Church of Ireland.29

Other work has foregrounded those social groups that either re-invented their past in response to the Reformation or appropriated aspects of their past to contest its outcome. For example, Andy Wood’s analysis of the 1549 rebellions contains an illuminating discussion of the way in which popular recollections of the uprisings in Norfolk were weapons of plebeian resistance to the increasingly heavy hand of agrarian capitalism and the Tudor state.30 Focusing attention further up the social scale, Peter Sherlock examines funerary monuments built by the gentry after the Reformation, tracing their re-invention of familial and status privileges over time. These lapidary testimonies were designed to convey novel understandings of a family’s place within their locality, while also taking into account the new meaning of death and the body after the proscription of purgatory from the reformed English Church.31 Similarly, Jan Broadway’s account of the rise of local history writing among the gentry underlines the usefulness of erudition about the genealogical and regional past for both new and established aristocratic households. The gentry could be especially keen to assert their connection to their locality and its people during a period of social and religious change.32 Philip Schwyzer, to consider a last example, makes a convincing case that much of the power of Shakespeare’s Richard III derives from a particular moment in the cycles of the cultural memory of the Wars of the Roses and the Henrician Reformation. The play appeared at precisely the period when active memories—recollections of firsthand witnesses—of the last Plantagenet were lost forever, while at the same time the generation able to recall England before Henry’s break with Rome was passing away.33

Unlike the religious and political reformations, the English civil wars did not produce widespread rewritings of national, local, and family histories. However, the period witnessed the advent of new political and religious groups that turned to the past as part of their quest for legitimacy or toleration. The events of the 1640s and 1650s also prompted many people to reassess or rewrite their past in order to make sense of the present. For example, Tim Cooper argues that Richard Baxter and John Owen, two notable Puritan clergymen, parted fellowship because their experiences—and by extension, their personal memories—of the civil wars differed.34 Similarly, Andrew

Hooper’s evaluation of Sir Thomas Fairfax’s memoirs demonstrates how the former New Model Army leader refashioned aspects of his military and political career, largely seeking exculpation for the regicide. By contrast, according to R. C. Richardson, while Reverend John Nalson was not himself a veteran of the conflict, he willfully refashioned the 1640s into an image of the 1680s in his monumental *Impartial Collection*, as well as his pamphlets, in order to “re-fight the civil wars.” In practice, this meant reprinting documents to prove the inherently seditious intentions of Dissenters and Whigs. Only slightly less vituperative was Nalson’s contemporary Sir William Dugdale. As Stephen K. Roberts shows in an essay focused on the antiquary’s post-Restoration career, Dugdale employed his erudition in a historical attack on Exclusionists in the 1680s, the so-called *Short View of the Late Troubles in England*, although his desire to maintain cordial connections with such Presbyterians as Edward Harley and John Rushworth kept the work from descending to the level of a diatribe. Both Richardson and Roberts recapitulate Scott’s point that for many people in late Stuart England, the civil wars were far from over.

For some people, however, it was not the civil wars but the consequences of the Restoration settlements that were most important for shaping and sustaining the life and continuity of their communities. This was particularly true for minority Protestant groups in late Stuart England. Historical writing became a crucial genre in the formation of Dissenting identity, as John Seed has argued. Most famously, Reverend Edmund Calamy’s account of the clergymen ejected on “Black Bartholomew Day” became very important for fostering among eighteenth-century Presbyterians and Congregationalists a separate and enduring religious identity, one that was grounded in a powerful narrative of victimization at the hands of the established Church.

That this posture of righteous suffering in the face of an oppressive polity was to a great extent the result of post–Civil War politics is evident from an example of pre–Civil War historical writing examined by Peter Lake. Thomas Ball’s *Life of John Preston* was intended, Lake argues, to guide *politique* godly men to act in ways that would contest both thorough monarchy and Laudian churchmanship, while eschewing the quasi-republican model offered by the Puritan commonwealths of New England. Additionally, Lake demonstrates that the memory of the 1620s presented in Ball’s history of


Preston’s career was meant to show politically engaged Puritans how best to contest Charles I’s Personal Rule. Thus, Ball marshaled memory to change the course of English history.

The scholarship briefly reviewed above, like the contributions to *The Uses of History*, draws mostly on written or printed texts for arguments about the legacies of the Reformation and violent conflict in Stuart Britain. Recently, these complex problems have been tackled from the standpoint of the natural environment. Articulations about the past and its meaning appeared not only in the space of the printed page but also in fields and along roads. For example, Nicola Whyte’s study of Exchequer records reveals that features of the landscape provided a crucial resource for resolving disputes over land use in early modern England. Thus, while the Reformation removed one or more layers of meaning from particular markers, such as roadside crosses, the evidence of disputes over access rights suggests that local people were quite capable of refiguring what were once pointers to the sacred for their own more mundane purposes. It was not, Whyte argues, so much that these religious symbols were crosses as that they were old, making them useful markers in the struggle over the extent of land and rights of entrance to it. The Reformation thus gave material traces of the natural and human past new uses and meanings.

The argument that the Reformation fostered a straightforward diminution of the sacred in early modern conceptions of time and space is now made with much less confidence, thanks in large measure to the work of Alexandra Walsham. Two of her books, one on providence in Elizabethan and early Stuart England, and a more recent one concerned with the impact of religious change on the experience of the natural world from 1500 to 1800, present a distinctly anti-Weberian interpretation of Protestantism’s cultural legacy. The religious Reformation did not lead to the contraction or weakening of the numinous sphere but rather the translation (in the sense of being carried over) and transmutation of the images, metaphors, and stories by which Irish and British people understood Creation and their place within it. The natural world may have been re-envisioned as Britain became a country of Protestants (while Ireland was officially Protestant but practically Catholic, especially outside Ulster), but it also strongly shaped the contours and character of belief, practice, and the senses of the past.

---


While the questions Levy poses in his afterword to *The Uses of History* will undoubtedly engage researchers for a long time to come, the foregoing review of a portion of the literature concerning history and remembering in early modern England suggests a move beyond the Renaissance problematic of true-versus-false knowledge about the past. On the one hand, the essays in this issue broaden the scope of study by looking at practices as well as texts, and at popular as well as elite forms of representation. On the other, they are concerned with the past and its uses. While the first ambition could be seen as yet another incremental change to the field of historical thought, the latter should be regarded as a qualitative shift in the approach to and understanding of the power and place of the past for early modern people.

In a sense, the shift of subject and approach advocated by this issue echoes the intellectual trajectory of one of the leading scholars of “the historical” in the early modern period, Daniel Woolf. This can be quickly charted by comparing the title of Woolf’s first monograph, published in 1990, with that of his third, which appeared more than a dozen years later. In the former, which centered on historical writing before the civil wars, the key word was “history,” while thirteen years later it was “the past.” The change in emphasis to “the past” in Woolf’s later book was both necessary and significant—first, because it testified to both the wider range of sources under consideration and to the non-elite social origins of some of their producers, and second, because it foregrounded his engagement with the questions and concerns posed by students of historical culture. Historical writing and indeed writing in general made up only one, albeit an increasingly significant, component of the “modes of discourse within which the past is recovered, represented and transmitted” in the twelve generations after the Battle of Bosworth Field.44

The contributors to this special issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* aspire to foreground the gains that a more capacious approach to the presence of the past in early modern England makes possible. However, they recognize (as Woolf has done previously) that they are not innovators. After all, it has been over four decades since Sir Keith Thomas discussed “The Appeal to the Past” in his monumental *Religion and the Decline of Magic*;45 and it is almost exactly thirty years since he delivered a lecture titled “The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England.” In this lecture, Thomas noted that “the past was... ever present in the minds of the common people.” Thus, an appreciation of popular memory in post-Reformation England is nothing new. Nor is the awareness that the past could be put to use for a variety of reasons. For example, according to Thomas, early modern England had two myths concerning its pre-Reformation past, one that supported the social order and one that subverted it. These conflicting visions, he argued, represented two contending value systems, each with its own ideal of where the nation ought to be headed politically and religiously.

Puritans and Laudians each constructed a myth about the medieval past that could be dislodged neither by “historical research,” nor, as Thomas implies, by the violent upheavals of civil war.46

Thomas's lecture opened up new vistas on the past and its uses, yet concluded with a recapitulation of the Renaissance problematic of true-or-false knowledge. In particular, Thomas reminded his audience of the relative powerlessness of academics to alter the “historical perceptions of ordinary people.” While I certainly agree that historians (and researchers in cognate disciplines) have a responsibility to tell the truth about history that is not incumbent to the same extent on laypeople, I would argue that there are gains to be made by shifting the focus from historical epistemology to historical ontology.47 By that I mean simply that there is much we can learn about the power of the past in early modern England by attending to its reality for ordinary people. There is still much we do not understand and cannot explain about why some elements of the past were at times more vivid to some people than to others. As the essays in this volume show, the past formed and re-formed the outlooks and actions of large and small communities—from social movements to parish republics to clergy families. Furthermore, the past had political uses beyond the more familiar exemplary narratives conveyed in historical writing, including arranging the local landscape, asserting the pre-eminence of a particular county dynasty, and mobilizing citizens to demand their ancient rights. Often it was through the process of discovering or constructing a usable past that ordinary women and men were spurred to contest the unequal distribution of power in the local or national community.

The essays in this special issue present important case studies of elite and non-elite women and men who used objects, texts, and images from or about the past to alter perceptions, justify their sense of identity, or vindicate a particular course of action in the present. It is clear from these contributions that interpretations and representations of the past could be and were contested at moments of significant religious or political upheaval. The articles by Gary Rivett and Philip Baker foreground instances from the Civil War era in which individuals with different amounts of cultural capital and social power struggled to bring the past to bear on contemporary negotiations for a new political and religious settlement. Baker's essay, “Londons Liberteries in Chains Discovered: The Levellers, the Civic Past, and Popular Protest in Civil War London,” sheds light on the power and use of the nation’s medieval past during the 1640s. While not denying that a variety of factors influenced the campaign, Baker points out that the failure among researchers fully to locate the Levellers and their ideas in a civic context is a major oversight. Indeed, he contends that the Levellers’ physical inhabitancy, and their identification with the city’s medieval rights and freedoms,

47. This formulation was first suggested to me by Michael Bentley, “Are Historical Periods Real?” (unpublished paper, American Historical Association conference, New York, 2008); admittedly, my emphasis on the reality of the past is somewhat different from his. See Michael Bentley, “Past and ‘Presence’: Revisiting Historical Ontology,” History and Theory 45 (2006): 349–61. Again, I thank Gary Rivett for this reference.
undoubtedly fashioned (if not determined) central elements of a program that should be located within a pre-existing tradition of popular protest surrounding the historical rights of London's citizenry.

In “Peacemaking, Parliament, and the Politics of the Recent Past in the English Civil Wars,” Rivett explores an overlooked aspect of Civil War era historical writing: the construction and publication of a historical work conducive to a secure peace. Parliament commissioned two separate histories in early 1647: a translated version of Arrigo Davila’s *Historie of the Civill Warres of France* and Thomas May's *History of the Parliament of England*. These historical writings faced strong competition from a variety of publications that were intended to hold parliamentary authority to account for its promises, obligations, and responsibilities while attempting to legitimize their own peacemaking agendas. Such publications, Rivett argues, indicate that historical writing was a component of metropolitan public discourse and a major factor mobilizing individuals and institutions to become politically active.

The past was, of course, put to use in a wide variety of less violent and less overtly political circumstances. Lucy Munro's essay, “Speaking History: Linguistic Memory and the Usable Past in the Early Modern History Play,” opens a window onto the uncanny temporality of late Elizabethan history plays, including Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, and Anthony Munday's *Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*. While twenty-first-century writers often use old-fashioned vocabulary and syntax to lend verisimilitude to a historical narrative, their sixteenth-century counterparts instead drew on contemporary debates about the nature and status of the English language, using archaic style as part of a complex meditation on the relationship between past and present, and between recollection and representation. For example, in the faux-chivalric diction of Shakespeare's Pistol, the dramatic language is temporally unstable, at once recalling the past but also actively re-creating and re-embodying it. That is, the language looked forward to the present of the 1590s just as much as the character's speech adhered to the historical period that was being re-created.

Re-creating the past was also a concern for newly ascendant families among the gentry, as Jan Broadway points out. Her essay, “Symbolic and Self-Consciously Antiquarian: The Elizabethan and Early Stuart Gentry’s Use of the Past,” centers around two material modes through which the past circulated socially among the gentry and their localities: a particular style of funeral monument and the genre of narrative painting. Her study adds to our understanding of county communities in seventeenth-century England, since a connection to the medieval past was fundamental to gentle families seeking to assert their status and power within a locality, even as they were forced to come to terms with social and economic change.

Enclosing common or waste lands transformed the physical as well as the mnemonic landscapes of early modern England. Nicola Whyte's essay, “An Archaeology of Natural Places: Trees in the Early Modern Landscape,” examines the material dimensions of oral recollections in early modern England. Her analysis explores the way in which old trees were multivalent markers within local customary topographies.
For example, since old trees were both signs of times past and identifiable places, they manifested the temporal and spatial contexts of oral remembering. Similarly, ancient trees could divide communities from one another while simultaneously serving as places of gathering. Trees were non-human features through which and at which ordinary people remembered who they were in relation to Creation, and where new understandings of humanity’s place in the natural environment were tested and worked through, sometimes with great difficulty.

Fiona McCall’s essay, “Children of Baal: Clergy Families and Their Memories of Sequestration during the English Civil War,” examines an overlooked legacy of the English civil wars. She explores the ways in which the children of Anglican clergymen sequestered for delinquency during the 1640s and 1650s interpreted and structured their sometimes-traumatic experiences, or firsthand accounts of these experiences, for posterity. McCall seeks to uncover why Anglican families remembered what they did about humiliating aspects of their family history, and why they did not seek to reveal their recollections until the early eighteenth century. She makes a strong case for both the accuracy and the utility of family memories of Puritan persecutions, which dozens of Anglican survivors worked through in writing at the dawn of Augustan England.

While none of the contributors to this volume would argue that the individuals they have studied straightforwardly intended to work through the past, their respective analyses deepen our understanding of the ways in which the past was put to work in early modern England. Paradoxically, new perspectives on and fresh uses for the past had to be discovered precisely because the past worked itself through the experience of individuals. For example, in the very recent past, the killing of fellow Englishmen mobilized Parliamentary politicians to seek historical validation for what they believed was the best chance for peace. The powers that London citizens attempted to claim for themselves derived from decisions and actions taken in the very distant past—a past whose traces admittedly were open to a wide variety of present meanings. The sometimes-violent sequestrations of clergy families during the civil wars and Interregnum continued to poison Anglican relations with Dissenters decades after the return of the monarchy. Many more examples could be added.

The essays in this special issue provide ample evidence that early modern English people could put the past to work for them consciously, even as the events of the past worked themselves into their responses and reactions to the present, and their fears for the future. Even if they did not conceive of the present as the product of an actual past, they were aware that the present could be shaped by its force—which might be a weight or a lever, a stumbling block or a tool. But for the fact of the Restoration, we would never have known how important it was for Richard Lewis to be remembered as a constantly faithful subject of the Stuart monarchy—even, as he wanted posterity to think, while he was collecting the revenues from a sequestered clergyman’s rectory.
I would like to thank Gary Rivett, Phil Baker, and Daniel Woolf for their encouragement and helpful criticism. Elements of the research undertaken for this introduction were funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For assistance at various stages of preparing this special issue, I would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Warwick’s Humanities Research Centre, the University of Warwick’s Department of History, Roberts Funding, Ronald Hutton, Mark Knights, and Nadine Lewycky.

MATTHEW NEUFELD, an assistant professor of early modern British history at the University of Saskatchewan, is the author of The Civil Wars after 1660: Public Remembering in Late Stuart England (2013).