spotty copy-editing) is one that Bonfield himself readily acknowledges (see 257-58): his evidence yields up a wealth of information about these legal disputes but not the reasoning of the judges who decided them. Numerous kinds of legal documents chart the progress of these cases through the courts but while the final verdicts, at least in cases that were pursued to completion, are recorded, they are never explained. Thus Bonfield can only infer from the arguments made by the various interested parties what they thought the judges wanted to hear. Bonfield concludes, quite reasonably if somewhat unsatisfactorily, that the probate courts, given great discretionary leeway in the period’s culture of will-making, simply must have ruled in favor of those litigants who were, with the help of their witnesses and attorneys, best able to craft persuasive narratives about testators, their will-making, and their dying intentions (see esp 106-07, 128-29, 154-55, and 175-76). But we never hear the judges say just that. The effect is a bit like seeing four acts of a Shakespeare play and then simply being told who marries whom (or who kills whom) at the end. It is the Duke’s final speech—the one explaining why things happened the way you thought that they would probably happen—that you really want to hear.


The late Conrad Russell—affectionately known as ‘the earl’—was a towering, provocative and extraordinary presence within early Stuart studies, and this book contains probably his final contribution to a field that he did so much to shape. It is based upon, but not confined to, the Trevelyan lectures that he delivered at Cambridge University in 1995, the six instalments of which are supplemented by four other chapters which were subsequently drafted as part of a planned monograph. Thus, while the book has been edited from an unfinished typescript by two former PhD students, it reflects Russell’s own plan, and represents a project that he evidently hoped would sit alongside two earlier volumes covering a later period: *Parliaments and English Politics,*
1621-1629 (1979) and The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637-1642 (1991). Like them it is based on a detailed narrative of Westminster politics, analysis of which is supplemented by an introduction, three thematic chapters (on Anglo-Scottish union, religion and political ideas, and royal finances), as well as a brief concluding assessment of ‘What was new in the 1620s?’ Like them it is profoundly rich and erudite, and it is hard not to ‘hear’ the great man’s voice in some of the more gnomic statements and cryptic references. And like them, it might be thought of as offering the kind of ‘revisionist’ analysis with which Russell became synonymous. However, there are grounds for arguing that this book actually contains important surprises for anyone who expects to find a straightforward re-statement of familiar Russellian ideas, and that herein lies a fairly significant problem.

Of course, it would be foolish to overplay the idea that there are discrepancies between the story told here and the one that marked Russell’s earlier work. This is very clearly a work of ‘high’ revisionism, in both form and substance. It is grounded in, and dominated by, a densely reconstructed narrative, and one that largely ignores the world beyond the palace of Westminster, and its argument very often involves matter-of-fact, even trenchant, challenges to the idea that the period represented a ‘high road’ to civil war, involving worsening constitutional crisis and an increasingly hostile ‘opposition’. Sometimes this is probably a bit crude, as with the rather too abrupt dismissal of the idea that Parliament’s ‘Apology’ of 1604 was a significant constitutional document. More often, however, it reveals typically Russellian acuity and subtlety, and time and again the analysis involves precise dissection of the kind of evidence that might be thought to support an older ‘whiggish’ narrative. In noting, for example, Sir Robert Wingfield’s idea that the Commons should produce a collection of grievances in 1606, he admits that this was innovative, but also points out that the plan emerged after much-needed funds had been granted to the king, and that the aim was to secure a hearing rather than to demand an answer. Similarly, he is at pains to point out that legislative activity tended to be inversely proportional to constitutional ‘conflict’, and uses this to suggest that political tension ebbed and flowed rather than simply mounted over time. And emphasis is repeatedly placed on the idea that the king was astute—and ‘arbitrary only when frightened’
—while his critics behaved irrationally and naively, and were frequently 'not in the real world' (76).

However, what will perhaps be more surprising is the degree to which Russell also acknowledges the significance of division, and division involving fundamental theoretical and constitutional issues. Most obviously this means recognising that the question of 'union' with Scotland stirred up big issues relating to the nature and definition of a state, and of authority within it, and here Russell recognises that the king opened 'a Pandora's box' (66). Here, indeed, was 'a major constitutional issue', and one on which there was profound disagreement 'on basic constitutional principles', and on 'big theoretical questions' (72). Likewise, Russell also acknowledges that by denying Parliament the right to even discuss matters of property and taxation in relation to impositions (1610), the king provoked 'a state of fundamental constitutional alarm' (82). Peppered throughout the analysis, moreover, are references to the fact that the period witnessed 'intense constitutional alarm' (94), and a 'dialogue of the deaf' (95), and that there was a very real sense in which a 'consent gap' became 'a chasm' (89). There is also evidence that Russell here places much greater emphasis than was once the case on the importance of 'godly' MPs. At one point he even notes that such men may have been few in number, but they were nevertheless 'formidable for their dedication and their organisation' (57). Of course, such statements are frequently subjected to important caveats. Tension over how to interpret the Gunpowder Plot is both acknowledged and used to demonstrate how king and parliament drew closer together. Moments of tension are shown to have been followed by periods of harmony. And James is described as having the tactical ability to get out of tricky situations, not least by means of an occasional 'judo fall' on the Commons (84). These caveats sometimes serve as a reminder that Russelian logic—with its almost wilful desire to contradict received wisdom, and to wriggle away from conclusions about political and religious division—could be infuriating as well as brilliant. Nevertheless, there seems to be a fairly real sense that this book reveals a more or less significant shift in Russell's thinking.

That it only 'seems' to signal such a shift is part of the problem, however, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that this is a prob-
lematic book, in more than one sense. First, it repeatedly sees Russell
drawing upon modern parallels and his own parliamentary experience.
This might be considered appropriate, given that a fairly considerable
part of his later life was spent in the House of Lords rather than in
libraries and record offices, but is nevertheless striking. Russell himself
acknowledges that this might be considered troubling, but his efforts
to defend the practice—by accusing Geoffrey Elton of ostrich-like
tendencies in denying the relevance of modern comparisons—rep-
resents an unconvincing response to those who will accuse an arch
revisionist of committing the sin of anachronism. Secondly, it is hard
to avoid the conclusion that Russell is determined to under-emphasise
the change in his ideas. Thus, while many will welcome the way in
which he has conceded territory to his critics, they may also wonder
whether enough has been done to make this clear. What makes this
book feel so disappointing is that, by making the argument so dense,
by offering so little help to readers who are not already specialists, and
by studiously avoiding direct historiographical engagement, it is likely
to find only a very limited audience.

Charles W. A. Prior and Glenn Burgess, eds. England’s Wars of Religion,
2 illustrations. $115.00. Review by chris r. langley, university
of york.

The fourteen essays produced in this volume revolve around the
premise made by John Morrill in 1983 that the English Civil War
was the last war of religion, rather than the first modern revolution.
Although Morrill claims that this was nothing more than a “throw-
away” line aimed at undermining prevalent Marxist readings of the
mid-seventeenth century, he is right to suggest that it has become the
“load-bearing wall” of this present volume (307). The contributors
successfully illustrate how far studies of the mid-seventeenth century
have developed over the last quarter-century, throwing light on those
areas where politics and religion met. The essays presented engage with
what Glenn Burgess calls “one of the most stubborn of historiographi-