one half-page (68) an entire section unaccountably appears in a much smaller font. Nor is the contents page consistent with the actual contents of pp. 255-58. Given the thoroughness of the Index and Bibliography, to say nothing of the usefulness of the Glossary of Rhetorical Terms (omitted from the contents page), these technical flaws are a pity indeed.


Matthew Reynolds’ study of early modern Norwich is an ambitious project that engages with a number of historical controversies. Reynolds maintains that Norwich was neither the insular city described by John Evans, nor the “modern liberal pluralistic society four centuries ahead of its time” outlined in Munel McClendon’s recent work (32). Far from being a haven of religious toleration that underwent a relatively uncontested Reformation, Norwich became Protestant “in a process that was far from quiet” (35). The religious divisions the Reformation created remained rife, providing Laudian reforms with a measure of lay support within the city, which in turn helped to create “a grass roots royalist contingent by 1642” (255).

Reynolds’ volume is separated into four sections. The first considers Norwich’s response to the Reformation and its emerging identity as a Protestant city from the 1560s to the latter part of James’ reign. Religious division was widespread, evident amongst the higher clergy attached to the Cathedral, where relations were defined by a split between those who stood against further reform and evangelical Protestants. In civic politics a group of evangelical Protestant aldermen sought to promote godly learning, through the patronage of charismatic preachers and the attempted removal of those deemed to be obstructing the progress of the Reformation. By the mid 1570s Norwich had come to Elizabeth’s attention as moving dangerously towards the puritan camp and her fears were realised as the separatist tradition promoted by Robert Browne gained footholds during the 1580s, as did a separatist element led by William Hunt in the 1590s. While Reynolds acknowledges that in assessing levels of support for separatism “we may not be dealing with the tip of an iceberg, so much as the iceberg itself,” he argues
that the significance of the beliefs of Browne and Hunt lay in “the radical continuum it represented, marking an undercurrent of dissent in Norwich, which survived to trouble both the ecclesiastical and civic authorities at the close of the sixteenth century” (97). Some stability was leant to religious and civic affairs in Norwich due to the “measured evangelical programme” of John Jegon, Bishop of Norwich from 1603-1618, though this was quickly unsettled by James’ pursuit of the Spanish match and the disciplinarian leanings of Jegon’s replacement, Samuel Harsnett (111).

The second section charts the turbulent ministry of Harsnett, a “noted anti-Calvinist” as he exerted a tighter control over the city’s preaching ministry, closing a number of lectureships and promoting a more decorous style of church worship (111). By 1624 matters came to a head and a petition against Harsnett’s behaviour was presented to parliament, only for James to intervene and prevent it from going before the Lords. Though the petition was presented at Parliament under the patronage of the Mayor of Norwich, it had not been voted on by the common council in a city assembly, allowing Harsnett to present it as the “underhand work” of a puritan faction (132). Nonetheless, while Harsnett antagonised Norwich’s godly, he also found support among some elements of the city’s inhabitants; such as the group surrounding Robert Debney, one time city burgess and a supporter of a more decorous style of church worship. Through an analysis of the program of beautification in Debney’s parish of St Gregory’s, which came under attack from the godly in the early 1620s as promoting the use of images “to the great offence of the people,” Reynolds shows that in Norwich agitation over church repairs predated Laud’s rise to power by almost a decade (149).

The third section of the book picks up the narrative from Harsnett’s elevation to York in 1629. In 1631 the “trustees for the Religion in Norwich and Norfolk” was established to promote preaching; the specific aim of which, Reynolds argues, was to operate “in the face of official efforts to stem teaching of the central Reformed doctrine, predestination” (160). A dispute broke out between William Bridge, candidate of the Norfolk Trustees, and the anti-Calvinist John Chappell, another city minister. In May 1633 Bridge claimed that Chappell’s teaching of God’s universal grace was an innovation, prompting a godly boycott of Chappell’s sermons. The case was brought before the consistory court and loaded in Chappell’s favour, Bridge being represented as a subversive and later suspended for seven months. Crucially,
Reynolds holds that the spat between Chappell and Bridge contradicts the arguments of Kevin Sharpe, demonstrating that predestination was a central issue in the 1630s. Reynolds also considers the ministry of Matthew Wren, Bishop of Norwich from 1635-1638, whose inflexible enforcement of the “altar policy” during his 1636 visitation caused bitter division amongst Norwich’s citizenry. After the visitation, eleven ministers and one school master were suspended for refusing to comply, failure to reinstate five of whom provoked the then Mayor, Thomas Baker, to support a series of petitions against Wren. Following a number of bitterly divided assembly meetings, a petition was put before a loaded council chamber and it was agreed that it should be presented to the King. The day after this document was sent to London ten aldermen and a sheriff sent an apology to Wren, which “successfully discredited Mayor Baker’s cause before Archbishop Laud and King Charles, much to the chagrin of the godly among Norwich’s citizenry” (198). Reynolds goes on to show that many of the signatories of the latter petition had supported “Laudian” reforms, most evident in their championing of church beatification. Thus, Reynolds highlights the mixed response to Wren’s reforms, concluding “that this was so in a borough typically noted for its native reformed tradition warns against making assumptions about the city’s overarching ‘puritanism’” (213).

The final section follows the fate of the Norwich puritan movement into the early 1640s. What seems clear from Reynolds’ work is that puritanism remained as an active force in Norwich, and those who fled abroad kept in close contact with individuals in the city and continued to promote the godly interest, forming “a puritan network with contacts across the North Sea and the Atlantic” (234). From the early 1640s the puritans gained strength in Norwich, and the city eventually gave its support to parliament, only to have to repel a coup by those inhabitants who supported the King two days later. Shortly before the plot, William Gostlyn, then Mayor of Norwich, a pro-Wrenian and future royalist, was arrested on suspicion of being involved in a royalist conspiracy, which opened the way for a successor sympathetic to Parliament. Reynolds speculates that the disappearance of many royalist figures from Norwich may be a result of their joining the royalist army, while he is keen to highlight that “backing for Parliament was far from unanimous” and “opinion in Norwich in the 1640s was as divided amid the collapse into Civil War as it had been in the 1630s” (250).
That Reynolds is able to cast so much new light on the history of Norwich is due to the vast amount of source material used for this study. A whole range of personal, civic and diocesan records have been meticulously examined, which he is keen to note have helped prevent him from adopting “the same uncritical approach to the city archive” that informs other works on the topic (32). Also, Reynolds’ study maintains a balance between recognising the importance of parochial affairs in determining the fate of the city’s puritans, while never presenting Norwich as insular. However, despite the thrust of his work aiming to highlight the fluidity of religious belief, at times Reynolds overstates his arguments. For example, in his discussion of Thomas Whalle, one time Mayor of Norwich, Reynolds builds a clear argument for Whalle not having been an evangelical Protestant during the late sixteenth century. While he outwardly conformed to the Elizabethan settlement, he was no friend to Protestant refugees from the continent and his home parish of St Simon and St John remained stubbornly attached to decorous forms of worship. Furthermore, he was in contact with a number of recusants and his two sons were future recusants. However, to make the case that a “key aspect” of Whalle’s lack of support for Protestant refugees “was his crypto-Catholicism” overplays the material presented (52). Suspicion of Protestant refugees was not limited to Catholics, while association with Catholics never automatically delineated the religious leanings of an individual. That Whalle was not numbered among the godly does not axiomatically infer that he was a crypto-Catholic; religious identities were far more complex than this interpretation permits and many contemporaries maintained cordial relations with individuals on either side of the confessional divide. Nonetheless, this is a compellingly argued and thoroughly researched piece of work, which provides a valuable reappraisal of the political and religious scene in early modern Norwich. In particular, Reynolds’ case study demonstrates that early modern attitudes on religion, at least in Norwich, were rarely defined by consensus and harmony.