

Fra: Walsingham

THE QUEEN'S AGENT

Francis Walsingham
at the Court of Elizabeth I

JOHN COOPER

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Abbreviations in the Notes

BL British Library

NPG National Portrait Gallery, London

TNA The National Archives, Kew

APC *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. J. R. Dasent et al. (London, 1890–1964)

CSP *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth*, ed. R. Lemon et al. (London, 1856–71)

CSP *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth*, ed. J. Stevenson et al. (London, 1863–1950)

CSP *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland, and Mary, Queen of Scots*, ed. J. Bain et al. (Edinburgh, 1898–1969)

CSP *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice*, ed. Rawdon Brown et al. (London, 1864–1947)

HMC Historical Manuscripts Commission

STC *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books ... 1475–1640*, ed. W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer (London, 1986–91)

VCH Victoria County History of England

EHR English Historical Review

ELH English Literary History

HJ Historical Journal

HLQ Huntington Library Quarterly

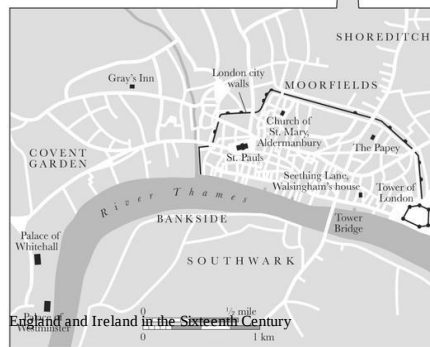
JEH Journal of Ecclesiastical History

PP Past and Present

SCJ0 Sixteenth Century Journal

TRHS Transactions of the Royal Historical Society

WMQ William and Mary Quarterly



England and Ireland in the Sixteenth Century

Prologue



On the feast day of St Bartholomew 1572, a marked man picked his way through the streets of Paris towards the residence of the English ambassador. The Sieur de Briquemault had just seen his son murdered in front of him, two victims among the thousands of Protestants who were being cut down by their Catholic neighbours. His own survival now depended on reaching Francis Walsingham without being recognised. The road to the suburb of Saint Marceau was well known to Briquemault, who had visited the English embassy several times since Walsingham's arrival in January 1571. British informants were on the lookout for Protestant Huguenots fleeing the mob justice which had taken hold of the city. Carrying a side of mutton on each shoulder, the aristocratic Briquemault tried to lose himself among the porters and carters who worked the medieval streets of Paris. When he stumbled and fell at the city gate, friendly hands helped him up and hoisted the meat onto his back. The French guards watching for any trouble outside the embassy had no interest in a delivery man, and Briquemault made it inside.

Walsingham could have refused to help the Sieur de Briquemault. As English subjects and Protestant heretics, the ambassador and his staff were already under threat from the Catholic crowd rampaging through the city. Briquemault had been close to the Huguenot leader Admiral Coligny, whose murder on the king's orders had unleashed the torrent of violence pouring through Paris and provincial France. Giving asylum to such a prominent fugitive could threaten the lives of other English nationals and their Protestant allies, who had taken refuge in Walsingham's house. Then there was the safety of his own family to consider, his pregnant wife and his young daughter. The decision was one of the toughest which Walsingham would ever face: to trust in God's providence and give sanctuary to Briquemault, or to play the politician and turn him in. When the Frenchman refused the offer of money and horses and pleaded on his knees, Walsingham chose to follow his conscience. Briquemault was disguised as a groom and hidden in the embassy stables. His discovery after seven days was blamed on one of his own servants, who was spotted in the city and made to reveal the whereabouts of his master. The king demanded that Briquemault be handed over, adding that he would force his way into the embassy if necessary. Even now Walsingham did not give up on his friend, accompanying him to court in a closed coach to petition for his life. It did no good: Briquemault was tried and executed on a charge of plotting with his fellow Huguenots to overthrow the Valois monarchy.¹

The incident passes unnoticed in the traditional version of Walsingham's career, yet it says a lot about the courage of the man who served Queen Elizabeth as ambassador, principal secretary and chief of security. His efforts to save a fellow Protestant from being slaughtered were recorded by Walsingham's agent Tomasso Sasseti, in one of the comparatively few coherent accounts of the St Bartholomew's Day massacres. A reader of Machiavelli and a friend of the historian Lodovico Guicciardini, Captain Sasseti had volunteered for Elizabeth's army in Ireland before Walsingham recruited him for his embryonic secret service. He took his place in a network of news and intelligence which would ultimately stretch from Constantinople to the new-found lands of Canada and Virginia. Francis Walsingham is justly famous as a spymaster, a pioneer in cryptography and an expert in

turning his enemies into double agents paid by the state. Catholic plots against Elizabeth were allowed to run just long enough to expose the full extent of their support. Less familiar is Walsingham's role in Elizabethan foreign policy, his long struggle with the issue of the queen's marriage and his promotion of English plantations in Ireland and America. His life in royal service saw him fighting in other battles, against the canker of court faction as well as the illness which was gradually poisoning him. Where others would have crumpled under the burden of government, Walsingham stayed by Elizabeth's side until the twin threats of the Queen of Scots and the Spanish Armada had been neutralised.

Walsingham often wielded power over the lives of others. The destruction of Mary Stuart has been attributed to him by both critics and admirers, though Walsingham exonerated himself of any blame as she had conspired to destroy his mistress, and consequently she deserved to die. The execution of Catholic missionary priests is harder to justify. Walsingham was responsible for protecting the queen from assassination, and he saw it as his duty to use every weapon in his arsenal. Imprisonment, torture and a state-sponsored campaign of intimidation were all employed to drive Catholics into conformity with the established Church of England. Walsingham's agents infiltrated the English Catholic community at home and in exile, tempting the radicals in their midst to break cover by standing up for what they believed.

Modern lawyers would condemn this as entrapment, but again Walsingham's conscience was clear. Hidden treason would always reveal itself in the end, just as a witch could never fully conceal the pact which she had made with the devil. England was engaged in a war; literally so in the Netherlands and on the oceans from the mid-1580s, but also in spiritual combat against the forces of the Antichrist, whether in the form of the pope or the Guise family or Philip II of Spain. The need to convince Elizabeth of this fact was Walsingham's most urgent priority during the two decades which he spent as her adviser and principal secretary. He presented himself to the world as the queen's agent, carrying out her policies and protecting her from harm. The full picture may surprise anyone who thinks that Tudor England was governed solely by personal monarchy. Walsingham was loyal and true to Elizabeth, devoted his life to her service; but he also cajoled her, clashed with her, and ultimately authorised the beheading of Mary Stuart without her knowledge. Queen Elizabeth I believed that she was in command of the ship of state, but Francis Walsingham was often at the tiller.

NOTES

¹ Briquemault and Sasseti: John Tedeschi, 'Tomasso Sasseti's Account of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre', in A. Soman (ed.), *The Massacre of St Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents* (The Hague, 1974), 143, where Briquemault is called Bricamo. 'Journal of Sir Francis Walsingham from Dec. 1570 to April 1583', ed. C. T. Martin, *Camden Miscellany* 6 (London, 1870–1), 5, 10, 13; Dudley Digges, *The Compleat Ambassador, or, Two Treaties of the Intended Marriage of Qu. Elizabeth* (London, 1655), 270–1, 345. The Briquemault incident is not mentioned in Conyers Read's account of St Bartholomew: *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford, 1925), I, 219–22.

1 Exodus



In 1529 a London lawyer named William Walsingham used the proceeds of his thriving practice to buy the manor of Foot's Cray, a dozen miles out of town on the road to the Kentish coast. As he and many like him were discovering, it was a good time to be a barrister. The name of Walsingham was well known in London, and William was able to trade on his contacts in city government and the royal household. King Henry VIII chose him to report on the possessions of the disgraced minister Cardinal Wolsey, and he was elected to a prestigious readership at Gray's Inn. In 1532 he was appointed under-sheriff of London, the highest position which a city lawyer could hope to achieve. His wife Joyce had already given him daughters who could be married into prominent families; all that he now lacked was a son.

Regular registers of baptisms weren't introduced until the later 1530s, so the year of Francis Walsingham's birth is uncertain. But if we count back from his admission to King's College, Cambridge then it was probably 1531 or 1532, the twenty-second year of King Henry's reign. Norfolk is the place known for sure, although Foot's Cray seems more likely than the family's London home near Aldermanbury in Cripplegate ward; mothers of means usually chose to have their babies away from the filth and pestilence of the city. Francis would have been christened as soon as he could safely be carried to the parish church, in a rite that was rich in sacramental ceremony. The devil was exorcised with salt and holy oil before the baby was immersed in the font and wrapped in a christening cloth. Children who died before they could be cleansed of original sin were believed to go into limbo rather than heaven, hence the urgency of getting them to baptism.

Some pedigrees trace the ancestry of the family back to the village of Little Walsingham in Norfolk. It would be ironic if Francis Walsingham, who grew to loathe Catholicism, could be connected to one of the greatest sites of pilgrimage in medieval England. Henry VIII prayed at Little Walsingham in thanks for the birth of his short-lived son Henry in 1511, before the Reformation swept away its shrine to the Virgin Mary. But the link with Norfolk is probably apocryphal. The earliest reliable evidence dates from fifteenth-century London, where the Walsinghams emerged as property owners and members of the prestigious Vintners' Company. In 1424 the merchant Thomas Walsingham bought a country manor at Scadbury near Chislehurst, so staking his claim to be a member of the gentry. It was a pattern that would define the English upper class for centuries to come: owning land was a social passport out of the world of commerce. Thomas's grandson James had a long career, serving Henry VII as sheriff of Kent in 1486–7 and travelling to France with Henry VIII in 1520. He witnessed the fantastical Field of Cloth of Gold as one of the king's honour guard. James Walsingham had two sons, Edmund – who inherited the estate at Scadbury – and William, who was Francis's father.

Edmund Walsingham scrambled a rung or so higher up the social hierarchy. He earned a knighthood fighting the Scots at Flodden, and accompanied his father to France in 1520. Two years later he attended King Henry during the visit of the emperor Charles V to England. The sword and helmet that were once hung above his tomb are now preserved at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. His wife Anne owned a jewel depicting Henry VIII within a golden heart, a visible statement of her family's

standing at court. In 1521 Sir Edmund was appointed lieutenant of the Tower of London, giving him day-to-day responsibility for the prisoners held there. He found himself guarding both the Protestant translator John Frith, burned for heresy in 1533, and Frith's great enemy Thomas More, beheaded in 1535 for his refusal to accept Henry VIII's supremacy over the Church of England. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester and another Catholic martyr, complained of harsh treatment at Walsingham's hands. The duties of lieutenant included supervising the torture of suspected traitors on the rack. For years hence, his nephew Francis would be authorising the same methods of interrogation.

William Walsingham had no prospects of a landed inheritance, so he turned to London and the law. Like Thomas More, he prospered on the legal business of the city. John Stow's *Survey of London* describes Aldermanbury as a street with many fair houses 'meet for merchants or men of worship' with a conduit of fresh water running down the middle. St Mary Aldermanbury had a churchyard and a cloister where the curious could see a shank bone reputedly belonging to a giant. William Walsingham asked to be buried in the church, and left its high altar a symbolic shilling in his will. Any monument to him would have been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, while the Wren church that replaced it was reduced to rubble during the Blitz and removed to Fulton, Missouri as a tribute to Winston Churchill. But a memorial to Sir Edmund survives in Chislehurst parish church next to a tablet to his grandson Thomas, who probably did some intelligence work for Sir Francis Walsingham and was a close friend of Christopher Marlowe.¹

If William Walsingham enjoyed a degree of contact with the royal household, then his wife was even better connected. Joyce Walsingham was the younger sister of the Protestant courtier Sir Anthony Denny. As one of the principal gentlemen of Henry VIII's privy chamber, Denny was the closest thing that the king had to a friend during the 1540s. His position as keeper of the privy purse made him responsible for Henry's huge personal expenditure on buildings, artwork and gambling. As groom of the stool, the gentleman in charge of the king's close-stool or portable toilet, Denny regulated access to the royal apartments during the last two years of Henry's reign. He also took charge of the dry stamp, a facsimile of the king's signature which empowered him to authorise documents as if they had been signed by Henry in person.

This was a remarkable concentration of power, based on closeness to the king rather than a bureaucratic office. When the royal doctors decided that the time had come for Henry VIII to prepare for death in January 1547, it was Denny who had the unenviable task of telling the king. Denny kept his faith in reform even when Henry grew suspicious of Protestant radicalism, and he was among those who ensured that the young Edward VI was advised by councillors of the right religious persuasion. Protector Somerset appointed him as Edward's guardian during his own absences from London fighting the Scots, and he was still close to the throne when he died in 1549. One unconnected with the Tower of London, another at the core of the king's court: these were powerful connections for a London lawyer's son. The tradition of royal service ran in Francis Walsingham's blood.

'Kent is the key of all England', wrote the traveller and antiquary John Leland in the 1530s. Henry VIII had spent much of his childhood at Eltham Palace, four miles from Foot's Cray. The Walsingham lands lay in a belt of arable farms and small estates that sent their wheat to the ever-expanding city of London. Livestock was raised on the salt marshes of the nearby Thames estuary. Timber and cloth travelled from the forests of the Weald, where an embryonic iron industry met the demand for cannon to arm Henry VIII's navy. To the east the road ran towards the River Medway at Rochester and onward to Canterbury, the ecclesiastical capital of England.

Kent was a landscape of ancient settlement, closely governed and prosperous. But its society was also experiencing some unsettling changes under the Tudors. Wealth was becoming concentrated in the hands of relatively few gentlemen and yeomen farmers, causing friction within a social order

which was supposed to be fixed and harmonious. Population was rising fast, while people were increasingly on the move in search of work. As a justice of the peace for Kent and under-sheriff of London, Francis Walsingham's father was faced with the consequences of this demographic revolution in the form of growing problems of vagabondage and crime. At its most acute, economic discontent began to shade into politics. Kentish cloth-workers refused to pay a forced loan to fund the king's wars in France, following a tradition of resistance to unjust taxation which stretched back past Jack Cade's rebellion of 1450 to memories of Wat Tyler and the Peasants' Revolt.

The Church was traditionally a force for stability in turbulent times. Sermons and prayerbooks taught that people should submit to adversity and focus on the life of the world to come. But that bedrock was also shifting in response to events in Lutheran Germany, and its trade links with Europe meant that Kent was one of the first English counties to feel the tremors. In 1530 a joiner named Thomas Hitton was caught importing heretical books at Gravesend and burned at the stake on the orders of Bishop Fisher. Two priests and a carpenter who criticised devotional images and praised the works of Martin Luther were faced with a stark choice, to recant or to die for heresy. Kent had a history of religious radicalism to match its tradition of rebellion. The secretive community of the Lollards, who had been reading an English Bible and criticising the doctrine of purgatory for several hundred years, was strong in Maidstone and the Weald. But figures like Hitton represented the advance guard of a new movement, inspired by Lutheran ideas about the priesthood of all believers and justification by faith; and unlike the Lollards, its converts were determined to evangelise.

Disturbed by the spread of heresy in their midst, Catholics received comfort from an unlikely source. Elizabeth Barton was working as a serving maid when her graphic visions of heaven and the deadly sins first brought her to the notice of the authorities. An investigation into the 'holy maid of Kent' pronounced her to be orthodox, and she subsequently took her vows as a Benedictine nun in Canterbury. But as the movement to break from Rome gathered pace, Barton's revelations acquired a sharply political edge. Having spoken in the pope's defence and called for the burning of Protestant books, she told the king that he would not survive a month on the throne if he divorced Katherine of Aragon. Henry was outraged, and put her under Sir Edmund Walsingham's guard in the Tower. She was hanged and beheaded for treason at Tyburn in 1534, alongside the Canterbury monks who had promoted her as a prophetess.²

Francis Walsingham was born during this watershed of the English Reformation. The king's personal dislike of Luther meant that it was not until the early 1530s that an official campaign got under way; and reform, when it came, was driven by Henry's need to settle the succession rather than any commitment to Protestant theology. In 1533 the Act of Appeals declared that 'this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king'. A thousand-year allegiance to the papacy was not so much severed as declared to have been an illusion. The English Church was subject to kings rather than foreign potentates, just as it had been before the pope had usurped the rightful power of the crown. Printed for proclamation to the king's subjects, the Act unleashed a barrage of positive and negative propaganda. Henry VIII was hailed as the lion of Judah and Christ's lieutenant on earth, while the pope was vilified as the Antichrist. The royal supremacy over the Church was preached in every parish, taught in every school and catechism class. Heads of household had to swear an oath to uphold it.

Walsingham belonged to a generation of English men and women who had never known how to pray for the pope. Viewed from their perspective, the Reformation seemed like a rebellion of young people against their elders. Henry VIII's erratic relationship with religious reform left many causes for them to fight. Church services were still largely in Latin, incomprehensible to most of the people attending them. The king would not permit any dilution of the traditional teaching on the mass, or the reworking of Christ's sacrifice in which bread and wine were miraculously transformed into body and

blood. Chantry priests were still singing for the souls of the departed in purgatory. And yet the Bible was openly preached in English from 1539, while parish churches were being cleared of their images of the saints. Targets of the iconoclasm in Kent included the 'rood of grace' at Boxley Abbey, whose moving eyes and lips were exposed as a fraud in the market-place at Maidstone, and the sumptuous shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury. Catholicism was becoming tainted with superstition and trickery. It was also increasingly derided as foreign, unpatriotic, 'Roman'. Protestant scholars such as John Leland and John Bale searched the historical record for proof of England's special place within Christendom. In Queen Elizabeth's reign this nascent sense of nationhood would peak in the belief that the English were an elect people, a new Israel en route for the promised land. It was a conviction which Walsingham would share.³



William Walsingham died in 1534, the year that saw Henry VIII proclaimed as supreme head of the Church of England and the holy maid of Kent carted to execution. Francis, his only son, was no more than three years old. William signed himself 'esquire' in his will, as did his own father James Walsingham. Sixteenth-century society divided itself up into ranks or orders marked out by forms of address, the order of precedence in church, even the cut and colour of their clothing. 'Esquire' placed Francis Walsingham's father and grandfather among the lesser gentry. They owned land and displayed a coat of arms, became magistrates and sat on the commissions that monitored London's drinking water, but remained below the first tier of families which sent knights of the shire to Parliament and exchanged gifts with the king at new year. As for his soul, William committed it 'to Almighty God our blessed Lady Saint Mary and to all the holy company of heaven'. His work as under-sheriff would have required him to keep a watchful eye for heresy within his London jurisdiction. If he had any Lutheran leanings of his own, he kept them to himself.

Having provided for the marriage of his five daughters, William left the rest of his property to Joyce, 'my well-beloved wife', during his son's minority. Sixteenth-century legal documents are not known for their displays of emotion, so it seems that Francis's parents had developed a real affection for each other, perhaps had even married for love. Joyce was named as an executor, together with Sir Edmund Walsingham and one of William's fellow under-sheriffs. His death left Joyce a widow at twenty-seven, a property-owner with contacts at court and young enough to have more children. Within a couple of years she had married again. Her new husband was the courtier Sir John Carey, brother to the William Carey whose wife Mary Boleyn (the 'other' Boleyn girl) was Henry VIII's mistress for a time in the early 1520s. This proved to be another useful political connection. William and Mary's son Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, was Walsingham's near contemporary and a cousin (or, according to gossip, half-brother) to Queen Elizabeth.

Francis very probably went to live with his mother and stepfather at Hunsdon in Hertfordshire, a royal manor where Sir John was bailiff. Princesses Mary and Elizabeth and Prince Edward all spent time there in the 1530s and 40s, and Henry VIII is also known to have visited. In 1546 Edward had his portrait painted at Hunsdon, the gables and tall Tudor chimneys of the house visible through an open window behind the prince. Francis may also have spent time on Sir Anthony Denny's estates nearby, or with his grandfather at Scadbury. Frustratingly, nothing else is known about his childhood. Any private papers in the Walsingham archive were weeded out from the records of state after his death, taking much of his personal life with them. But assuming that Joyce Walsingham shared her brother's Anthony's reformed religion, it is fair to speculate that she was the source of the Protestantism that defined Francis's world-view and career.⁴

The first formal record of Walsingham's education is his admission to King's College, Cambridge early in Edward VI's reign. The college accounts reveal that he was paying quarterly bills for food and lodging by June 1548. He matriculated as a member of the university in November and remained in residence for at least two years, leaving sometime in 1550–1. There is no evidence that he took a degree, although this was not unusual for someone of his rank: formal qualifications were mainly for those seeking a career in the Church. His background allowed Walsingham to claim the status of a fellow commoner, giving him social privileges over poorer scholars in chapel and hall. But conditions at King's would still have been spartan, closer to the life of a medieval monk than to the luxurious indulgence enjoyed by later generations of gentleman students.

The college of Walsingham's day was cramped and cold, one small court huddled behind a fortified gatehouse. Land levelled a century earlier for a great complex of quadrangles remained empty and unbuilt on. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge still moved to the rhythms of the recent dissolved monasteries, private study and prayer interspersed with lectures in Latin and Greek. Student rooms were fireless, windows shuttered rather than glazed. Discipline at King's could be enforced by flogging and the stocks. But the college also provided security and fellowship, a combination of austerity and privilege in which a sense of communal identity could take deep root. Walsingham's time at Cambridge placed him among a body of five or six hundred men, many of whom would rise to become the governors, scholars and churchmen of Elizabeth's reign. It also put him at the fulcrum of England's spiritual renewal.

Cambridge students had been among the first to imbibe the new religious ideas coming in from the European continent. Opposite King's College lay the White Horse inn or 'little Germany', where Lutheran study groups had gathered in the 1520s. Officially the university took a strong stand against heresy. Under the chancellorship of John Fisher, graduates were required to repudiate the errors of Luther and John Wyclif and to affirm their belief in Catholic doctrine. But when Fisher was succeeded by Henry VIII's chief minister Thomas Cromwell, the orthodoxy changed dramatically. Royal injunctions abolished the teaching of canon law and revised the theology curriculum. The officers of the colleges and the university were ordered to surrender their 'papistical muniments' to the crown. King's advertised its loyalty by paying to have the injunctions painted on a board, while the whole university was required to attend mass in Great St Mary's to pray for King Henry VIII. There was to be no room for doubt about the new ordering of Church and state. The charter of Trinity College, drawn up a month before Henry's death, specified the fight against the pope as part of its mission.⁵

Walsingham's arrival at King's in the spring of 1548 coincided with two major events in the life of the college. The first was the completion of the stunning sequence of stained glass that had been gradually installed in the chapel over the previous thirty years. The construction of King's Chapel had begun as a monument to Henry VI and the house of Lancaster, but its decoration was utterly Tudor. A pageant of royal iconography framed the lives of the Virgin and Christ that were celebrated in the glass: union roses, the royal arms, Prince Edward's fleur-de-lis, the badges of Anne Boleyn and Katherine Parr. The result rivalled the Henry VII Chapel at Westminster Abbey as a showcase of dynastic symbolism. One window dating from the 1520s pays homage to Henry VIII as Solomon receiving the tribute of the Queen of Sheba, a theme which was also taken up by the court painter Hans Holbein. With the break from Rome the image acquired a more specific resonance, the emperor who built a new temple in which his people could worship.⁶

The second event was the resignation of the provost of the college, George Day, and his replacement by John Cheke. They were similar men in some ways: Day a royal chaplain and frequently at court, Cheke a tutor to the royal children. Both were devotees of classical Greek, and indeed Cheke had been Day's pupil at St John's College. But the Renaissance humanism which they shared led them in different directions. Day supported the royal supremacy over the Church which

remaining a conservative in terms of doctrine. Henry VIII approved of his loyalty and appointed him Bishop of Chichester. But when Henry was succeeded by Edward VI, the fellows of King's took advantage of the altered atmosphere to purge the Catholic practice of private masses from the college chapel. Day promptly resigned as provost. He was deprived of his bishopric three years later for refusing to replace altars with the wooden tables decreed by the new Protestant rite.

The new head of King's was a scholar rather than a clergyman. As a junior fellow at St John's, Cheke had attracted a circle of students devoted to the study of Greek. They set themselves apart by speaking the language in the style set out by the great humanist scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam. In the modern world, where knowledge of classical Greek has faded almost beyond recovery, it is difficult to comprehend why such a dry academic question should provoke the controversy that followed. Stephen Gardiner, who was appointed chancellor of Cambridge following Cromwell's execution in 1540, ordered harsh punishments for anyone using the Erasmian rather than the medieval pronunciation. Erasmus was no Protestant; but by opening up the question of biblical translation, his Greek New Testament made a breach in the old Church through which the floodwaters were cascading by the 1540s. Cheke backed down and was appointed tutor to Prince Edward in 1544, devising a curriculum based on languages, scripture and history. He continued in post after 1547, weaning the young king onto Cicero, rhetoric and finally Greek.

Cheke's duties kept him often at court, but his impact on Walsingham's Cambridge was profound. In 1549 he conducted a visitation of the university to test its compliance with Protestantism and refashion its teaching along humanist lines. He was appointed Lady Margaret professor of divinity the same year. His counterpart as regius professor was the eminent German theologian Martin Bucer, whose attempts to find consensus between the reformed churches of Europe may have moulded Walsingham's own belief in Protestant unity in face of a common Catholic enemy. Bucer lectured to large crowds on St Paul's letter to the Ephesians and contributed revisions to the Book of Common Prayer. When he died in 1551, his funeral procession ran to three thousand. Walsingham's tutor, Thomas Gardiner wrote verses mourning his death. So complete was Bucer's identification with Protestantism that his bones were exhumed in Mary's reign and burned in a posthumous attempt to obliterate his heresy.

Walsingham drank deeply from this wellspring of reform. Cambridge refined the faith which his mother had taught him, while exposure to Bucer's teachings put him in touch with the European Reformation. An education in the classics induced another powerful impulse in Walsingham and his contemporaries, to enter the service of crown and state. Cheke's collaborator in Greek philology was Thomas Smith, professor of civil law, who was ambassador to France in the 1560s and worked alongside Walsingham as senior principal secretary between 1572 and his death in 1577. Cheke and Smith both taught Roger Ascham, who devised a programme of Christian and classical studies for Princess Elizabeth and was appointed her Latin secretary when she became queen. The most famous of Cheke's pupils was William Cecil, twelve years Walsingham's senior, who became an accomplished classicist and married Cheke's sister Mary. Cecil advanced to be the greatest statesman of his generation, lord treasurer and Baron of Burghley. For twenty years of Elizabeth's reign, the government of England would depend on the ability of Cecil and Walsingham to co-operate.⁷



The stained glass of King's College Chapel survived the iconoclasm of both the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries and can still be seen more or less as Walsingham knew it, a final flourish of sacred Catholic art in England. Its depictions of the assumption and coronation of the Virgin Mary

became controversial almost as soon as they were installed but were saved, ironically enough, by the Tudor royal imagery threaded through them. Beyond the sheltering walls of King's, Edward VI and his governors led the attack on the sin of idolatry. The compromise between tradition and reform which had held Church and state together during Henry VIII's last decade was swiftly abandoned by the council ruling in the young king's name. Churchwardens were ordered to deface or destroy all the devotional images that had survived the purges of the 1530s. Four thousand chantries and colleges singing masses for the dead were dissolved. Altars were removed and priests given permission to marry. The new English prayer book stipulated communion in both bread and wine and left out the symbolic elevation of the Host, provoking riots in several parts of the country and a full-scale rebellion in Cornwall and Devon. Further reforms in 1552 converted the Eucharist into an act of commemoration, and ended the practice of anointing the baptised and the dying. As the Protestant propagandist Richard Morison recalled during Mary's reign, 'The greater change was never wrought in so short space in any country since the world was'.

The king's own role in this is hard to quantify. There was no regency; Edward ruled. But he was also subject to the guidance of men like Walsingham's uncle Anthony Denny. What evidence there is suggests a boy who internalised everything that Cheke and his other tutors could teach him. When he was eleven, Edward collected scriptural passages on the subjects of idolatry and justification by faith and translated them into French as a gift for his uncle the Duke of Somerset. Another exercise was to compose a treatise on the papal supremacy. Deploying arguments for and against in typical humanist fashion, Edward came to the conclusion that the pope was a tyrant, 'the true son of the devil' and an Antichrist on earth. He also kept a notebook of the numerous sermons he heard at court. The contrast with his father, who had transacted royal business whilst listening to mass, must have been obvious.⁸

To Protestants who had suffered intimidation and occasionally active persecution during the closing conservative years of Henry VIII's reign, the liberation of the gospel under Edward was an act of divine providence. Here, at last, was a regime truly committed to reform. Preaching and print began to carry religious debate far beyond the clerical elite to which it had traditionally been confined. The gates of the kingdom of heaven, obscured for so long by ignorance and superstition, were being cleared of weeds and flung open. And yet there were many who struggled to make sense of the new teaching on salvation. A movement which identified itself as unshackling the word of God, giving it back to the poor and unlettered to whom it had been revealed in the time of Christ, also devalued the good works which had always been central to the spirituality of English men and women. Leading a good and charitable life was no longer enough; the Christian soldier must also have faith, defined not as broad belief but as a burning inner conviction, the faith of a convert on the model of St Paul. On this could weigh against the intolerable burden of human sin on the day of judgement.

Nowhere did this evangelical energy pulse so strongly as in London, where Walsingham spent the final part of Edward's reign and possibly the first year or so of Mary's. He is last recorded at Cambridge in September 1550, although the relevant college accounts for the following year are missing, so he may have been in residence for a few months longer. He is remembered at King's in a portrait hanging in the hall, a version of the half-length attributed to the Dutch artist John de Critz in London's National Portrait Gallery. According to the Latin inscription which hung above his grave in St Paul's Cathedral, Walsingham completed his education with a pilgrimage to Europe to study in languages and laws. He was certainly a gifted linguist, especially in French and Italian. It was probably the death of his stepfather Sir John Carey that recalled him to London. In 1552 he enrolled at Gray's Inn, where William Walsingham had been a reader and Cecil had also studied during the early 1540s. He may have been testing his vocation as a lawyer like his father, although this does not necessarily follow: having some learning in the law enabled a gentleman to defend his lands against the predatory litigation which increasingly occupied the Tudor courts. More than this, Gray's Inn

offered Walsingham a billet close to Westminster and Whitehall, the hub around which king and court, the privy council and Parliament all revolved.

Walsingham was about twenty when he came to London. He found it in a ferment that was partly religious and partly social in character. Two years had passed since every altar in the capital had been ousted by a plain communion table. At St Paul's the iron grates of the choir had been bricked up to prevent traditionalists from engaging in any unauthorised veneration of the sacrament. Preachers denounced the rampant avarice of the ruling class along with the more conventional sins of the city: its want of charity and its addictions to gambling and prostitution. Ordinary people were experiencing sudden personal conversions. An apprentice allegedly turned away from his former riotous living when he heard the lectures at his local church. Other responses to change were more troubling to the authorities. Chroniclers recorded the stories of those who had seen strange omens, three suns in the sky or ghostly soldiers hanging in the air. The atmosphere was fevered, literally so when a mysterious sickness began to strike down both the rich and the poor. Courtiers who contracted the sweat were dancing at nine o'clock and dead by eleven, hence its given name, 'stop-gallant'. The price of bread rose to heights that had never before been seen, accelerated by bad harvests and the thousands pouring into London in search of work. With no modern economic theory to call on, the privy council blamed the crisis on the sloth of the mayor and aldermen. Preachers came to a different conclusion, detecting the punishing hand of God and calling on their congregations to repent.

Gray's Inn lay just outside the walls of the city of London in what John Stow called the 'suburb' north of Holborn and Chancery Lane. The district was still almost rural, the houses and tenements of Gray's Inn Lane giving way to open fields. Walsingham learned to debate cases within the strict conventions of the common law, familiarising himself with the ossified Latin and Norman French in which writs were sued and judgements delivered. He would also have spent time observing the courts at work in the Palace of Westminster, which had been abandoned as a royal residence early in Henry VIII's reign. It must have seemed that he had entered a strangely medieval world. But life was not wholly limited to moots and learning by rote. The Inns of Court had a tradition of putting on Christmas plays satirising figures in authority (Cardinal Wolsey had been a target during Henry VIII's reign) and commenting on contemporary affairs.

Gray's Inn had a chapel of its own, where barristers and students gathered to mark the opening and closing of the formal legal terms. Its stained-glass window of St Thomas Becket had dutifully been removed on the orders of Henry VIII. But Walsingham would also have been aware of the radical Protestant 'Stranger Churches', the Dutch and French exiles who were offered the same emergency hospitality in London that Martin Bucer had found in Cambridge. The Strangers were given financial support by Edward VI's government, and the dissolved priory church of the Austin Friars in which they worshipped. Under their pastor John à Lasco, they created a miniature Zurich in England and prayed that they would become a beacon of reform to their hosts. Walsingham's sympathies with the Stranger community are revealed in the contributions he made to its upkeep following the St Bartholomew massacre of Protestants in Paris in 1572.⁹

Just when it seemed that English religion was being born again, calamity struck with a suddenness that left godly preachers reeling. In April 1552 King Edward contracted what he described in his diary as measles and smallpox. His health had apparently been robust until now, and he recovered to celebrate his fifteenth birthday in October. But the infection reactivated the tuberculosis which Edward must already have been carrying. His journal suddenly broke off in November 1552, implying that his condition had begun to deteriorate. By Christmas he was clearly ill, and by March 1553 the Venetian ambassador reckoned that he was dying. Edward knew it too, and began to draft a document known as the 'Devise' to alter the succession to the throne as ordained by Henry VIII.

The next few months witnessed some of the most extraordinary political manoeuvring of the entire

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