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Genre into Artifact: the Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century

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Explanations of the changes in historical writing in sixteenth-century England generally focus on the rise of humanist-inspired genres such as the "politic" history and the antiquarian treatise without actually explaining the decline and virtual disappearance of the chronicle, until the late sixteenth century the standard form of historical writing. This decline was occasioned not primarily by humanism but by social and technological change, in particular by the impact of print, by a growing cultural stratification among the readers of history, and by inflation. Quantitative evidence derived from book prices and publication trends further illustrates the course of the chronicle's decline from a living genre of historical writing into a historical artifact.

I ha' benee here ever since seven a clock i' the morning to get matter for one page, and I thinke I have it compleate; for I have both noted the number and the capacity of the degrees here; and told twice over how many candles there are i' th' roome lighted, which I will set you downe to a snuffe precisely, because I love to give light to posteritie in the truth of things.¹

WHILE JONSON MAY HAVE AMUSED THE AUDIENCE at his new year's masque, *News from the New World* (1620) with this picture of a chronicler desperate to find news with which to stuff his tome, having promised his stationer to use at least three reams of paper, such a caricature would scarcely have surprised them. The chronicler had provided easy prey for wits for several decades by the time Jonson wrote. A tongue perhaps sharper, even, than his own, that of Thomas Nashe, had lashed out against the hapless recorder of events as early as 1592. Characteristically, Nashe managed to present his victim in the worst possible light, warning his gentle readers against "lay chronigraphers, that write of nothing but of mayors and sheriefs, and the dere yere, and the great frost".²

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¹Ben Jonson, *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon*, in *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols., ed. C.H. Herford, P. Simpson, and E. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925-52), vii:514. Herford (x: 596) redates this from 6 January 1621 to the same date in 1620. Place of publication of all works printed before 1700 is London except where otherwise indicated.

²*Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. 1, ed. R.B. McKerrow (London: Bullen, 1904), 194.

Most modern scholars would agree with the thrust of these contemporary statements even while making the more subtle distinctions among different chroniclers that the perspective of four centuries provides. Few would now wish to argue that the chronicle, once *the* form of historical writing, had fallen into anything but a state of decay. As a genre, it was all but dead by the early seventeenth century, though a few examples continued to be produced until early in the eighteenth, and though the possibility always remained that someone might correct, expand, or continue an existing chronicle by bringing it up to date.

Yet while there is considerable agreement on the fact of the chronicle's decline, there is little in the way of an explanation. The standard works on Renaissance historiography identify a number of factors, of which that ubiquitous but vague reagent, "humanism," is by far the most popular.³ The chronicle declined in the sixteenth century, we are told, because historians were no longer satisfied with its rigid, annalistic structure, or because they found its style barbaric, or because its providential mode of explanation had ceased to provide a satisfactory interpretation of the unfolding of events now perceived as having immediate, contingent causes, human or natural. Historians evolved other forms such as the "politic" history (itself a return to a Latin, particularly Tacitean style of historiography) which transcended the confines of the annal and which sought the causes of the events it depicted in human nature rather than providence, fate, or fortune; or the antiquarian treatise in which remnants of the past were organized topographically rather than chronologically.⁴

Such generalizations contain an element of truth, but they leave much unnoticed. A number of other factors must be taken into any account of the decay of the chronicle from its former stature as a living, growing genre into a remnant of the past useful mainly as evidence for the modern historian. I suggest that technological and social change lie behind this transforma-

³F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580–1640* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962); E.J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1967), chs. 1, 5; Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1979), 18–27. For continental developments, see Donald R. Kelley, *The Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1970); George Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), ch. 1; Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁴On antiquities and history in ancient and Renaissance times, see Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 1–39. For a more recent attempt to sort out the relationship between a number of different historical genres in early modern England, see D.R. Woolf, "Erudition and the Idea of History in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1987): 11–48.

tion, and that the advent of humanist historical writing in the sixteenth century was not so much a cause of the chronicle's demise as another consequence of the factors which occasioned this.

"Chronicle" is itself an amorphous term and it is as well to define it early on. Here it will be taken as an account of events of the past or present organized according to year and written to preserve those events for the benefit of future readers. As a rule, the chronicler wrote his account year by year, without recourse to a classical *model* even when he was well aware of and deliberately referred to classical *sources*. A chronicler could write with several purposes in mind: for the moral edification of the reader or for his entertainment; to preserve information or documents which might otherwise be lost; to demonstrate the hand of the divine in past times; or to communicate the news of recent great deeds to a select group of readers and commemorate them for posterity. The twelfth-century monk, Orderic Vitalis, illustrates some of the medieval chronicler's goals in the prologue to his *Ecclesiastical History*:

Our predecessors in their wisdom have studied all the ages of the erring world from the earliest times, have recorded the good and evil fortunes of mortal men as a warning to others, and, in their constant eagerness to profit future generations, have added their own writings to those of the past.

Orderic himself, though aware of his own deficiencies, has now "set about composing an account of the events which we witness and endure." He does so out of a sense of responsibility to past and future, for "just as past deeds have been handed down by our forebears present happenings should be recorded now and passed on by the men of today to future generations."⁵

The boundaries between these categories are not clear-cut, and most chroniclers could write with several of these aims in mind at the same time, but taken together they were fundamental to the activity of chronicle writing. I shall suggest below that the chronicle ceased to matter as a genre not because the types of function it fulfilled no longer had social value but because these functions had come to be usurped by other literary forms in an age of broader literacy, increasing social stratification, awareness of the rapid passage of time, and, above all, rapid reproduction. In short, the chronicle did not so much decay as *dissolve* into a variety of genres, such as almanacs (information); newsbooks, diurnals, and finally newspapers (communication); antiquarian treatises and classically modelled histories (historical); diaries, biographies and autobiographies (commemorative); and historical drama, verse, and prose fiction (entertainment).

⁵The *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols., ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969-80), 1:131.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the limitations on reproduction imposed by a chirographic technology had restricted the medieval chronicle, monastic, secular or lay, chivalric or urban, to a comparatively small audience of readers (or hearers) in the present and future. Though the developing appetite for history among an increasingly literate lay audience slowly drew the records of the past out of *scriptoria* and abbey libraries and into scribes' shops and noble collections—a process which the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s completed rather than began—such growth cannot but have been severely limited by the cost and slowness of reproducing and distributing manuscripts.

The advent of moveable type in the mid-fifteenth century did not initiate the dissemination of historical material, but it clearly amplified it enormously. Printers found a market for the mass reproduction of historical texts, some, like Bede (trans. 1565), written centuries earlier, others, like Fabian's chronicle (1516), written very recently. One must be careful not to overstate the immediate impact of print. For the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, historical works constituted only a fraction of the output of printers, even of those specifically interested in history, like William Caxton; and among the many different types of work claiming to be "historical," allegorical, didactic works like the *Gesta Romanorum* or *The seven wise masters of Rome*, and chivalric romances about legendary heroes like Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Southampton clearly surpassed the chronicles in popularity. Nevertheless, under the stimulus of a revival of chivalric values under Edward IV and Henry VIII, there appeared a steady trickle of editions of medieval chronicles hitherto available only in manuscript, accompanied by translations such as Lord Berners' of Froissart (1523–25) and an English life of Henry V by an anonymous author claiming to "translate" Titus Livius's *Vita Henrici Quinti* (1513).⁶ The *Brut* was published in 1480 and again in 1482, with four more editions before 1500 and seven others over ensuing decades.⁷ Caxton himself commented on the increasing availability of chronicles as early as 1480, noting that "in many and diverse places the comyn cronicles of englond ben had and also now

⁶A second edition of Berners's translation appeared in 1545, and an epitome of it in 1608: *The First English Life of King Henry the Fifth*, ed. C.L. Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911). A new Latin life was written in the 1570s by Robert Redmayne: *Memorials of Henry the Fifth*, ed. C.A. Cole (Rolls Series, 1858) 3–59; R.R. Reid, "The Date and Authorship of Redmayne's Life of Henry V," *English Historical Review* 30 (1915): 691–98. The chivalric motif in early sixteenth-century culture is well handled by Arthur B. Ferguson in his *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960), *passim* and, more recently, his *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (Washington: Folger Books, 1986), 45–65.

⁷Caxton, *The chronicles of England* (1480 *et seq.*). E. Gordon Duff, *Fifteenth-Century English Books* (Oxford: Bibliographical Society, 1917), nos. 97–102. Other editions were published by Caxton's apprentice, Wynkyn de Worde, and by alien rivals in London and St. Albans, such as the Frenchman Julian Notary and the Fleming William de Machinlia.

late enprinted at Westmynstre".⁸ This trickle would grow into a much larger stream by the end of the sixteenth century.

The next step was the production of chronicles specifically for the press. Caxton in fact contributed little of his own to the *Brut*, but it soon became known as "Caxton's Chronicle."⁹ He added an eighth book to the *Polychronicon* in 1482 "to thentente that such thynges as have ben don syth the deth or ende of the sayd boke of polycronicon shold be had in remembraunce and not putte in oblyvyon ne forgetyng." Successive printers of Fabyan's chronicle brought that work forward in time at every edition until early in Elizabeth's reign.¹⁰ About 1530 the lawyer and printer, John Rastell, compiled and printed a completely new chronicle, *The pastyme of people*.¹¹ Robert Wyer probably compiled the short chronicle, distilled from *Brut* and Lydgate, which he printed some time before 1535.¹² Short chronicles such as these enjoyed some popularity until the mid-sixteenth century;¹³ the production of larger works for the press would peak under Elizabeth in the activities of the prodigious printer and chronicler Richard Grafton and in the even better-known works of John Stow. The consequence of all these developments was to make the chronicle more widely accessible than it had ever been or would be again. Paradoxically, this accessibility may also have contributed to its demise.

The ragged shape of the English chronicle, which by 1500 had virtually become a kind of civic commonplace book, was well established before the

⁸Caxton, prologue to Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Descripcion of Britayne* (1480), in *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. W.J.B. Crotch, Early English Text Society, original series 176 (1928), 40. On the transition from manuscript to print culture in Europe the most recent work is Elizabeth Eisenstein's magisterial *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁹Stow pointed out in the 1590s that "Caxton's Chronicle" had in fact acquired that name only because Caxton had printed it: Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 137.

¹⁰Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. Caxton (1482), 449r. The several continuations of Fabyan in 1516, 1533, 1542, and 1559 are reprinted in Henry Ellis's edition, *New Chronicles of England and France* (London, 1811).

¹¹John Rastell, *The pastyme of people. The cronycles of dyvers realmes and most specyally of Englonde compyled & emprinted* (c. 1530).

¹²[Robert Wyer], *The Cronycle begynnynge at the vii ages of the worlde with the comynge of Brute & the reygne of all the kyniges* (n.d., but pre-1535): see *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640*, ed. A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave (London: the Bibliographical Society, 1926), no. 9984. All further references to this work will be given as STC followed by an item number, except where reference has been made to volume II of the revised edition, 2 vols., ed. W.A. Jackson, Katharine Pantzer et al (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press for the Bibliographical Society, 1976-86), which is referred to as revised STC. On Wyer's chronicle, see Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, 25.

¹³See, for example: J. Byddell (printer), *A short cronycle, wherein is mencioned all names of all the kings* (1539); J. Judson (printer), *A cronicle of years, wherein ye shall find the names of all the kings* (c. 1552), a work which ends with a list of the principal roads of England; and an anonymous broadsheet, *The cronycle of all the kyniges, syth Wyllyam Conqueroure* (c. 1590).

advent of print.¹⁴ It might well have continued unchanged but for the influence, later in the century, of Polydore Vergil's *Anglica historia*. Vergil, who came to England in 1502 and stayed through most of the following half-century, altered the style and structure of the chronicle by using the reign rather than the year as the fundamental unit of organization, thereby allowing him to interpret the period of each English king's rule as something approaching a whole. Indeed, as Professor Hay pointed out, Vergil paid so much attention to the kings themselves—the work had, after all, been commissioned by Henry VII—that the *Anglica Historia* in places looks like “biographies on the scale of the *Dictionary of National Biography* placed end to end”.¹⁵ Moreover, Vergil put the history of his adopted country into polished, classical Latin, and turned what had been disconnected, truncated annals into a smooth-flowing narrative. Consciously writing for the broader audience afforded him by print (though he kept the book from the press for twenty years after he had written it), he provided the reader with an index.¹⁶ Finally, he showed considerable critical ability in judging his sources, rejecting as unproven legend the tales of Brutus, Arthur, and the ancient British kings contained in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. In doing all these things, Polydore set a pattern for subsequent chroniclers and historians, even those who criticized him for his ignorance of the details of English history or for his deflation of cherished national myths. Despite the initial hostility of antiquaries as eminent and influential as John Leland, John Bale, and Sir John Prise, Vergil's criticism of the Galfridian legends gradually gained ground: by 1600 most antiquaries and historians had grown wary of them, even if they avoided unequivocal denials.

Despite these modifications to the traditional structure of the chronicle—modifications which, one hastens to add, were by no means universally adopted—the distance between Vergil's work and the historical works which both preceded and followed it is not vast. Vergil's critical abilities and his conscious attempt to distance his work from the medieval chronicles which he deemed *nudi, rudes, indigesti ac mendosi*,¹⁷ cannot be allowed to obscure his roots in the very European tradition he was trying to escape.

¹⁴See, for example, the following early Tudor examples: *Wriothesleys Chronicle*, 2 vols., ed. W.D. Hamilton, Camden Society, new series, xi, xx (1875–77), 1: 2; Arnold, *The Customs of London, otherwise called Arnold's Chronicle*, ed. F. Douce (1811), xxxviii. The section of Arnold which is specifically historical runs only from p. xix to p. liii, with the annals increasing substantially in length from 1499. The remaining nine-tenths of the volume contains charters, customs, and various documents concerning the city, with incidental reference to national politics and ecclesiastical matters.

¹⁵Denys Hay, *Polydore Vergil: Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 99.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 152–53.

The *Anglica Historia* today reads more like the Italian official histories of the quattrocento or the works of the French *historiographes du roi*, Gaguin (whom Vergil loathed almost as much as Geoffrey) and Aemilius, than those of Vergil's contemporaries, Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Vergil's habit of summarizing each reign at its conclusion differs in degree rather than kind from Matthew Paris's end-of-year summaries and fifty-year retrospectives; and his description of the transition of peoples and dynasties from British to English to Norman, a scheme which his successors were to adopt, similarly resembles the time-worn theme of the *translatio imperii*. Vergil's wide interests, as encyclopedic as those of Higden, are reflected in his *De Rerum Inventoribus*, which describes the ancient inventors of things, and his history did not differ dramatically in the type of information that it reported—*res gestae*, ecclesiastical events, battles, sieges and embassies, freaks of the natural and supernatural—from Bede in the seventh century, Malmesbury in the twelfth, or Walsingham in the fifteenth, whatever the superiority of Vergil's Latin prose style.¹⁸ It is therefore not surprising that the *Anglica Historia*, first published in Basel in 1534, and continuously revised to reflect the vagaries of Tudor politics,¹⁹ could be absorbed so successfully into the vernacular chronicle tradition, first by Edward Hall (d. 1547). Confining himself to the period from the fall of Richard II to the events of his own time, in the 1530s, Hall adopted (with a few changes dictated by his English outlook on events) some of the content and much the same construction of the *Anglica Historia*: most of his account of the fifteenth century amounts to little more than a paraphrase of Vergil.²⁰ As

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 135; Hay notes that the humanist fixation with the refinement and perfection of classical texts encouraged "an abstract and arid approach to the past which is curiously similar to that of the monastic chronicles whom the humanists affected to despise."

¹⁹*Polydori Vergilii Urbinitis Anglicaee Historiae Libri XXVI* (Basel, 1534). A second edition was published in 1546; like the first, it goes only to 1509. Vergil extended the work to 1538 in the Basel edition of 1555. Later editions were published in Basel (1557, 1570), Ghent (2 vols., 1556–57), Douai (2 vols., 1603), and Leyden (1649, reprinted 1651): Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 84, provides a complete bibliography. An anonymous Tudor translation of the *Anglica Historia*, (significantly entitled "the cronicle of Polydore Vergil" was edited in part by Sir Henry Ellis from British Library (hereafter, B.L.) MS Royal C. VIII/IX: *Polydore Vergil's English History*, 2 vols., Camden Society, old series, xxix, xxxvi (1844–46). That this translation remained unpublished until the nineteenth century is probably due both to Vergil's attack on Geoffrey of Monmouth and to Hall's having incorporated large chunks of the *Anglica Historia* into his own chronicle. On revisions to the text of the *Anglica Historia*, see Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 187–98; cf., more recently, Peter Iver Kaufman, "Polydore Vergil and the Strange Disappearance of Christopher Urswick," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986):69–85.

²⁰Edward Hall or Halle, *Hall's Chronicle*, ed. Henry Ellis (1809); for Hall's debt to Vergil, see Hay, *Polydore Vergil*, 117–18, 131–33; on the publication of the work, A.F. Pollard, "Edward Hall's Will and Chronicle," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 9 (1931–32):171–77. Graham Pollard, "The Bibliographical History of Hall's Chronicle," *BIHR* 10 (1932–33):12–17, argues the case that the 1542 "edition" of Hall supposedly published by Berthelet either did not exist or was no more than a partial printing; the evidence as adduced by Pollard remains far too ambiguous to permit a firm conclusion on this issue.

any chronicler would, Hall added to this account of the past the interesting events of his own day, which as a prominent lawyer, common serjeant for London, royal commissioner and MP, he was well-qualified to report. Vergil, in turn, used the latter sections of Hall to update his own work for its 1555 edition.

This sort of mutual borrowing, copying, and summarizing continued through the rest of the century. Grafton, Stow, Holinshed and his associates in the 1570s, and John Speed in the early seventeenth century drew equally freely on the works of their immediate predecessors; the temporary survival of the chronicle tradition was thereby assured, even though many such writers tried to distance themselves from others and occasionally even abandoned altogether the claim to be chroniclers.²¹ Speed believed that his *History of Great Britain* (1611) was sufficiently different from its predecessors to justify calling it a history instead, and there is considerable justification for excluding it from any inventory of true chronicles. In design, it is radically different from Hall's, Stow's, and Holinshed's chronicles; Speed abandoned the Gothic print still favored by popular writers and balladeers in favor of Roman type,²² he numbered his paragraphs for quick reference (an idea perhaps suggested by his involvement in the printing of the Authorized Version of the Bible) and he provided a summary of the whole at the end. On the other hand, Speed's research techniques, the way in which he assembled his material, and the substance of the final product reveal close affinities to Holinshed at least. His surviving notebook illustrates exactly how Speed prepared his *Historie*, by pasting together transcripts from his chronicle sources, adding the materials supplied by his various assistants and contributors, and arranging these by years for insertion into the regnal chapters of the final work. He was, quite literally, a "scissors-and-paste" historian.²³

²¹Thomas More's unfinished *History of King Richard the Third*, though much more clearly different from the medieval chronicles than Polydore Vergil, was similarly absorbed almost wholesale into the chronicles, beginning with Grafton's inclusion of a considerably emended version of the work in his 1543 continuation of Hardyng's *Chronicle*. As a result, More's potentially more radical influence was muted until the early seventeenth century, when historians like Camden, Hayward, and Bacon began to develop the more biographical aspects of history. More, *The history of King Richard the Third*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester, *The English Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); A. F. Pollard, "The Making of Sir Thomas More's *Richard III*," in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, and E. F. Jacob (Manchester: privately printed, 1933), 223–38; Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, 69–73.

²²The shift by printers late in the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth to Roman and Italic fonts provides another instance of the gradual stratification of English culture, and of the distancing of elite from popular texts. For, as Keith Thomas points out, the black letter which we now find so taxing to read was in fact more attractive to readers at the lower end of literate society, who may indeed have been unable to read in Roman type works they had mastered in Gothic. See Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 97–131.

²³B.L. MS Add. 57336, esp. 26v, 55, incorporated in Speed, *The history of Great Britain* (1611), 714, 717.

The most cursory examination of the large collection of Stow's notes and transcripts reveals that although his interests were much wider than Speed's, and his critical sense more acute, his method of composition was essentially the same, even if the form in which he cast his material differed.²⁴ The differences between them are matters of presentation rather than substance, and it might be argued that Stow and Speed mark the borderland between history and chronicle in Renaissance England, a march which is present but extremely difficult to define. It is perhaps simpler to consider the entire tradition from Vergil to Stow as a final, humanist-influenced stage in the transition of English historiography from the chronicle into the various forms that developed in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; as such, they can best be described as "humanist chronicles," to borrow a phrase from the late Professor Eric Cochrane.²⁵ They were fuller than earlier annals, and used a variety of sources rather than abridging or copying a single author; but chronicles they remained nonetheless, tied to the calendar year, with a dry, abrupt narrative style. In 1615 Edmund Howes bristled at the taste for smooth, elegant prose and the love of detailed minute research that characterized the politic historians and antiquaries of his day. By continuing Stow's *Annales*, he claimed to have kept to "the originall and true purpose of chronologie," which was "to shew successors, the actions good and bad of their ancestors, and to remayne as documents to pursue the good and eschue the badde, and not to fill up great volumes with superfluous curiosities, loftie style, and needlesse eloquence, such as our fore-fathers never knewe."²⁶ Howes's statement reveals both the humanist's stress on the didactic value of history and the chronicler's loyalty to traditional ways of recording it. It demonstrates very well that the influence of humanism, as introduced to England by Vergil, did not revolutionize English historical writing; it merely grafted some new elements onto an old tradition. Humanist interests and styles of representation were to have a greater impact on historical thought much later in the sixteenth century, as continental learning nurtured English antiquarian, legal, and philological scholarship. But as the only, or even the most important, agent of the chronicle's decline, humanism will not serve.

As late as 1569, the chronicle still seemed to the English writer to be the most appropriate, indeed the only, available vehicle for a narrative representation of the past. Grafton could conclude his *Chronicle at Large* in that year with an apology for his "rude and unlearned woorke, not worthye the

²⁴B.L. MS Harl. 247, 210–18 (notes on English history in Stow's hand); B.L. MSS Harl. 540 and 545 (notes by Stow from various chronicles). Both writers, in the tradition of Vergil and Hall, organized their accounts around reigns, though Stow retained the annal as his "building block" within each reign.

²⁵Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, xvi.

²⁶Edmund Howes, "An historicall preface to this booke," in Stow, *Annales* (1615 ed.).

name of a Chronicle."²⁷ By the end of the century, however, comments on the insufficiency of the chronicles or their lack of style began to become more frequent, particularly among those who believed that they themselves could write with greater eloquence or erudition. Polydore Vergil continued to be a subject of derision, and not always from die-hard defenders of Brutus or King Arthur. Camden's friend Bishop Francis Godwin proclaimed in 1616 the obsolescence of the *Anglica Historia* and his desire for a new national history, something he shared with his contemporary, Francis Bacon.²⁸ A dozen years later, when Polydore's name was introduced in the House of Commons to support Cambridge's claim to greater antiquity than Oxford, the Oxonian alumnus Edward Littleton showed his contempt for such a witness: "What have we to do with Polydore Vergil? One Vergil was a poet, the other a liar."²⁹ Edmund Howes, reluctant to abandon the Galfridian inheritance, thought Vergil had been too critical of the ancient histories, "and himselfe deserveth to bee rejected for his many fabulous narrations."³⁰ None of this was new, nor must any criticism of Vergil be taken as an implicit criticism of chronicles—Howes clearly thought he was defending the medieval chroniclers against an interloper.³¹ But the ferocity and frequency of comments about the flaws of chronicles, medieval or Tudor, leave little doubt that, from 1590 and perhaps earlier, dislike of specific chroniclers rapidly evolved into an antipathy toward chroniclers in general, and toward the accounts of the past that they offered. The genre itself fell out of favour.

On the whole, the more accomplished historians and antiquaries were rather more sympathetic to their chronicler predecessors than were less well-informed, casual consumers of history who had less experience with the difficulties of historical writing. It became fashionable to point out errors of fact, prejudice in interpretation, and ugliness of expression. The insufficiency of the Elizabethan chronicles offered one of the very few issues on which the classically minded Gabriel Harvey found himself in agreement with Thomas Nashe. Annotating his copy of Livy's *Romanae Historiae Principis*, probably in 1590, Harvey wondered whether a British Livy, Tacitus, or Frontinus would emerge while complaining of the "many

²⁷Grafton's *Chronicle*, 2 vols., ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1809) 2:567.

²⁸Francis Godwin, *Annales of England*, trans. Morgan Godwin, (1630), A2; Bacon declared his interest in a new history of England and Scotland in a letter to Lord Chancellor Ellesmere in April, 1605: *Lord Bacon's Letters and Life*, 7 vols., ed. James Spedding (London, 1861–74), 3:249–52.

²⁹*Commons Debates, 1628*, 5 vols., ed. Mary Frear Keeler, Maija Jansson Cole, and William B. Bidwell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977–83), 4:42 (31 May, 1628).

³⁰Howes, in Stow, *Annales* (1615), preface.

³¹Vergil was also accused of crimes such as burning the documents he had used or of shipping them off to Rome: see, e.g., John Caius, *De antiquitate Cantabrigiensi academiae libri duo* (1568), 52. For a summary of the anti-Vergilian literature see Henry Ellis, introduction to *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, Camden Society, old series, 19 (1844), xxiii–xxvii.

asses who dare to compile histories, chronicles, annals, commentaries." These include "Grafton, Stow, Holinshed, and a few others like them who are not cognizant of law or politics, nor of the art of depicting character, nor are they in any way learned."³² Sir Henry Savile, who referred to Polydore as "homo Italus, et in rebus nostris hospes," was prepared to edit a number of medieval chronicles and to "correct" them, but a pronounced distaste for their Latin style and a contempt for the low social origins of many annalists suffuses his preface.³³ The anonymous author of the continuation of William Martyn's *History of the Kings of England* exploits the annals of John Stow, while attacking chroniclers as a group — "not the learnedst generation among us" — and preferring to any English account of the later sixteenth century the elegant Latin of Jacques-Auguste de Thou's *Historia sui temporis*.³⁴ The minor verse historian Charles Aley, perhaps conscious of the weakness of his own claim to historical veracity, dismissed the chronicle accounts of Henry VII's defeat of the earl of Lincoln's rising as a superficial list of events:

Chronicles doe it so lamely tell
As if twere sayd, they came, they fought, they fell.³⁵

Most of all, it was easy to poke fun at the reliability of the chronicler by exposing the very disagreement of the sources on which he based his account and his failure to reconcile them. The learned chancellor Lord Ellesmere refused to cite evidence from Richard II's reign during the debate on the case of the post-nati in 1608, because "some of our chroniclers doe talke idely [of it] and understand little." Ben Jonson's chronicler despairs of ever being able to write the truth. "I have been so cheated with false relations in my time, as I have found it a harder thing to correct my book than to collect it."³⁶

Such comments do not suggest a declining interest in the tales that the chronicler told or in the information that he presented. Whatever the arguments that can be adduced pro or con the "middle class" character of Elizabethan culture, it is undeniable that the second half of the century witnessed an enormous expansion in the public (a less loaded term than "popular") interest in the past, particularly within the urban environ-

³²Virginia F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey: his Life, Marginalia and Library* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 152. Ms. Stern dates this remark to 1580, but Harvey's references to Camden and Hakluyt in the same passage make the later date more likely.

³³Sir Henry Savile (ed.), *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptores post Bedam* (1596), preface.

³⁴William Martyn, *The historie and lives of the kings of England*, continued by "B.R., Master of Arts," (2d ed., 1638), 376.

³⁵Charles Aley, *The historie of that wise prince, Henrie the seventh* (1638). Aley presumably did not include his principal source, Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh*, in this number.

³⁶Ben Jonson, 7:515.

ment.³⁷ It is probably truer to say that the chronicle disappeared because supply could not keep up with demand—and demand turned elsewhere for satisfaction.

Ironically, the very instrument that had given the chronicle its widest readership, the printing press, also contributed, in several different ways, to its death. By making the chronicle, and with it the facts of the past, a common intellectual currency, the press rendered possible the development of other genres, which clearly derived from the chronicle but were much more able to meet the public demand whether because more readable, cheaper, or more novel. These “parasite” historical forms, which began to flourish from the middle of the sixteenth century, drew much of their substance from the chronicle and soon came to satisfy public interest in history, with the result that the chronicle itself was soon made redundant.

The most obvious consequence of the advent of print was to rob the chronicle of its function as the recorder and communicator of *present* events, that is, as a medium of news. Pretypographic cultures depended upon a variety of media for the transmission of events, from the human voice to the letter to the manuscript. All are slow in comparison with print, just as print itself cannot compete with the electronic media that today have made possible almost instantaneous communication over thousands of miles. One of the most important changes wrought by print was the speed at which information could be stored, reproduced, and transmitted quickly to a wide audience; the Tudor manipulation of the press for political purposes shows that contemporaries could exploit this phenomenon even if they did not yet fully understand its significance.

A cultural consequence of this technological development was the alteration of the contemporary perception of the passage of events, and of time itself; in a sense, time “sped up” in Tudor England as news traveled faster through the countryside.³⁸ Just as the printed almanac could disseminate historical and other types of information, however rudimentary, to rural areas much more effectively than any chronicle, so the ballad—increasingly a recorder of recent events—the corranto, the newsbook, and from the late seventeenth century, the newspaper could record and com-

³⁷Louis B. Wright, *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (2d ed., Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), 297–338; Wright, “Heywood and the Popularizing of History,” *Modern Language Notes* 43 (1928): 287–93; Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, ch. 6.

³⁸From the thirteenth century on, many chroniclers took advantage of the development of newsletters by incorporating them almost verbatim into their texts. See, for example, *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1333–1381*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927), xxxiv ff. On the dissemination of news, see C.A.J. Armstrong, “Some Examples of the Distribution of News in England at the Time of the Wars of the Roses,” in *Studies in Medieval History presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, ed. R.W. Hunt, W.A. Pantin, and R.W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), 429–54; for the sixteenth century, see, in addition to works already cited, F.J. Levy, “How Information Spread Among the Gentry, 1550–1640,” *Journal of British Studies* 21 (1982): 11–34.

municate events with even greater velocity.³⁹ With the exception of the letter, which was confined to interpersonal communication between two points, the handwritten document lost its position as the most important purveyor of news over an extended space.

The chronicle was too bulky, too long in the press, and too expensive to keep up—either in speed or volume—with the various news genres created by print. By the time a chronicler such as Stow had recorded a contemporary event it was already well known; by the time it passed through the press and reached the bookseller it was no longer news but history. At best, the chronicler could record the *recent* past. Again, Jonson's *News from the New World*, written at the start of a decade that would see England flooded with newsbooks and corantoos, illustrates the point. Its characters—the chronicler, heralds, printer and news-factor—argue over the proper medium of news—print, manuscript, or voice. The factor objects to the printing of news, “for when they are printed they leave to bee newes; while they are written, though they be false, they remaine newes still.” The printer counters that it is the very printing of events that “makes ‘hem news to a great many, who will indeed beleeeve nothing but what’s in print.” Thus the printer keeps his presses running, and every ten years or so, “as the age grows forgetful, I print over again with a new date, and they are of excellent use.” The factor claims that he disseminates news by writing a thousand letters a week to the shires of England; he even has an “answering catalogue” to enable him to dispatch news to friends of all ranks and religions; he can alter the tone and the details of a standard letter to suit the individual taste.⁴⁰ The factor is right that it is possible to copy a single document more quickly than one can typeset it; but one cannot copy a hundred, much less a thousand, more quickly. Still less can one communicate information more efficiently by voice, the medium defended in Jonson's masque by the heralds. John Lyly could claim in 1580 that “the eare is the caryer of newes”; a further century of corantoos, ballads, and newsbooks made the eye an increasingly effective rival.⁴¹

After the collapse of censorship in 1640, when restrictions on domestic newsbooks were lifted, no one wishing to learn about the very recent past would begin his reading in the pages of a chronicle. Even the weekly

³⁹On the circulation of printed news in Tudor England, see H. S. Bennett, *English Books & Readers, 1475–1557* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 135–45; and *English Books and Readers, 1558–1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 220–47.

⁴⁰*Ben Jonson*, 7:515; for Jonson's dislike of the sale of news as merchandise, see David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 218.

⁴¹John Lyly, *Euphues and his England* (1580), *Complete Works of John Lyly*, 3 vols., ed. R. Warwick Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902; reprinted 1967) 2:159. For some aspects of the relationship between sight, hearing, and historical consciousness, see D.R. Woolf, “Speech, Text, and Time: the Sense of Hearing and the Sense of the Past in Renaissance England,” *Albion* 18 (1986): 159–93.

newsbook was to prove a slow and cumbersome medium during the civil wars, always several days behind events; improvements in typographic technology later in the century made cheaply produced daily newspapers much more attractive. Against rivals like these, the chronicle could hardly hope to compete.⁴²

The publication of chronicles was now rendered entirely dependent upon a public interest in the past. As we have already seen, some of the most prolific historical writers in the period were either printers or had close connections with printers: Grafton and Rastell provide good examples. The printer of Cooper's *Epitome of Chronicles* (1559) took an active interest in the work, contributing a brief introductory paragraph before the third book.⁴³ Holinshed's chronicle offers an even better instance. This work was planned by a printer, Reyne Wolfe, as a sort of super-chronicle, a universal history and geography on the order of the *Polychronicon*, complete with maps. When Wolfe died his task fell to his associate Holinshed who promptly enlisted the assistance of William Harrison, Francis Thynne, Richard Stanyhurst, John Stow, and John Vowell alias Hooker of Exeter. The printing syndicate that produced the first edition in 1577 (limited to Britain, and without the maps) decided that an even larger second edition might prove profitable and, since Holinshed had died in 1580, placed Hooker in charge of it. The result was the huge and rather unwieldy compilation of 1587 which bears Holinshed's name but with which he had little to do.

In 1612 the penurious virtuoso and intellectual projector Edmund Bolton complained to Sir Robert Cotton of "the conspiracies of booksellers, and printers, to robbe the authors of theyr commoditie."⁴⁴ Such grumbling from discontented authors who had much less leverage with printers than do modern writers, and virtually no copyright protection, are commonplace. The commercial nature of any publishing venture, then as now, meant that money played as great a role in determining the shape and size of a chronicle as considerations of truth or style, and that the printer would have considerable say in the design and production of a historical work for the public consumption. Jonson was not far from the truth in depicting the chronicler in cahoots with the stationer, but he may have gotten the situation backwards: with the exception of occasional monsters like Holinshed's and projects that had the assistance of a patron to defray costs, the direction in general was towards smaller, shorter and cheaper, not longer and heavier. The briefer, the more ephemeral a work—almanacs and calendars were ideal—the more likely it was to sell quickly, and the more

⁴²The newspaper's distant antecedents are betrayed in the number of newspapers which today call themselves chronicles.

⁴³Thomas Lanquet, *Epitome of Chronicles*, ed. Thomas Cooper (1559 ed.), 84. The first edition was printed by T. Berthelet in 1549, and Crowley's pirated edition by W. Seres and T. Marshe in 1559. Cooper's own revised editions appeared in 1560 and 1565.

⁴⁴B. L. MS Cotton Julius C. III, 30 (Bolton to Cotton, 16 Oct. 1612).

easily it could be produced and marketed outside the London booksellers' stalls.

John Stow, the most prolific as well as the most able of the late Tudor chroniclers, and the only genuine scholar among them, found this out to his cost. Originally interested in poetry—he built up a substantial collection of Chauceriana and fifteenth-century literature—he turned to history around 1564 out of dissatisfaction with recent chronicles, by which he probably intended Grafton's work in particular.⁴⁵ In 1565 the first octavo edition of his *A summary of English chronicles* appeared, followed by a second in 1566. He expanded the work with additional research in 1570 and 1575. Meanwhile, he also issued a series of briefer abridgments of the *Summary*, in slightly smaller (16°) format.⁴⁶ The *Summary* kept the traditional form of a city chronicle, complete with mayoral years, as did its quarto successor, the *Chronicles of England* (1580).

These works proved extremely successful; nineteen editions are known, and there may have been others. With the quarto *Annales of England* which followed, beginning in 1592, Stow enjoyed similar success.⁴⁷ Because he conscientiously corrected each version himself as it came out and updated it, his *Annales* enjoyed a high level of popularity, sufficient to outlive the author and allow Edmund Howes to reissue them twice, in 1615 and 1631, with his own additions and in an even bulkier folio format. But Stow could not rest satisfied with summarizing earlier chronicles. In the 1605 edition of the *Annales*, the last to appear in Stow's lifetime, he admits to having completed in the 1580s a huge, detailed great chronicle, probably along the lines of Holinshed's tomes, but found to his dismay that no printer would undertake the project.⁴⁸ Even in an age when the number of printers was comparatively small, and publication more strictly controlled, the

⁴⁵Stow helped with such projects as Thomas Speght's edition of Chaucer (1598) and compiled notes on Lydgate (B.L. MS Harl. 367, 83v, 85; B.L. MS Stowe 952, 303v–379) and on earlier English poetry. He published *Pithy pleasaunt and profitable workes of maister Skelton* in 1568 and edited *Certaine worthy manuscript poems of great antiquitie* in 1597. Stow's quarrel with Grafton, his principal rival in the chronicle trade in the 1560s and 1570s, sprang in part from Stow's doubting Grafton's claim to have written much of Hall's chronicle before publishing it: B.L. MS Harl. 367, 1–4, 11; Bennett, *English Books & Readers, 1557–1603*, 215–16.

⁴⁶The longer version went through seven editions between 1565 and 1590, the shorter through twelve between 1566 and 1618, the last three being edited and continued by Edmund Howes. See revised *STC*, vol. 2: items 23319–23340. With 25 known editions or reissues of his chronicles, Stow was by far the biggest seller before 1640: see Table 3.

⁴⁷Stow, *Annales of England* (1592). Subsequent editions, each longer than its predecessor, were published in 1600 (to 1600), 1601 (to 1601), 1605 (to 1605), 1615 (to 1614) and 1632 (to 1631); again, the last two were updated by Howes.

⁴⁸Stow, *Annales* (1605), 1438; Kingsford, *English Historical Literature*, 268. Since the work, if it really was completed, has not survived, there is no way of knowing for certain precisely what shape it took. Under the influence of his younger friend, Camden, Stow may have tinkered with a humanist model, and he refers to the work as a "history of this island" rather than as a chronicle; nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that it would have differed substantially, except in size, from his earlier works.

demand for large, expensive volumes of this kind must never have been great, and two editions of Holinshed would almost certainly have saturated the market, at least for a time.⁴⁹

Unless a historical work became a surprise bestseller, (such as Camden's *Britannia* which began as a small octavo and grew by stages into the folio of 1607) it was unlikely to go into the reissues or new editions that could offset the initial cost of publication, and few printers were prepared to venture much on the possibility of such success unless expenses could be offset by assistance from a patron or the work had some endorsement from the government. No one got rich from writing or publishing a work of history in Renaissance England (some things never change). Stow had to petition the mayor and aldermen for a pension to offset the costs of printing his *Summaries*, many of which he had borne.⁵⁰ By the end of the century, printers and booksellers were selling, buying, or exchanging copyrights on certain chronicles, almost certainly in response to their sales. In 1573 Thomas Marshe exchanged the copyright to Stow's *Summaries* with Henry Binneman for the latter's edition of Terence.⁵¹ The abridgments similarly changed hands a number of times within a few years until finally, in 1607, the Company of Stationers took over their publication.

Other printers were compelled to share larger jobs among them. Grafton used other printers for his own chronicles while printing for himself his editions of Hardyng and Hall. Archbishop Parker's edition of Asser and of Thomas of Walsingham's *Ypodigma Neustriae* were printed by John Day, the publisher of early editions of Foxe and of two editions of Gildas, but his edition of Walsingham's so-called *Historia Brevis*, which was bound up and sold with these, was printed by Henry Binneman.⁵² Binneman also printed the first edition of Holinshed, but the greatly expanded second edition of 1587 involved no less than five printers. A simpler work, such as the popular *Breviat cronicle contayning all the kinges from Brute to this daye*, was produced by only one printer at a time, though he might change from edition to edition. The late sixteenth-century taste for emblems and

⁴⁹John Lewis's *The history of Great Britain*, written over a period of years between 1605 and 1615, may never have been published for the same reason, Speed's *Historie* having appeared in 1611. Lewis attempted to gain royal support for his project in a set of proposals, undated, for the printing of a new history of Britain in ten books (B.L. MS Royal 18.A. xxxvii, 1–20). A partial manuscript of the work, ending with Brutus, is in B.L. MS Harl. 4872, 242–341. The full *History* was first published in 1729 by Hugh Thomas from a manuscript that has since been lost.

⁵⁰B.L. MS Harl. 367, 8. On 8 March, 1604, James I issued a warrant for letters patent to Stow empowering him to collect gratuities and voluntary contributions for defraying his costs.

⁵¹*A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640*, 5 vols., ed. Edward Arber (London, 1875), 1:272, 418.

⁵²Asser, *Aelfredi regis res gestae* (John Day, 1574); *Historia brevis Thomae Walsingham, ab Edwardo primo, ad Henrici quintum* (Henry Binneman, 1574); Walsingham, *Ypodigma Neustriae vel Normanniae . . . ab irruptione Normannorum usq; ad annum 6. regni Henrici Quinti* (John Day, 1574).

other sorts of visual imagery may have increased the attraction of works like Speed's *Historie*, with its engravings and its companion volume of maps, the *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*, but it also drove up considerably their cost of production. Just as some early Tudor chroniclers and their printers had enjoyed special privileges—Pynson, Berthelet, and Grafton had been among the first royal printers⁵³—so Speed received financial assistance in the form of a government license to produce the genealogies for inclusion in the Authorized Version of the Bible, which appeared in the same year as his history; he also enjoyed the patronage of Sir Robert Cotton and several influential backers who had contributed material, including the attorney general, Francis Bacon.

Few works were as lavish as the 1583 edition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, which was reprinted several times, but few appealed so well to national feelings of anti-popery and had the backing of the Crown, which required a copy be available in every parish church across the land. Even so, corners were cut, primarily through the device of using the same engraving to represent a number of different martyrs on different pages. A famous explorer and soldier like Raleigh had high hopes of selling a book like the *History of the World* on the strength of his reputation, even when the government forced the removal of the title page bearing the author's name. Lesser individuals were generally not so fortunate. When Edmund Bolton proposed to the London court of aldermen that they support one of his many pet projects, a mammoth new history of London—in Latin and English, complete with maps—the city officials reneged on an earlier promise of assistance when he revealed the true cost of the work—between three and four thousand pounds—much to the anguish of the penniless Bolton, who had already invested two years and considerable money in the project. Once more there seems to have been room for one such work, but not two, and the aldermen decided instead to accept the offer of Ben Jonson to present the city with a short chronology of the past four years—a less ambitious project, and one which Jonson was prepared to do for “love” instead of money.⁵⁴

In this manner, the printing press brought the chronicle, new and old, into the public domain and gave it, temporarily, a relatively wide readership; it also contributed to its decline by forcing the cessation of continued chronicle-writing in favor of the re edition, summarizing, abridging, or updating of older ones. In the seventeenth century, even the re edition of

⁵³FS. Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England 1476–1776* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), 32–33, 39.

⁵⁴B.L. MS Harl. 6521, fos. 243v, 247–49 (Bolton's notebook and drafts of letters): Bolton noted on 18 Oct., 1632 that “all the aldermen were against it, though [Sir Hugh] Hamersley and some others spoke for it.” There is no evidence that Jonson complied with his promise to the aldermen.

sixteenth-century favorites like Stow and Rastell gradually proved less attractive to printers, with the result that the chronicles published after 1595 tended to be either unsuccessful one-edition ventures or scholarly editions of medieval texts. The chronicles of Stow and of Matthew Paris differed no more in their language and outlook than did the societies in which they were produced; the chronicle was much less suited to the world of the printed page than it had been to that of the manuscript. Ultimately, even the re edition of chronicles gradually became a matter of concern chiefly to scholars who performed such tasks for the benefit of other scholars and historians.

We still know all too little about the retail prices of individual titles in early modern England, though the painstaking efforts of bibliographers such as F.R. Johnson, Gordon Duff, W.A. Jackson, and others have provided some help by analyzing the inventories and other surviving records of booksellers, printers, and occasionally book-collectors.⁵⁵ F.R. Johnson estimated that the "average" book retailed, unbound, at about .33*d* per sheet before 1560, and rose with inflation to about .45*d* from 1560 to the 1630s.⁵⁶ These figures are at best averages, subject to wide variance from case to case. Nevertheless, Johnson's correlation of these averages with specific prices for unbound sheets of a large sample of individual titles, suggest that the price of *all* history books, chronicles included, increased far beyond the basic rate of inflation. Table 1 illustrates Johnson's findings. Early and mid-sixteenth-century titles retailed at prices significantly lower than the average. From the last quarter of the century, however, even reprinted works sold to the public at a price higher than the .45*d* average. These findings need not contradict the conventional picture, derived from Louis B. Wright, of the "popularization" of history in Elizabethan England, though they do little to support his thesis of the formation of an identifiably "middle-class" culture.⁵⁷ They merely show that more people were reading history books of some sort or another despite their relatively higher prices.

⁵⁵F. Madan, "The Day-book of John Dorne," Oxford Historical Society, *Collectanea* 1 (1885): 71-178; E. Gordon Duff, "A Bookseller's Accounts, circa 1510," *The Library*, new series, 8 (1907): 256-66; W.A. Jackson, "A London Bookseller's Ledger of 1535," *The Colophon*, new series, 1 (1936): 498-509. Private inventories, such as that compiled in 1556 for the library of Sir William More, also contain much information. More paid five shillings for a copy of Fabyan: J. Evans, "Extracts from the Private Account Book of Sir William More," *Archaeologia* 36 (1855): 288-92.

⁵⁶Francis R. Johnson, "Notes on English Retail Book-Prices, 1550-1640," *The Library*, 5th series, 5 (1950): 83-113; H.S. Bennett, "Notes on English Retail Book-Prices, 1480-1560," *ibid.*, 172-78. In *English Books & Readers, 1475-1557*, 232-34, Bennett favors a slightly higher estimate of between .35*d* and .5*d* per sheet for the earlier period. If correct, this would make early Tudor chronicles even more clearly underpriced. For a thorough discussion of retail and production costs, see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 178; Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade* (2d ed., London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1965), 35-58, 238-47 also contains useful information.

⁵⁷Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, 330-38.

Table One
Retail Prices of Some Chronicles and Histories, to 1640

Yr.	STC	Aut/til.	Price		Cost per sheet of unbound work	≤20% above or below av. of .33d pre-1560) or .45d post 1560).
			bound	unbound		
1542	10661	Fabyan, <i>Chronicle</i>	5s	3s6d	.20d	-
1542	10662	reissue of last	5s	3s6d	.20d	-
1543	12767	Hardyng, <i>Chronicle</i>	2s6d	1s10d	.23d	-
1550	4626	Carion, <i>Chronicles</i>	1s	8d	.10d	-
1550	4626	anr. example	-	1s	.16d	-
1552	12723a	Hall, <i>Union</i>	12s	9s	.32d	-
1560	19848	Sleidan, <i>Chronicle</i>	-	7s2d	.35d	-
1563	19849	Sleidan, <i>Brief Chronicle</i>	-	1s2d	.48d	Av.
1565	15220	Lanquet/Cooper <i>Chronicle</i>	4s6d	3s10d	.44d	Av.
1575	23325	Stow, <i>Summary</i>	4s	3s8d	.73d	+
1577	13568	Holinshed (1st ed.)	26s	20s	.45d	Av.
1599	12995	Hayward, <i>Henry III</i>	-	?2s.	1.20d	+
1613	13000	Hayward, <i>III Normans</i>	-	2s	.60d	+
1618	23332	Stow, <i>Abridgement</i>	3s	2s4d	.71d	+
1622	1159	Bacon, <i>Henry VII</i>	7s	4s6d	.84d	+
1627	5684	Cotton, <i>Henry III</i>	1s	6d	1.00d	+
1627	23048	Speed, <i>Historie</i>	30s	20s	.69d	+
1633	23345	Stow, <i>Survey</i>	-	5s	.73d	+
1638	353	Aleyn, <i>Henry VII</i>	1s8d	1s	1.2d	+

SOURCE: Francis R. Johnson, "Notes on English Retail Book-Prices, 1550-1640," *The Library*, 5th series, 5 (1950): 83-112; H. S. Bennett, "Notes on English Retail Book-Prices, 1480-1560," *ibid.*, 172-78.

Note that prices per sheet for chronicles and other historical works were consistently lower than the average in the period up to about 1560, average early in Elizabeth's reign, and generally higher than average after about 1575. These averages remained fairly constant, even allowing for inflation, from about 1560 to 1635, when book prices climbed significantly. It should be further noted that while a work like *Holinshed*, through economy of scale and shared responsibility for production, might have a lower per-sheet price than Stow's *Abridgement*, this would be more than compensated for by the large discrepancy in their retail prices, making Stow, though more expensive on a sheet-for-sheet calculation, clearly the cheaper and more vendable.

If so, then we must ask why the chronicle, almost alone among historical genres, failed to maintain this level of popularity in the following century.

Despite the scarcity of price information, a quantitative examination of publishing trends in the last two centuries of the chronicle's existence may provide at least part of the explanation for its eclipse. I have identified 220 editions or issues (excluding minor variants) of 79 chronicles published between 1475 and 1699. By arranging the items on this list in several ways we can discover something about the public taste for history and the vendability of the genre over an extended time.⁵⁸ The chronicles can first be broken down according to the format in which they were published. Again, though there are few reliable price figures for individual items, in general those titles listed as "folios" were almost certainly more expensive than quartos, quartos than octavos, and so forth, all the way down to the single broadsheet. Secondly, one can distinguish within each chronicle the first edition from a number of new editions or reissues of the same text (translations, however, have been indexed as separate "originals," as have abridgments or epitomes of larger works). Finally, the chronicles thus classified by format and edition can be plotted against time from 1475 to 1699. In order to avoid a misleading appearance of precision, fifteen-year periods have been employed rather than single years. Numbers represented in Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2 are fifteen-year cumulative totals, not running averages. It should be emphasized that these aggregates will require some adjustment when the final volume of the revised *Wing* appears.⁵⁹ Furthermore, much useful information—for example, the changing percentage of chronicles (or other historical genres) per total publications over this two and a quarter centuries—will remain unavailable

⁵⁸This population of 220 was arrived at after an examination of the titles listed in *STC*, revised *STC*, vol. 2, Donald G. Wing, *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland . . . 1641–1700* (2d ed., N.Y.: Index Committee of the Modern Language Association of America, 1972–), the *National Union Catalogue* and various indices to these works. Titles can often be deceptive, and several items were deleted from the list after inspection. The question of what is and what is not a chronicle defies any kind of objective solution, and the decision taken whether to include a particular item may well seem arbitrary in certain cases; for that reason, statistical sampling techniques have been employed. In general I have counted all works which either call themselves chronicles, annals or cognate terms, or which clearly are chronicles despite the lack of such a title (Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* for example, but not Speed's *History of Great Britain* [1611]). Works published either in England or abroad by English authors are counted (Vergil counts as "English" for this purpose), but not editions of English chronicles published by foreigners abroad (for example the collected editions of Jerome Commelyn and André Duchesne). Collections such as Savile, Camden, or Twysden have been counted only once when they were bound together, but separately if evidence exists that the constituent chronicles were bound or published separately (as with Matthew Parker's editions of Walsingham, Asser, and Matthew Paris in the 1570s).

⁵⁹Volume 1 of revised *STC*, ed. Katharine Pantzer (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986) unfortunately appeared too late to be taken into account. Although it and the revised *Wing* will likely add a few re editions or variants and delete a few ghosts, the general trends suggested here are not likely to change much.

	1475	1490	1505	1520	1535	1550	1565	1580	1595	1610	1625	1640	1655	1670	1685	Subtotal	Total
Folio Original	4	1	2	3	1	1	6	0	3	1	0	3	1	2	3	31	
F. Re-edition	2	6	2	6	5	8	9	2	4	3	3	6	8	7	2	73	104
4° Original	0	0	1	0	2	1	3	5	0	1	0	4	0	0	1	18	
4° Re-edition	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	12	30
8° Original	0	0	0	2	3	4	1	2	1	0	0	0	5	3	1	22	
8° Re-edition	0	0	0	0	5	10	10	2	2	4	1	1	2	1	1	39	61
12° Original	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	
12° Re-edition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	1	1	2	9	11
16° Original	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	
16° Re-edition	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	11
Broadsheet O.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	
Broadsheet R.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Subtotal Orig.	4	1	3	5	6	6	12	8	5	2	1	8	7	5	6	79	
Subtotal Re-ed	2	6	2	6	11	20	24	7	11	9	9	9	11	9	5	141	
Total	6	7	5	11	17	26	36	15	16	11	10	17	18	14	11	220	220

n = 220

Table Two
The Publication of Chronicles by Fifteen Year Periods, 1475-1699

Figure One
Publication Folio, Quarto, and Octavo
Chronicles 1475-1699

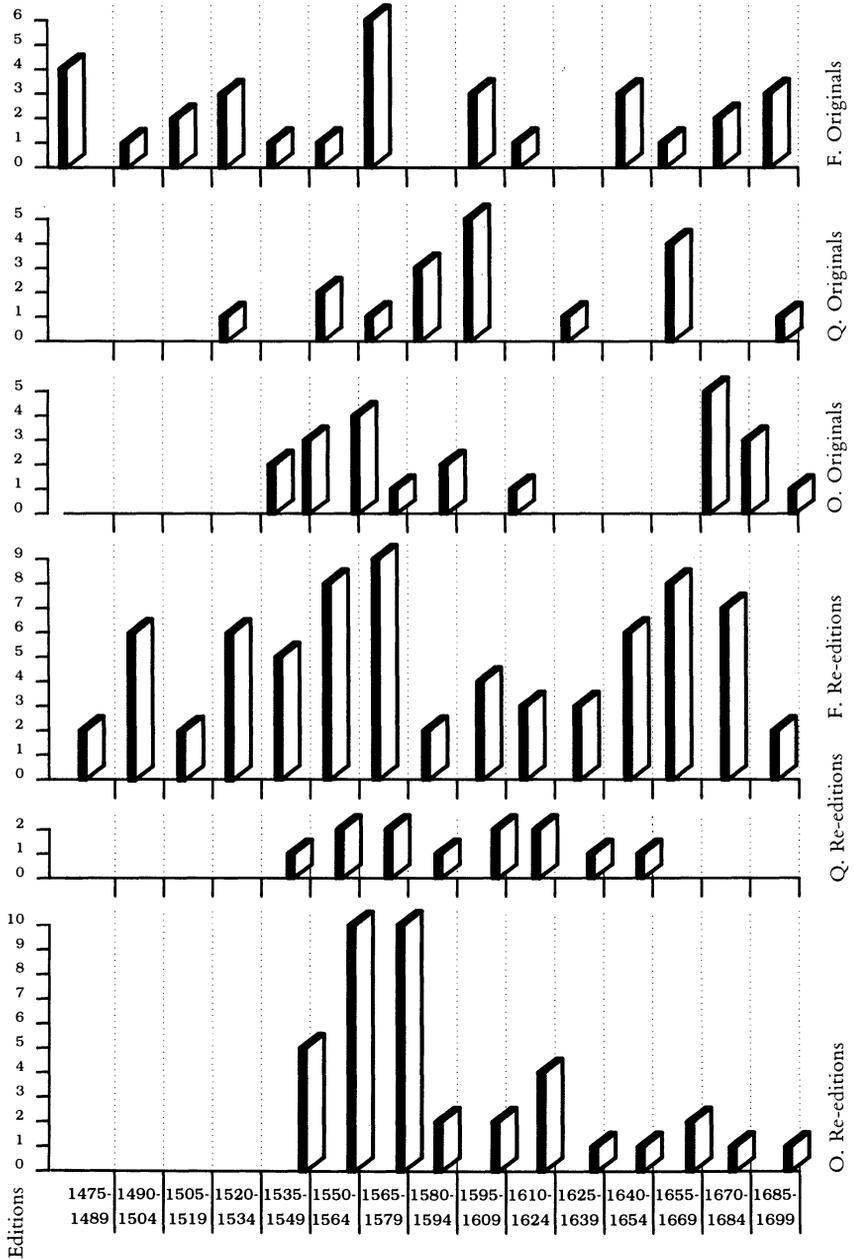
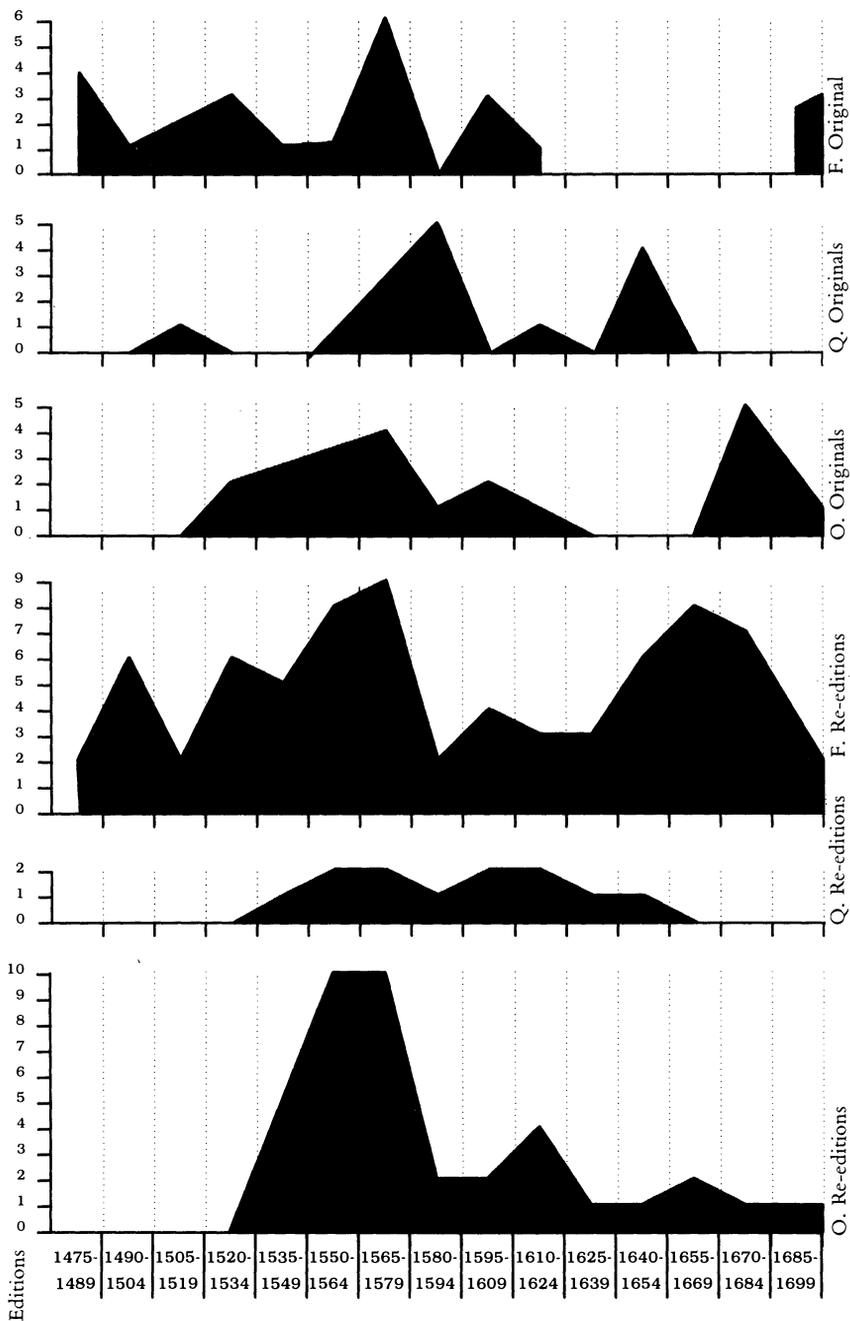


Figure Two
Trends in the Publication of
Chronicles 1475-1699



until the revised *Short Title Catalogue* and *Wing* catalog have been put into machine-readable form.⁶⁰

Between 1475 and 1699 there were published 79 “original” chronicles and 141 re editions. By format, this breaks down into 31 folio, 18 quarto, 22 octavo, 2 duodecimo, 3 sextadecimo, and 3 broadsheet originals, plus 73 folio, 12 quarto, 39 octavo, 9 duodecimo, 8 sextadecimo, and nil broadsheet re-editions. The peak years of the chronicle’s visibility on the publishing market (in originals, re editions, and totals) occurred between 1550 and 1579. This peak is skewed somewhat by the relatively brief popularity of the *Breviat cronicle*, which went through several editions in the 1550s. But even allowing for this it is clear that the chronicle as a published genre was at no time more popular than under the middle Tudors and early in Elizabeth’s reign, extending downward in the period 1565–79 to include the sextadecimo format.

Table 2 also reveals that the chronicle was primarily issued in folio (104) and octavo (61) formats. There were somewhat fewer quartos (30), and only 25 instances of all smaller formats. Again, caution is necessary: these figures are derived from survival rates which are almost certainly distorted in favor of the larger formats. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the chronicle remained largely confined to those larger formats and therefore, in all likelihood, to the upper reaches of the literate public. The number of folios peaked at about the same time as the genre as a whole, tailed off sharply in the 1580s and early 1590s, rose slightly from 1595 to 1639 and more steeply from 1640 to the end of the century (See Figures 1 and 2). Although a few post-1640 titles were inspired in some way by the civil war, the vast majority of later seventeenth-century titles were originals or re-editions of medieval or early Tudor authors. The declining popularity of the chronicle is less obvious, however, in period-to-period fluctuations, or in the decrease in totals published from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century (which was not statistically significant) than in the *relative* drop in numbers when compared with all printed works.⁶¹ The number of books published in England rose steadily in the early seventeenth century, from

⁶⁰The current chronologically arranged *STC* available in card form at a few major libraries is too crude and by now outdated a tool to provide much help here.

⁶¹The insignificance of the *absolute* decline in numbers over the two and a quarter centuries becomes clearer if we divide our whole period into two sub-periods, 1475–1594 and 1595–1699, and calculate changes in the *proportional* relationships between numbers of folios, quartos, octavos, and duodecimo or smaller formats, and the total number of chronicles produced in these sub-periods. Where $n_1=123$ and $n_2=97$ the application of tests for statistical significance reveals that the respective proportions of folios, quartos, and octavos to totals did not change by a significant margin. The proportion of smaller formats rose very slightly, but again, insignificantly in view of the huge increase of publication at the lower end of the market. Similar tests carried out on the proportion of originals to total number of editions, and of originals to re editions, in the same two periods revealed no statistically significant change. All tests were conducted at the 5 percent significance level.

259 in 1600 alone to 577 in 1640.⁶² In comparison, the number of chronicles published in the entire fifteen-year periods in which those years fall declined from 16 (1595–1609) to 10 (1625–39), both an absolute and relative decline. Although the number of chronicles published rose once more in the 1640s and 1650s, it clearly did not do so in proportion with the flood of publication at mid-century.

The relative steadiness of folio sales in comparison with other formats, and the almost complete failure of the chronicle to make a greater impact on the lucrative market for smaller formats (except briefly between 1550 and 1609) indicate that its attraction was less and less attributable to the information it contained and increasingly due to its status as a “collectible” or as a scholarly work of reference in the case of “critical” editions of medieval authors (Selden’s *Eadmer*, and the various collections by Savile, Camden, Twysden, Fulman, Gale, and Wharton) rather than as a popular, widely read and commercially volatile form. In modern parlance, the chronicle survived into the seventeenth century primarily as a “coffee-table” book rather than as a paperback. The sole instance of a highly vendible chronicle after 1640, Baker’s *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, offers a concrete example; edited, updated, and revised in later years by gentlemen such as Milton’s nephew Edward Phillips, it went through twelve editions and an abridgment before 1700. As with most such books, its great virtue was that it provided an elegant summary of all earlier chronicles. Baker himself professed to have compiled it “with so great care and diligence that if all other of our chronicles were lost, this only would be sufficient to inform posterity of all passages memorable, or worthy to be known.”⁶³ It is worth noting that Baker himself (1568–1645) was an old man when, as a bankrupt living in the Fleet, he first put pen to paper. He had grown up in the peak years of the chronicle’s popularity under Elizabeth, and may have been hearkening back to those days: his chronicle provided so easy a subject of derision for critics like Thomas Blount at least in part because it was an archaism.⁶⁴

Table 3 lists each *chronicler* (rather than his individual works) according to the number of editions or reissues in which his various works appeared, discounting those which appeared only once. It also gives the dates of first and last publication for each author, which reveals something about the market. In general, the most popular chronicles tended to be published in

⁶²Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict. England, 1603–1658* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 95.

⁶³Baker’s chronicle could be found on rural bookshelves well into the eighteenth century: Addison’s Sir Roger de Coverley quoted from the copy in his hall window (*Spectator*, nos. 269, 329: 8 January and 18 March, 1711–12) and it was also part of the furniture of Sir Thomas Booby’s country house in Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews: Dict. Nat. Biog., s.v.* “Baker, Sir Richard.”

⁶⁴Thomas Blount, *Animadversions upon Sir Richard Baker’s Chronicle* (Oxford, 1672). Blount should not be confused with his younger contemporary, Sir Thomas Pope Blount.

Table Three
Popularity of Chroniclers
Number of Editions with Intervals between First and Last Issues

2	3	4	5	6	7	8 or more
Arnold 1503-21	Asser 1574-1684	Hall 1542?-52	Bede 1565-1644	Fabyan 1516-59	Commynes 1596-1674	Grafton (9) 1562-72
"Florence of Worcester" 1590-92	Bale, <i>Sir John Oldcastle</i> 1544-48?	Holinshed 1577 (3 distinct issues) -1587	Froissart 1523-1611	Gildas 1525-1691		<i>Breviat cronicle</i> (9) 1551-61
Caradoc of Llancarvan 1584-1697	Codomannus 1590-96		Lanquet/ Cooper 1549-65	Higden 1480-1691		Eusebius (11) 1576/7-1698
Euty chius 1642-54	Monipennie (English editions only)	William of Malmesbury 1596-1691	"Matthew of Westminster" <i>Flores</i> <i>Historiaum</i> 1567-73	Polydore Vergil* 1534-70		<i>Brut</i> (11) 1480-1528
Hardyng 1543 (2)	1612 (3)					Sleidan (12) 1560-1686
"Ingulf" 1596-1684	Ralph Diceto 1652-91		Matthew Paris 1571-1684	Thomas of Walsingham 1574-1603		Richard Baker (13) 1643-96
Historia Eliensis 1691 (2)			Wynkyn de Worde et al. (other than editions of the <i>Brut</i>) 1515-52			Stow (25) 1565-1632
Zosimus 1679-84						

* Published abroad

Note: Numbers in this table are not directly comparable with those in Table Two: here, chroniclers have been counted rather than their distinct works, and separate parts of multi-author editions (e.g. Savile, Camden, Twysden) have been counted individually.

multiple editions over a relatively short period of time: all nine editions of the *Breviat cronicle* appeared between 1551 and 1561, while Stow (the leader at 25) peaked in the 1570s and 1580s. Others, such as Eusebius and Sleidan, enjoyed slower but more enduring popularity which, in the case of those authors, increased in the millennial fervor of the mid-seventeenth century. Those authors who went through fewest editions also tended (not surprisingly) to be published over a short period of time: Arnold's Chronicle (c. 1503–21), Hardyng (2 editions in 1543) and "Florence" of Worcester (1590–92); on the other hand, a few of these, Caradoc of Llancarvan (2 editions, 1584–1697) for instance, could turn up again after several decades. The works with the greatest chance of recurring in multiple editions over an extended time were mainly by medieval authors (Gildas, Bede, Matthew Paris, Ralph Diceto, William of Malmesbury, and even Higden) rather than those first written under the Tudors. Again, this reinforces an intuitive feeling about the chronicle as a commodity, that a small but steady market lay in folio collectibles or scholarly editions reissued quietly over a long period, while cheaper formats enjoyed greater popularity at the genre's peak but did not weather very well its decline in the seventeenth century: Stow's works certainly lost ground from the end of the sixteenth century, and despite Howes's attempts to turn the *Annales* into a large collectible, only two more editions of that work appeared after Stow's death.

After its Indian Summer in the mid-sixteenth century, the chronicle's functions as narrator of history and as entertainer were taken up by the humanist or "politic" history; by the chapbook romances and broadsheet ballads which went by the name of "histories"; by the verse accounts of national history authored by poets such as Drayton, Daniel, and a host of lesser names; by the Elizabethan chronicle play, whose very name betrays its origins; and finally, at the level of popular culture, by the seventeenth-century almanac. Printers catered to a growing market for these genres, but the origins of the market itself lie in the social and cultural changes which England underwent between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Tudor and Stuart society cannot be divided easily into economic classes, but it was stratified hierarchically, and by the mid-sixteenth century literary tastes had altered to reflect this fact. The growth of the parasite genres suggests that the reasons why an individual might turn to the past, and the manner in which he might then choose to represent it, varied a great deal up and down the late Tudor social ladder; Sir Henry Savile's denigration of chroniclers as base and ignoble smacks of social snobbery as much as of a love of eloquence and truth in history. Each of these genres appealed to different segments of Tudor and early Stuart society. Those who read Camden and Sir John Hayward were unlikely to be more than casual consumers of ballads, almanacs, and the sort of chapbook

histories so well described by Margaret Spufford.⁶⁵ Conversely, the villager listening to or even reading a printed ballad was extremely unlikely even to have heard of William Camden, let alone read his *Annales*.

The genre that appealed to perhaps the broadest cross-section of Elizabethan society, though one primarily restricted to London, was the history play. Responsive both to late Tudor nationalism and to the sixteenth-century demand for visual spectacle, the plays took events out of the folio pages of the great chronicles—Polydore Vergil, Hall, and Holinshed—and from less voluminous works like Stow's *Summaries*, and brought them to life: often with considerable violence to chronology or historical detail (which in turn did little to remedy the chroniclers' reputation as purveyors of error). The chronicle origin of particular plays was sometimes explicit, other times not: scholars will probably never sort out entirely Shakespeare's relative debt to Hall or Holinshed, or their medieval predecessors.⁶⁶ Few dramatists made their sources so obvious as Thomas Middleton, the former city chronologer of London. His *Mayor of Queensborough*, set in Arthurian Britain, is introduced by none other than Ranulf Higden himself:

What Raynolph, monk of Chester, can
Raise from his Polychronicon,
That raiseth him, as works do men,
To see long-parted light agen. . . .⁶⁷

Ranulf in his dramatic persona was much more likely to see the light of day than was his chronicle. It is impossible to estimate precisely how much larger was the audience for plays than the readership of printed chronicles, but the effect of the play was probably analogous to that of the film or television dramatization today. The performance of plays generally preceded their printing—Middleton's was not published until 1661—but it is the printed ones which outlived the moment to be read and re-performed in ensuing years. If the proportion of spectators who were sufficiently inspired by a performance to read the text in print was small, then the number who went further afield to read the chronicle sources must have

⁶⁵Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (London: Methuen, 1981), 48, suggests that "the two cultures," elite and popular, had drawn apart in seventeenth-century England much as they would do in Scotland in the following century, though of course the barriers were far from insurmountable. For some recent treatments of the stratification of culture in this period, see essays by Jonathan Barry and Bernard Capp in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

⁶⁶G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1966–75), vols. 3, 4: *passim*. Bullough's work supersedes that of W.G. Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed: the Chronicle and the Historical Plays Compared* (London: Lawrence, 1896). Useful discussions of a more general kind may be found in Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (London: Methuen, 1964); E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

⁶⁷1, chorus: *Works of Thomas Middleton*, 7 vols. (London, 1885–86), 2:5. Middleton was city chronologer in 1620.

been smaller still. The chronicle plays themselves enjoyed a relatively brief vogue between the 1560s and 1620s, their popularity falling off after that, though not as severely as is sometimes believed.⁶⁸ In the meantime they had introduced the contents of their sources to a much broader audience than had ever been exposed to history before; the price may have been to render those sources virtually unreadable.

The “politic histories,” to use Professor Levy’s term, of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries reached a much more select audience, primarily the well-educated or at least relatively affluent gentry and aristocracy. It hardly needs to be said that Hayward, Daniel, Godwin, and Bacon did not write for the masses. Nor did Camden, the closest thing to an official historian under James I, though a lingering nostalgia for Elizabeth’s day ensured a market for various translations of his Latin *Annales*. These authors mined from the chronicles the ore which they refined in their own works. They rarely contributed anything like a new interpretation of events, though they often corrected the chroniclers on points of detail or attempted to resolve contradictory reports. Rather, they translated the clipped, rough annals of the past into elegant Latin or vigorous, readable English, sewing their fragmentary sources together into what John Clapham called a “continued historie” and what Bacon designated as “perfect history.”⁶⁹ Creating unified, vivid characters out of the chroniclers’ stylized descriptions and lists of names, pointing moral and especially political lessons from the events the chroniclers merely recorded; and attempting to entertain the reader in so doing, these historians, much more clearly than their early Tudor predecessors, drove history further away from its chronicle *sources* in the direction of its classical *models*, even while they claimed to follow the best of those sources unerringly. That was the paradox: the more faithful were the new histories to their sources, the more they contributed to their increasing obscurity by superseding them. The educated spectator at a Jacobean history play might well want to know more about the Middle Ages, but he was more likely to turn to a short general work like Clapham, Martyn, or Daniel, or to a detailed study like Hayward’s *Henry VIII* than to the limited and ultimately unsatisfactory succession of events in the chronicles. If he turned to chronicles at all it

⁶⁸The plays certainly suffered from the early Stuart tendency to make firmer distinctions between fact and fiction; but could they also have suffered from the same disintegration of their audience that, I am arguing, occasioned loss of interest in the chronicles on which they were based? I am indebted to F.J. Levy for showing me a copy of his forthcoming essay on the decline of the history plays.

⁶⁹John Clapham, *The historie of England* (1602), preface; Bacon, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, in Works of Francis Bacon, 7 vols., ed. James Spedding, R.L. Ellis, and D.D. Heath, (London, 1857–59), 3:335, 4:292–314; the list of secondary works on Bacon’s idea of history is extremely long; most useful in the present connection are George H. Nadel, “History as Psychology in Francis Bacon’s Theory of History,” *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 275–82; and F.J. Levy’s introduction to *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* (N.Y.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972).

would almost certainly be to the more readily available Tudor abridgments, Stow and Grafton, rather than to the folios; still less likely, unless he were contemplating writing a history or had caught the antiquarian bug, would he find himself glancing over a manuscript or even a printed copy of Thomas of Walsingham.

The success of the new history, with its vivid character depiction, its pointed Tacitean style and its Machiavellian analysis of political events, further ensured the downfall of the chronicle as a viable form. Would-be historians were commonplace in the seventeenth century; one must look very hard for the self-avowed chronicler. Like the chronicle play, the "politic history" itself did not long endure. It arose from habits of thought, specific to the Renaissance, that assumed the events of the present could be represented analogically in those of the past and that rulers and aristocrats might learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. Nevertheless, it had contributed to a permanent change in the style of English historical writing, and its development into the political history of the late seventeenth century further ensured that the older chronicles would no longer be imitated. Throughout the 1640s and 1650s, and to a large extent after the Restoration, history writers focused their eyes on the very recent past as they sought the reasons for the cataclysm of the civil war and regicide. Significantly, the period between 1640 and 1699 produced histories, diaries, and a flood of tracts and newsbooks, but only a handful of new chronicles.⁷⁰

The "history", like the antiquarian treatises and chorographies which gained popularity around the end of the century, severely deflated the "top" end of the potential market for chronicles. But what of the lower end? As we saw, the chroniclers and their printers made some attempt in the second half of the sixteenth century to penetrate the bottom end of the market. They might have been successful had not almanac writers almost literally taken pages out of their books.

Late in the Tudor period, almanacs acquired historical content, in the form of chronologies generally running from the Creation and a calendar listing the saints' days. Like the lists of fairs and roads which the writers began to include in the 1550s, these historical sections had a practical purpose, since they could help the rural reader with the dating of leases and deeds which frequently employed regnal years.⁷¹ These chronologies,

⁷⁰See Table 2: 28 original publications and 35 re-editions of works including newly edited chronicles or newly written ones (almost always of recent events like the Civil War) exist from the period 1640–99. Of these a substantial number are editions of medieval works designed for a scholarly readership and frequently in Latin. Of the few genuinely new chronicles, like Baker's atypically popular work, many are really collections of documents which sport the title of "chronicle" or "annals" for rhetorical effect but look very unlike the works of a century earlier.

⁷¹Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs, 1500–1800* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 62. Works closely related to the almanac and fulfilling some of its functions, such as Dekker's observations on the weather, *The cold year. 1614* (1614), and the

until late in the sixteenth century, gave little more information than the number of years elapsed since the Creation or the birth of Christ and the year of the almanac. But from 1585, when Thomas Porter listed the dates of each "invasion" of England from Brutus to William I, a more detailed chronology quickly became a standard feature. Those almanac writers who listed their sources of information relied overwhelmingly on the later Tudor chroniclers, Lanquet-Cooper, Grafton, Holinshed, and Stow, supplemented less often by other authors such as Sleidan or Polydore Vergil.⁷² Since the almanackers were generally of higher social and educational background than most of their readers, they provided a valuable service by filtering down the content of the chroniclers, in however adulterated a form, to a geographically dispersed rural audience.

Like the history plays in London, but to an even greater extent, the almanac chronologies made their own sources of information redundant. At their peak in the mid-seventeenth century, the almanacs, which by then sold for about three or four pence, were published yearly in the hundreds of thousands. The market for these works was not, as Dr. Capp's illuminating study argues, "infinitely expandable," and it was tightly controlled by the same monopoly that regulated the printing of other works, the Stationers' Company. The stationers preferred, instead of introducing new titles, to "keep alive old favorites," much as the printers of Stow and, much later, Baker, kept those works in print after the deaths of their authors.⁷³

Successive reprintings of any book will keep it in circulation indefinitely, without ensuring that it maintains its relevance and interest. When old works are reprinted unchanged, and new ones remain unwritten, a genre grows stale. Sixteenth-century printers and seventeenth-century editors lived off the capital of existing chronicles rather than adding to it.

Throughout the Middle Ages chronicles were copied, borrowed, and paraphrased. They often grew more by gradual accretion than by conscious design or systematic composition. Through the erring copyist's hand or the chronicler's personal whim errors were added, details left out, and sometimes wholesale revisions made which have proved a nightmare for modern editors. But this was precisely what kept the genre alive, allowing it to grow and change to suit the purposes of generation after generation of writers. As long as historical writing remained confined to the manuscript, any given chronicle would likely differ, even if only on the most trivial textual points, from any other: the modern editor must sort out lines of relationship and descent and from those determine the original text of a

writing tables issued by Frank Adams, Robert Triplet and, ultimately, by the Company of Stationers itself, provide further examples of the ways in which the many functions of the late medieval chronicle were usurped by newer, more "print-friendly" genres.

⁷²Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, 215–16.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 44.

chronicle as best he can. Print made possible the establishment and reproduction of accurate texts.

There is an obvious analogy here to the fate of Latin. The humanists who abandoned the practical, erratic but living ecclesiastical Latin of their own day to make "pure" classical Latin into an object of adoration thereby terminated its further development and eventually made it a dead language. So with the chronicle: scholars grew concerned in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to establish accurate texts which could then be preserved and mass-circulated in print, and these printed editions, free from corruption by the scribal hand, froze the medieval text into a "canonical" form. Only the shortcomings of these early editors rendered further change, in the form of better editions, necessary in ensuing centuries. Those who loved the chronicle for its crudities, errors, and inconsistencies must share with those who despised them the responsibility for finishing it as a vital genre.

Again, the process that transformed the chronicle into a museum piece developed slowly through the sixteenth century. Early Tudor printers indeed seemed unconcerned with presenting a text faithful to the original: hence Caxton's and Grafton's attempts to "update" or revise chroniclers such as Higden and Hardyng. At this stage, because of a preoccupation with the relatively recent past, there had yet to develop any real sense of the medieval chroniclers as being not simply earlier historians, but truly remote writers whose works belonged to a different age. But beginning with Leland, who viewed many of the manuscripts he collected as of "ancient" origin, English antiquaries acquired a sense of distance both from the periods they studied and from the documents created in those times. They acquired this sense at the same time that they were developing a love of the past for its own sake. The same reviving interest in the Middle Ages which, late in Elizabeth's reign, drew even classical scholars such as Camden to explore England's medieval past, made the collection of manuscripts, along with other "antiquities" — coins, fossils, funeral inscriptions and the like — increasingly fashionable.

As the heat of the Reformation diminished and Elizabethans formed a clearer idea of their relationship to the English past, it became possible to detach medieval artifacts, even authors, from the taint of popery.⁷⁴ Manuscript collection increased dramatically under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts, and it is to men like Archbishop Parker, John Stow, and Sir Robert

⁷⁴It is worth noting, however, that until the seventeenth century, and even after, fervent interest in medieval documents might arouse suspicion: Stow found himself arrested on charges, later dropped, of Catholic sympathies, while writers like Camden and Lambard constantly avowed their Protestant beliefs. An ambivalence toward the Middle Ages, on these grounds, is characteristic of the psychology of Tudor and Jacobean antiquarianism and distinguishes it from that of the later seventeenth century, which was able to take a more clinical view of the period.

Cotton that we owe the preservation of many medieval chronicles. Parker, the most important Elizabethan collector, employed agents to scour the land for manuscripts. Many of these remain in the Parker collection at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, including the "Parker" text of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, Simeon of Durham, and Ralph Diceto.⁷⁵ The Tudor editors of medieval chronicles were determined to bring these texts into print for a variety of reasons: for Parker and his circle the desire to amass historical ammunition for the English church probably figured most prominently; for Stow it was sheer love of the past. For later editors such as Selden a desire to amass information that could shed light on English history was reason enough to resurrect an ancient author like Eadmer. Such interests occasioned Camden's edition of chronicles, and even the unenthusiastic Savile would scarcely have devoted time to his own edition had he not perceived its contents to be of some importance to knowledge of English history. Such interests endured well past the end of the seventeenth century.⁷⁶ Standards of criticism would improve over the centuries, but a clear line of descent can be traced from Parker, Savile, Camden, and other early editors. They inaugurated a tradition of chronicle editing which continued with Roger Twysden, William Fulman, Thomas Gale, and Henry Wharton in the later seventeenth century, reached even greater heights with Hearne in the eighteenth, and climaxed in the publications in the nineteenth century of the English Historical Society, the Rolls Series and—appropriately—the Caxton Society.⁷⁷ But with the early exceptions of Stow, Hooker, and a few other members of the Holinshed circle, these collectors did not turn from the collection of old chronicles to the writing of new ones.

Edmund Bolton could agree with Savile that the monastic chronicle lacked subtlety, vision, eloquence, and even accuracy; he could even accept Savile's airy dismissal of medieval and early Tudor historians as, in Bolton's paraphrase, the "dreggs of the baser sort of common people." Nevertheless, Bolton was one of a growing number of scholars who realized that detailed research through both the printed and unprinted historical works of the past, "musty rolls . . . dry bloodless chronicles and so many dull and

⁷⁵McKisack, *Medieval History in the Tudor Age*, 28.

⁷⁶For a striking late seventeenth-century example of the enthusiasm for collecting and editing chronicles, see the correspondence between Thomas Gale and the youthful Yorkshire antiquary, Abraham de la Pryme: *The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme, the Yorkshire Antiquary*, ed. Charles Jackson, Surtees Society, 54 (1869–70), 198–213.

⁷⁷Roger Twysden, *Historiae Anglicanae Scriptores X* (1652); William Fulman, *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum* (Oxford, 1684); Thomas Gale, *Historiae Anglicanae scriptores quinque* (Oxford, 1687) and *Historiae Britannicae, Saxonicae, Anglo-danicae, scriptores XV* (Oxford, 1691); Henry Wharton, *Anglia sacra sive collectio historiarum de archiepiscopis et episcopis Angliae ad annum 1540*, 2 vols. (1691); Thomas Hearne, *Chronica Angliae*, 20 vols. (Oxford, 1709–35).

heavy paced Histories," would prove essential to anyone who wished to write a new "universal history for England" in place of the "vast vulgar tomes" produced by the printers.⁷⁸ Common lawyers in search of precedents found them in the many documents and charters preserved, often exclusively, in chronicles, as well as in the remarks of the chroniclers themselves. They soon learned to distinguish a good chronicle from a bad. The same Edward Littleton who expressed his distaste for Polydore Vergil so loudly, had declared barely six weeks earlier that he held Matthew Paris to be "an author of special credit."⁷⁹ A greater scholar, John Selden, asserted similarly that the value of the old chronicle lay not in its style or teachings but in the evidence it provided about the chronicler's own time. It constituted a historical source like many other materials: diaries, letters, and especially public records, and was to be checked against these other materials. Indeed, Selden deemed most valuable those chronicles which appeared to have been founded upon sources which no longer existed by his own day; he singled out Henry Knighton's *Compilatio de Eventibus Angliae*, dealing with the period from Edgar to 1395, as perhaps the most valuable of medieval chronicles because many of the records it used had now disappeared. In other words, a chronicle was for Selden no longer a bad history but the raw material for the writing of a good one.⁸⁰

By 1600, the very intellectual status of the chronicle had changed. Technological and social change had removed its reason for existence, and it ceased to provide an attractive medium for the representation of the past, becoming instead the raw material for media which could do that job better. Having lost its home in the now vanished monasteries, and found temporary shelter in the printers' shops, it dwelt now principally on the bookshelf, to speak to the general reader only from the footnote. An art had truly become an artifact.

⁷⁸Savile, *Scriptores post Bedam*, preface; B.L. MS Harl. 6521, fo. 137; Bolton, *Hypercritica: or a rule of judgment for writing or reading our histories* (written 1621), in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols., ed. Joel Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), 1:96–97.

⁷⁹*Commons Debates*, 1628, 2:335 (7 April, 1628).

⁸⁰Selden was quite correct in his assessment of the value of Knighton's work. Knighton based much of it on the *Polychronicon*, but he also used the archives of Leicester Abbey and a chronicle of the abbey that had been lost by Selden's time: *Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnithon Monachi Leycestrensis*, 2 vols., ed. J.R. Lumby, (Rolls Series, 1889–95), 1:142; M.V. Clarke, "Henry Knighton and the Library Catalogue of Leicester Abbey," *English Historical Review* 45 (1930): 103–7; V.H. Galbraith, "The Chronicle of Henry Knighton," in *Fritz Saxl 1890–1948: a Volume of Memorial Essays from his Friends in England*, ed. D.J. Gordon (London and New York: Nelson, 1957), 136–45.