

## Editor's Introduction

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**T**his issue features beautifully written articles, many of which tell the stories of individuals grappling with changing social circumstances and puzzling out their lives.

This issue begins with a wonderful story evocative of the Cadfael murder mysteries. Laura Wertheimer discovers why the grave of an executed felon, Laurence of Oxford, became the site of a popular religious cult. Godfrey, the abbot of Peterborough had tried Laurence, his own servant, for robbery. But rumor had it that the abbot had fornicated with Laurence's wife—among other women—and even committed sodomy with Laurence himself. Wertheimer artfully links local and personal politics with the wider questions of popular religious sanctity in the Middle Ages in her article, “Clerical Dissent, Popular Piety, and Sanctity in Fourteenth-Century Peterborough: The Case of Laurence of Oxford.”

Derek Hirst's elegantly written article, “Making Contact: Petitions and the English Republic” contributes to the welcome new focus of seventeenth-century studies on the public sphere instead of on narrow revisionism. In this article on the interactions of petitioners with Cromwell's government, Hirst demonstrates that the republic's officials tried to respond to petitions, enabling them to form alliances with urban governments. To be sure, Hirst cautions that in some ways this represented a continuity of the tradition of reciprocity, in which governments acknowledged the needs of supplicants in return for loyalty. By concentrating on pragmatic petitions rather than the more spectacular Leveller demands, Hirst gives a complex view of the republic and Cromwell's rule.

Moving to the nineteenth century, Peter Gurney presents a beautifully nuanced story of Thomas Frost, a working-class journalist and novelist. The article is entitled “Working-Class Writers and the Art of Escapology in Victorian England: The Case of Thomas Frost.” “Escapology” alludes to a rope trick that Frost found particularly fascinating, in which an “escapologist” was bound with rope and locked in a cabinet but managed to escape. As Gurney delineates, Frost felt himself to be trapped by the difficulties of making his way from a dead-end job as a printer's assistant to becoming a novelist and editorialist—trapped by the political biases of his employers, the demands of readers, the necessity of making a living. He was fascinated by marginal people, such as circus performers, smugglers, and cross-dressers, who somehow managed to escape these constraints.

Marjorie Levine-Clark turns to the Black Country, where blast furnaces darkened the sky and ash heaps smeared the land, and where women struggled to make a

living in the nail- and chain-making industries as the opportunities for their men in the mining industries diminished. When their families failed to make a living, they had to turn to the poor law system. Drawing upon scrupulous research into local poor law records, Levine-Clark examines how poor law officials conceived of dependency. They held up the breadwinner wage ideal to demand that men be accountable to support, not only their wives and children, but often elderly parents as well. Although married women and wage-earning daughters also helped support their parents, poor law officials often covered over their contributions under the rubric of dependency. This careful local study illuminates larger issues of the breadwinner wage, women's work, and welfare.

The last two articles form a fascinating pair, both examining how photographers changed their art in response to World War II. Both Cecil Beaton and Bill Brandt contributed to the propaganda effort of the "People's War," but both these articles complicate the simple vision of stoic, heroic Britain. Cecil Beaton has been seen as abandoning his prewar, high-fashion frivolity to portray London under the Blitz and the heroism of the Royal Air Force. In "Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain," Martin Francis reveals that Beaton continued to hold a "flamboyantly elitist sensibility that sat uneasily with the democratic discourses of wartime populism" (92); Francis also discovers a "queer gaze" in Beaton's heroic photographs of soldiers and sailors. Stephen Brooke examines how Bill Brandt retreated from his wartime photographs of the solidarity of Londoners sheltered from the Blitz in the underground to the very individualist nudes, their abstract and enigmatic shapes set in hauntingly familiar domestic interiors. However, both types of representations shared a shadowy obsession with darkness and death. Comparing Brandt to Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Green, Brooke shows how they "evoke a world of private meaning and desire" quite different from public propaganda (138).