

Report on the Holinshed Workshop

Jesus College, Oxford: 5th-7th January, 2009

We had a thoroughly stimulating two days of talks and debate on Holinshed's *Chronicles*. We are grateful to all those who participated and are now circulating a short summary of the proceedings, as an *aide memoire* for those present, and as information for those who were not able to join us.

Introductory Session

The organisers (**Ian Archer, Felicity Heal and Paulina Kewes**) introduced the Project, and discussed progress on the Edition and the Holinshed Handbook. **Andrew McNeillie**, Senior Commissioning Editor for Literature at Oxford University Press, spoke of the Press's commitment to the multi-volume edition, and his pleasure that the Holinshed Handbook had been signed up. **Ian Archer** demonstrated the Project web-site: Dr Henry Summerson, the Project's researcher who had been funded by Oxford University's Fell Fund for the past year, had mounted extensive material on the site, most notably a very thorough exploration of Holinshed's sources. Henry Summerson's funding should continue for at least the next six months, during which time he will be working on the comparator of the 1577 and 1587 editions (see below) and will be able to offer some research assistance to those embarking on articles for the Handbook. Funding applications to AHRC, who gave the opportunity to resubmit after our initial bid, and to Leverhulme, are in train. The full edition can only go ahead if support is gained from one of the funding bodies: we have to hope for the best.

Plenary 1

Glyn Parry spoke on the relationship between William Harrison's manuscripts and his printed work in Holinshed. He guided the workshop through the complexities of Harrison's 'Chronologie' and raised important questions about the editorial processes in the *Chronicles*. In particular, the use of Harrison as a cited authority in the early history of England in 1577 was often edited out of the 1587 text. Was this Abraham Fleming, or, as Parry thought possible, John Stow, who was later so hostile to Harrison?

The Making of Holinshed

Felicity Heal provided a short introduction to the illustrations in the 1577 edition of the *Chronicles*. They comprise the largest group of illustrations in any secular text of the Tudor period. Although often generic in design, and extensively reused in the text, they are applied carefully to context, and in at least 138 cases are new cuts. They raise questions: why were the cuts rarely used elsewhere? Why were they not reused in 1587? How should the Handbook and Edition deal with the images? Among

important points made in discussion was one by Philip Schwyzer: that the reuse of portrait images in Llwyd's *History of Cambria* might indicate that this was intended as the missing History of Wales in Holinshed. It was agreed that the illustrations were important and needed separate attention in the Handbook.

Henry Summerson presented his findings on Holinshed's sources. He argued that Holinshed, who claimed to have been working on his sources for twenty-five years, had indeed examined an extraordinary range of evidence. Ancient authors were deployed alongside the obvious (and not so obvious) medieval chroniclers, and the use of continental sources suggests a deposit might have remained from Reyner Wolfe's original intention to publish a universal chorography. The Holinshed authors had access to the official records in the Tower, and to a range of unpublished MSS. Henry illustrated the ambition of the authors through a case-study of the texts used by Francis Thynne, who prepared the History of Scotland and a number of the lists of great men in the English section. A comparison of the materials used in the first and second editions of the *Chronicles* shows more extensive use of the sources listed in 1577, reinforcing the sense that the first edition was finally produced in some haste. The most remarkable discovery Henry has so far made is that the Holinshed authors had had access to a version of the late Saxon source, *The Vita Ædwardi Regis*, that does not survive. The text printed by Holinshed provides a significant number of additional verses to the known material.

Holinshed as Literature

Tricia McElroy, Jennifer Richards, Judith Mossman and **Matthew Woodcock** contributed to this session. **Tricia McElroy** reflected on the ways of approaching genres in the *Chronicles*. Focusing on the Scottish material as case-study, she showed how literary strategies were used to heighten effect, and underline the appeal to truth. **Jennifer Richards** considered how one incident, the deposition of Richard II, could be read: the inclusion of several documents with varying rhetorical registers has the effect of encouraging our scepticism, while at the same time the rhetorical structure of the texts was exploited by Holinshed to point readers to a particular conclusion. **Judith Mossman** addressed the question of classical influence, not so much on specific aspects of the Holinshed texts, but as an implicit background. She suggested Herodotus as a key model, because of his breadth of analysis and combination of the chorographical and historical. In discussion it was suggested that Thucydides might be seen as even more significant. **Matthew Woodcock** analysed the narrative voice/voices of the text, emphasising the stylistic differences between the contributors (Harrison's discursive style contrasting with Hooker's caustic prose), but also the ways in which the text 'orchestrates' responses to variant texts.

Holinshed as History

John Watts, Ian Archer, Steven Gunn, Alice Hunt and **Susan Doran** spoke on this theme. **John Watts** considered kingship in the English sections of the *Chronicles*, and rejected the 'ancient constitutionalist' view propagated by Annabel Patterson. He examined the usually neglected pre-Norman Conquest materials to show that the authors were committed to ideas of English national identity and unity. Kings had to

protect their subjects against conquest, which was the greatest threat to stability. But English identity was also achieved by absorbing kings as conquerors into indigenous structures, especially through respect for the law. Holinshed's stance was quintessentially monarchical: there was little concern for parliament or the ancient constitution, and the notion that rebellion was always wrong was 'wired in'. In discussion, Roger Mason pointed out the paradox that the Scottish narrative drew its strength from the continuity of kingship: the English from conquest survived. **Ian Archer** spoke of the binary vision of much of the text: nobles and commons as antithetical. At times this failed to accommodate social complexity, as for example with urban groups. But Harrison, in particular, had a more nuanced view, acknowledging the diverse causes of poverty, and looking to a commonwealth ideology which assailed injustice while maintaining the traditional social order. In discussion, the issue was raised of the degree to which the contributors were in dialogue with each other, or merely produced a cacophony of discordant messages. Helen Cooper argued that it was important to recognize that the chroniclers were steeped in medieval conceptions of the social order as articulated, for example, in *Piers Plowman*. **Steve Gunn** addressed the English views of Europe that emerge from the Tudor sections of the *Chronicles*, and underlined their rather insular quality. Little is said, for example, about the French Wars of Religion, rather more about the Dutch Revolt, and an awful lot (from a particularly splenetic viewpoint) about the loss of Calais in 1558. **Alice Hunt** focused on the role of ceremonies, pointing to the interesting contrast between the relative silence of the text on coronation ceremony in contrast to the preoccupation with royal entries. In discussion, Bart van Ess stressed that Arthurian pageantry needed particularly close study as a way of exploring contested historical meaning of ceremony. Finally, **Susan Doran** suggested ways in which she would benefit from the approach she has already adopted in examining the reputation of Mary Tudor to understand the attitude to other Tudor monarchs in Holinshed. She was particularly keen to explore the ways that the problematic elements of Tudor monarchy were represented (e.g. legitimacy, minority and female rule), as well as looking at some of the definite negatives (from an Elizabethan perspective), including Henry VII's extortion, and Henry VIII's fraught relationship with evangelicals.

Demonstration of the Comparator Tool

Ian Archer and **Sebastian Rahtz**, of the Oxford University Computing Centre, introduced the specially commissioned electronic tool that is being developed to compare the 1577 and 1587 texts, and which will assist contributors to both the Holinshed edition and the Handbook as well as being available to the scholarly community at large. The comparator will enable the matching of the texts at the level of paragraphing, and also the easy management of blocks of text for research purposes. **Henry Summerson** demonstrated the process of text-matching he is already undertaking. It is intended that the matched texts will be mounted on the website within six months.

2nd plenary

Cyndia Clegg discussed censorship and cancellations in the 1587 text. She showed that there were three separate stages of censorship provided a fascinating account of how she discovered these changes in a series of specific texts. The discussion underlined the importance of understanding the textual instability of the *Chronicles*, something not accessible to those only using the Ellis C19th reprint of the 1587 edition.

Chorography and Archipelagic History

James Carley, Philip Schwyzer, Roger Mason, Steven Ellis, Alfred Hiatt and Ralph Houlbrooke contributed. **James Carley** discussed the influence of Leland's *Itineraries* on the *Chronicles*. He analysed the route by which Harrison probably received the texts and suggested that the latter's complaints about the poor state of the MSS may have been a rhetorical exaggeration. **Philip Schwyzer** considered the logic of Holinshed's Britain: was it place or polity? Was the past being made to serve the purposes of the present? How could one establish national continuity through a history of multiple conquests? **Roger Mason** suggested that the multivocality of Holinshed may produce cacophony in the case of the Scottish material, so that different perceptions of Scotland emerge in the Scottish chronicles, the English chronicles, and Harrison's Description. Roger was sceptical of the *Chronicles*' roles in the development of notions of 'Britishness' given their 'little Englander' mentality, and the failure to incorporate the protestant element evident in the unionist rhetoric of the 1540s. Steve introduced Richard Stanyhurst's contribution on Ireland and emphasised the unique insight it offers into the mind of the Old English community, and the rhetoric of difference between the 'civil' English and the 'wild' Irish. **Alfred Hiatt** reminded the workshop of the importance of maps in Reynard Wolfe's original scheme for the cosmography, and asked if anything survived in the text that emerged. He suggested it may have done in an awareness of the complexity of the archipelago, made up of islands as well as states, and in Harrison's use of Saxton for his descriptions. Graphic maps underlay and infused the verbal descriptions. **Ralph Houlbrooke** discussed Harrison's England: the range of his reading and his borrowings from key sources like Leland, but also his adaptations and additions. His preoccupations were national identity, the state of the Church (Harrison was a 'godly conformist') and social mores, especially hospitality. Jan Broadway added the point that Harrison's concern with national identity led him to retain the Brut history, which by then already appeared old-fashioned.

Literary Appropriations

Richard McCabe, Richard Dutton, Paulina Kewes, Igor Djordevic, Gillian Wright and Bart van Es spoke. **Richard McCabe**, examining the influence of Holinshed on Edmund Spenser, suggested that it was important to avoid source-mining Holinshed for literary reference, but to start from the text and seek to understand how Spenser would have perceived it. The Irish sections of 1577 edition would have been a key introduction to Ireland, above all on matters of multiple nations, race civility, and language. **Richard Dutton** offered a sceptical interpretation

of Holinshed's textual influence on Shakespeare's British plays. Neither *King Lear* nor *Cymbeline* were exclusively dependent on the *Chronicles*; indeed the latter seems to have drawn little from them. **Paulina Kewes** discussed the staging of Holinshed by examining the issue of elective monarchy. She focused on Shakespeare's *Richard III* and the anonymous *True Tragedie of Richard III*, which figures election as a beneficial constitutional solution and displays anxiety about unresolved problems of the succession. **Igor Djordjevic**, reflecting on the themes of Shakespeare and the Middle Ages, isolated the ideas of kingship underlying the claim to France; English identity as developed through war; and the significance of commonwealth, particularly in the variety of ways in which the 'popular voice' was articulated, and not just in the classic moments of popular unrest such as 1381 and 1450. **Gillian Wright** showed how Samuel Daniel, though very cagey on his sources, used Holinshed extensively: in the 1595 edition of his versified account of the Wars of the Roses, *The Civil Wars*, Holinshed and Stow are conflated, while in the 1609 edition all the new material is from Holinshed, and Stow is dropped. This edition shifted from an emphasis on mystical kingship to a concern about good governance and fitness to rule. **Bart van Es** evaluated Michael Drayton's dependence on Holinshed in his verse histories, arguing that although the *Chronicles* were used, there was a marked reluctance to acknowledge the debt (a 'cultural cringe' when it came to mentioning Holinshed), and that by the early seventeenth century, there was a turn away from Holinshed towards Camden and later Speed. The composite text seems to have lost status, at least as an acknowledged authority, in the work of writers like Drayton.

Holinshed and his Contemporaries

Scott Lucas, Wyman Heredeem and **Oliver Harris** formed the panel. **Scott Lucas** discussed Edward Hall and the significance of the *Union* which was the principal source for Holinshed on the late C15th and early C16th. Hall's own history turns out to be a composite text, following Polydore Vergil for much of the C15th, but with telling variations, especially on church-state relations.. The Holinshed account of Henry VIII is of particular interest, since Hall's death led to the completion of his text by Richard Grafton, whose views on religion were more radical than Hall's. **Wyman Heredeem** reflected on the impact of Holinshed on later historical works, discerning a literary influence as far as Milton's *History*. He stressed the slow process of separating out scholars and antiquarians, with different ways of accessing the past remaining significant into the C17th. He suggested that the breadth of the text's rhetorical register engaged with a broad community, facilitating the creation of a 'consumer culture' for history that made Camden's *Britannia* possible. **Oliver Harris** began with the multi-vocality of the text, but stressed the antecedents for many of its supposedly novel features (e.g. the merging of national histories and the prefacing of history by chorography, both prefigured in Higden's *Polychronicon*). He concentrated on a series of case-studies demonstrating the interdependence of the chronicle accounts. Thus the descriptions of the martyrdom of St Edmund and the survival of the liberties of Kent at the Norman Conquest demonstrate the multi-layered aggregations of the text, sometimes with significant repercussions for the ideological register of the *Chronicles*. He also raised the issue of the absence of illustrations from the 1587 text, suggesting that by then imaginative reconstructions of the past may have become less acceptable.

3rd plenary

Daniel Woolf gave Holinshed a global context by talking about chronicling in Ming China, Mughal India, Persia and the New World. Official court chronicles and universal histories were features of many societies in the C16th and C17th. Parallels with the English tradition can be found in several of these cases, and although there is little evidence of connectedness, his findings have the effect of deflating our ‘cultural particularism’. Cultural transference did occur, the primary example being the melding of the indigenous and European approaches to chronicling in the New World. The discussion focused on elements that might have been unique to the Western European tradition, most obviously dissemination in print, but also the emphasis on national history (cf. the role of the ‘community of the realm’ in Holinshed) as opposed to dynastic history.

Concluding session

The workshop concluded with a round-up of the main issues discussed, and some thoughts on the next stages. Those present expressed general enthusiasm for the project, and emphasised how important it is to have a reliable, annotated edition of the text accessible to scholars. The ground-breaking discoveries already presented at the workshop underline the value of the exercise and the rationale for both the complete edition and the Handbook.

There are, however, many intellectual challenges ahead. Several contributors had expressed concerns about the question of multi-vocality, and about the ‘monster’ dimensions of the whole text. We need to establish exactly how many copies survive, and to undertake comparisons between them. However, there are limits to what can be accomplished. Even with the assistance of the comparator, it may not always be easy to assess in detail all the differences between the two editions. Contributors to the Handbook will, in many instances, have to decide whether a case-study approach to their material is more appropriate than an overview analysis.

Finally, the workshop focused on mechanisms to help the contributors. It was suggested that the comparator should include a concordance for ease of reference, and that there should be the capacity to print out individual pages from the texts mounted on the web. Henry Summerson should be able to assist in answering research queries, though these should in the first instance be directed to the editors. It was agreed that OUP would host an internal web site so that contributors to the Handbook, and later we hope the edition, could keep in touch with one another. The general editors would divide responsibility for sections of the Handbook, so that each contributor will know who to contact. One-page abstracts of the approach contributors propose to adopt for the Handbook should be sent to the editors by April 1st, so that issues of over-lap and gaps can be addressed.