

The Seventeenth Century British History Seminar: An Imperfect History, 1951-2022

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Writing the history of a specific IHR seminar poses a challenge, albeit one that has merit in terms of addressing important aspects of, and shifts within, academic culture. It is salutary to reflect upon something that has been a part of many people's lives for a very long time. My own involvement with what is now the Seventeenth Century British History seminar doubtless replicates the experience of countless others. It began while I was a PhD student – based outside London – in the early 1990s, and the seminar then became a fixture in my diary upon joining the History of Parliament in 1994, before becoming a more serious undertaking as a convenor (from 2006). I thus followed in the footsteps of others whose responsibility for finding, chairing and hosting speakers, as well as for guarding the registers – all of which will reappear as topics for discussion – is more or less directly linked to being appointed to a permanent academic position within the University of London. Like others, I am *loyal* to a seminar that has been part of my life for thirty years, and proud to be associated with an institution – often described simply as ‘the Thursday seminar’ – that was established in 1951, and that is now in its eighth decade of fortnightly sessions. At the same time, this kind of relationship with one particular seminar is associated with a particular phase in the IHR's history; it was not how things worked originally, and is a model that is no longer adhered to very strictly. In that sense, reflecting on the history of a specific seminar contributes to the wider history of the IHR, and of English academia. As such, this chapter teases out phenomena – regarding convenors, audiences and speakers – that speak to broader patterns of

continuity and change, all of which are relevant to debates about the IHR's future, rather than just its past.

Of course, such comments can only be suggestive, and the potential for relating the seminar's history is limited. Sadly, the opportunity has been missed to produce a satisfactory oral history; as with aged grandparents, there was scope to ask more questions, to pay more attention to stories from yesteryear, and to have a better memory. More importantly, we possess inadequate documentary records, and it is embarrassing not to be able to draw upon a systematic seminar archive. As things stand, it has not been possible to locate the registers of attendees, speakers and papers for the period after 1984/5. Hopefully, they survive somewhere within the IHR. Moreover, registers for earlier decades are frustratingly cryptic, not least in terms of how rarely evidence survives about who delivered papers, let alone about the topics upon which they spoke.

What follows is thus an imperfect history, based upon extant registers, upon memories (my own as well as those of others), and upon a fairly complete list of papers delivered since 2001, and maintained for my own purposes.¹ Historians, of course, always deal with imperfect evidence, and what will emerge about the Seventeenth Century seminar will hopefully do justice to its distinctive and valuable qualities, and raise questions about the role of seminars within the scholarly landscape. This particular seminar has inevitably changed over the decades, and yet its devotees generally agree that there is something about its culture that has remained consistent. As such, there is value in teasing out what can be gleaned from imperfect evidence about the things upon which every good seminar relies: its convenors, its audience, and its papers, as well as how it conducts its business, and its 'culture'.

For much of its life, the Seventeenth Century seminar has been less celebrated than its elder sibling – the 'Monday seminar' (formally the Tudor-Stuart seminar), convened over the

¹ IHR, MS 3.3.18 (Register, 1926/7-1984/5); IHR, MS 3.3.19 (Register, 1985/6).

years by A. F. Pollard, Joel Hurstfield, Sir John Neale, and Conrad Russell, amongst others. That seminar has its own revealing history and, as anyone who has attended both groups will attest, they have always had rather different atmospheres. That these two seminars – and indeed others – have co-existed for so long despite thematic and chronological similarities is significant, and is probably more or less comprehensible. Rightly or wrongly, the ‘Thursday’ seminar has sometimes been treated as less high-powered than the ‘Monday’ seminar, but for a long time it was also less austere and intimidating. Some have certainly wondered whether the Seventeenth Century seminar could do with being *more* robust, in terms of its discussions of specific papers. Nevertheless, the success and longevity of the seminar reflects its welcoming atmosphere, and its culture of support and sociability, all of which have been cultivated by successive convenors, and have engendered the loyalty that is so apparent from its history, thereby helping to make it an IHR institution.

I Convenors

As with all historical phenomena, there is a pre-history to what became the Seventeenth Century seminar, and one that perhaps set the tone for later decades. The early registers reveal the existence of a seminar on ‘English History, 1603-1660’, run by Miss Powell, from the mid-1920s until the mid-1940s, although that was almost certainly an *internal* Royal Holloway seminar, catering exclusively for its all-female student body. A more important precursor – on English political history in the seventeenth century – was in existence during the mid-1920s, overseen by Norman Sykes and Esmond De Beer.² Sykes, who began his career at King’s College in 1924, before moving to Westfield College, eventually became

² Debra J. Birch and Joyce M. Horn, *The History Laboratory: the Institute of Historical Research 1921-96* (London, 1996), p. 130.

Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History (Cambridge), and was unusual in being an ordained minister, who served as Dean of Winchester Cathedral.³ De Beer, meanwhile, was a New Zealander who inherited from his mentor, C. H. Firth, a passion for great editing projects, including the diary of John Evelyn and the correspondence of John Locke.⁴

Cosmopolitanism and big editorial ventures would remain important to later incarnations of the seminar, the convening of which also reveals other patterns. The formal creation of the Thursday seminar can be attributed to Robert Latham (1912-95), who moved to Royal Holloway from a lectureship at King's College in 1942, and who was a Reader there by the time that he established the seminar in 'English political and constitutional history in the seventeenth century'. Whatever motivated Latham, it is striking that the Thursday seminar was so beholden to one prominent historian, and Latham ran the seminar single-handed from 1951 until 1968. Of course, it should be noted that Latham was then much less celebrated than he later became, as one of the editors of Samuel Pepys' diary. It is also noteworthy that the Pepys project was an early example of transnational scholarship, involving a colleague from UCLA (William Matthews), even if the latter was an émigré Englishman with a London PhD.⁵

Latham's departure from the seminar in 1968 – for a post in Toronto, before becoming Pepys Librarian in Cambridge – perhaps signalled a change at the IHR, whereby seminars were increasingly overseen by groups of historians from across London, rather than by a dominant individual. Initially, this meant Roger Lockyer, Henry Roseveare and Ian Roy, a team that took over with the 1968-9 session, and one presumably designed to offer a blend of seniority and youthful enthusiasm, as well as a broader range of expertise. Lockyer (1927-

³ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 47 (1961).

⁴ J. B. Trapp, 'Esmond Samuel de Beer (1895-1990)', *ODNB*.

⁵ Eamon Duffy, 'Robert Clifford Latham, 1912-1995', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 166 (2010), 201-11; <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/robert-latham-obituaries-1568235.html>; *New York Times* (14 June 1975), p. 30.

2017) had been a lecturer at Royal Holloway since the early 1960s, and had already produced the first edition of a hugely successful textbook on Tudor and Stuart Britain.⁶ Roseveare and Roy had both begun attending the seminar in 1960, within weeks of each other (18 February and 3 March respectively), and while still pursuing postgraduate research. By this stage, at least, the seminar clearly had the ability to attract attendees from outside London. Roseveare, who brought expertise in economic history, completed his PhD at Cambridge in 1962, while Roy completed his Oxford DPhil on the royalist army during the civil wars in 1963. Both enjoyed long careers at King's, and both remained involved with the seminar until their respective retirements, and indeed for much longer in Ian's case.

That neither Roy nor Roseveare produced huge quantities of published work says less about the importance of their scholarship – which in both cases included important source editions – than about changes within the profession. Here, the seminar's long history reveals important shifts from amateur (or gentlemanly) to professional scholarship, as well as the re-balancing of scholarly endeavours between teaching (and postgraduate supervision) to publication, and it may be no coincidence that such developments were accompanied by seminars adding more convenors. Roy and Roseveare might be thought to symbolise a phase when academia had become professionalised but not yet obsessed with research publications. The next addition to the roster of convenors was John Miller, who completed his Cambridge PhD – on the 'Catholic factor' in English politics from 1660-88 – in 1971, and who is first listed as a convenor during the 1975-6 session. Miller's work signalled shifts in scholarly fashions, and broader interest in the politics of religion, and subsequently a new generation – with its own interests, as well as very different sartorial tastes – became represented on Thursday evenings with the addition of Justin Champion, who gained his PhD from Cambridge in 1989, who then worked briefly at the Centre for Metropolitan History

⁶ *The Guardian* (28 November 2017).

(1989) and La Sainte Union (1990), and who secured a lectureship at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College in 1992.⁷ At that point the Thursday seminar shifted from being known – colloquially – as the ‘three wise men’ seminar, to being dubbed the seminar of the ‘three wise men... and young pretender’, with Champion affectionally referred to as the ‘Lion King’ for his resplendent blond hair.

Thus far, the evolution of the seminar involved continuity as well as change. The number of convenors grew, and the development of more specialised scholarship became evident. What convenors shared, however, was a formal association with the University of London, as ‘permanent’ members of academic staff at one college or another. That tradition was upheld into the 21st century. That my own formal involvement did not begin until my appointment at UCL did not seem noteworthy, and other convenors likewise joined upon being appointed to lectureships. Neither did it seem noteworthy that, even as the number of convenors grew, the seminar acknowledged seniority. Thus, while all of the convenors generally attended each seminar, and helped to entertain the speakers, the programme was formally organised by John Miller, even if he was very open to suggestions about possible speakers, and even if he did not *invariably* chair sessions.

That Miller felt like the leader of the seminar, particularly following the retirements of Roy and Roseveare, did not seem remotely odd, but it is notable how much the seminar has changed since his retirement in 2012. The seminar now boasts not just an expanded group of convenors (in our case nine), but also a group that is much more diverse. This has occurred naturally, rather than as a result of a determined policy, and it reflects the kinds of people whose enthusiasm for the seminar has made them obvious candidates to be co-opted as convenors. Some convenors have retained their association with the seminar after leaving the

⁷ <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/about-us/news/professor-justin-champion/>. Royal Holloway merged with Bedford College in 1985.

University of London; others have always been employed elsewhere; and at least one might be thought to be part of the ‘precariat’ – a postdoctoral scholar with no permanent position – that is now such a controversial aspect of higher education. A new structure has been accompanied by new processes, and the seminar is now more collaborative, in terms of how speakers are identified, sessions are conducted, and administration is handled. This is appropriate, but also necessary; the lives of modern academics involve different pressures from those witnessed by previous generations, and running a seminar single-handed now seems less manageable, not least in a situation where university managers treat it as a less worthwhile dimension of our work, and where the University of London is a less meaningful entity.

II Audiences

Not all changes have been planned, or strategized, but convenors have certainly reflected upon the ‘culture’ of the seminar, not least in terms of thinking about ‘audience’, the second theme of this chapter. This is partly a matter of tone and atmosphere, and the determination to make proceedings welcoming. Key here is sociability, and however formal things may once have been, it is striking how informal things have been since at least the early 1990s. This is particularly true in terms of post-seminar proceedings, which have sometimes involved local restaurants, and *always* local pubs. The point here is not simply that such places were chosen because they appealed to the convenors, even if Ian Roy was partial to homely delights of the Trattoria Mondello on Goodge Street, and even if John Miller was partial to a pint of ESB. The real point is that venues were chosen so as not to exclude postgraduate students, either in terms of price or the ability to accommodate a large group of scholars. Mondello, while hardly pricey, was actually a rare treat; more often during the 1990s we dined at a very basic

(and long-gone) Italian canteen on Charlotte Street, and even there the bill was massaged to ensure that students were subsidised by more senior colleagues. It also meant that conversations continued in a range of less than glitzy pubs. The lure of a new Fuller's pub on Tottenham Court Road eventually gave the seminar not just a venue that served both food and beer, but also a base which soon became a firm association, at least until the area's gentrification prompted the move to a quieter venue, and one more convenient for those who needed to catch a late train.

The point of such stories is that sociability has long been integral to the culture and intellectual vibrancy of the seminar, rather than simply a function of the need to feed and water the speaker, usually at the convenors' expense.⁸ For many people, long evenings in the Jack Horner or Skinners' Arms have been as important as, if not more important than, the papers themselves, and while pub-based sociability risks excluding some people, this has certainly not been the aim, and such a culture is surely relevant to the seminar's success and longevity, and to the loyalty that it engenders.⁹ Of course, appreciating the importance of loyalty involves more than food and drink, although such things are hard to separate from the kinds of pattern that can be detected when reflecting on who has frequented the seminar over the years, not least with the aid of surviving registers.

Latham's seminar started small, with an audience of 4-5 people per session in its first year, but it soon became established, and by the mid-1950s papers were generally attracting 12-14 people. Over the years the average audience has sometimes been smaller than this, but it has frequently been larger, and it has often been gratifying – if claustrophobic – when we

⁸ The extremely limited budget that seminars possess – £150 per annum – provides another incentive for frugality.

⁹ One transatlantic friend recently acknowledged the 'Skinners' Arms seminar': Robert Ingram, *Reformation Without End: Religion, Politics and the Past in Post-Revolutionary England* (Manchester, 2018), p. xv. Some friends of the seminar come to the pub more often than to the papers, perhaps to enjoy less restrained discussion, especially after the speakers of less than brilliant papers have departed.

have crammed 30 or more people into a small seminar room. The early registers prove revealing in fascinating ways, even in terms of how names were recorded. In the early years it is striking that, while the seminar was very far from being a male preserve, there was a tendency to refer to men with their initials, or perhaps only a surname, while female attendees were generally referred to with a title (Miss Roberts, Miss Jenkins, etc.). That most members of the seminar were students appears clear from the fact that very few people were accorded their academic or professional titles, whether professor or indeed ‘reverend’. (Unfortunately, the recording of institutional affiliations was also erratic.) That said, such patterns (and associated prejudices) were not rigidly enforced. ‘Miss Hodge’ from Royal Holloway soon became ‘Susan Hodge’; Mrs Glow soon became ‘Miss Lottie Glow’; and ‘Miss Rowe’ – who had attended the ‘Miss Powell’ seminar back in the 1930s – soon became ‘Violet A. Rowe’. In its own way, and rather slowly, the seminar moved with the times.

Beyond signalling cultural change, the registers also prove revealing in other ways. A full prosopography of the seminar is obviously impossible, particularly in terms of those who never completed their postgraduate studies, published their research, or remained within academia. Nevertheless, striking patterns can be discerned on the basis of those whose names are recognisable from the historiography of early modern Britain.

Very often, of course, the seminar was frequented by, and dependent upon, local talent, in terms of those studying for London PhDs. This was true from the very start, and an early stalwart was Alan Everitt (1926-2008), who later found success as a pioneer of the ‘county community’ school of local history, but who was then one of Latham’s PhD students.¹⁰ Another young scholar who benefited from Latham’s support was William Lamont (1934-2018), the historian of puritanism, who began attending in 1956-7, having just completed his BA degree, and who was training to be a teacher alongside undertaking his

¹⁰ *The Guardian* (5 Feb. 2009).

PhD (1956-61). As noted already, these successful students were not always men. One example is Violet Rowe, who attended the seminar from 1955 until 1964, for at least some of which time she was completing her London PhD on Sir Henry Vane junior (1965). Many other names are also recognisable. These include Brian Quintrell, who attended while completing his 1965 Royal Holloway PhD – on early Stuart government in Essex – before taking up a post at Liverpool, as well as Madeline Jones, who received her London PhD – on the history of parliamentary representation in Kent during the English Revolution – in 1967.¹¹ They also include students of Ian Roy, such as R. H. Silcock (1971-2) and Lawson Nagel (1975-6); students of Lockyer such as Alan McGowan (1965-6) and Frances Condick (1975-6); and students of Conrad Russell, such as David Hebb (1973-4), Jacqueline Eales (1981/2) and Richard Cust, the last of whom began attending the seminar in 1976/7, shortly before moving to a lectureship at Birmingham. Beyond this, of course, the seminar benefitted from having on its doorstep – in Woburn Square – numerous early modernists at the History of Parliament, including Gillian Hampson, Peter Lefevre, John Ferris, and Stuart Handley, as well as Ted Rowlands, at least before he became MP for Cardiff North (1966). For generations of PhD students, the seminar has taken the place of a more general departmental research seminar, helping to make their experiences somewhat different from students in other universities.

What also made the experience different was that it was always possible to meet students from further afield, and there is mileage in the suggestion that IHR seminars are less insular than those elsewhere. Early visitors – in 1952-3 – included John MacCormack, the historian of the Irish Adventurers and of the Long Parliament, as well as David Underdown (1923-2009), the latter of whom had begun his PhD at Oxford under Christopher Hill (1912-2003), before completing his studies at Yale, and who had not yet taken up his first teaching

¹¹ <http://rslc.org.uk/blog/brian-qunitrell-a-tribute/>.

post in Tennessee. Neither MacCormack nor Underdown was then a published author. Another Oxford student who attended that year was D. T. Whitcombe, who was in the final stages of a PhD supervised by Donald Pennington (1919-2007). Whitcombe, whose subsequent career lay in school teaching, certainly acknowledged the influence of Latham, 'at whose seminar I received constant advice and encouragement'.¹² Others pursued university careers, including many who studied at Oxford and Cambridge. Robin Clifton, who began attending the seminar in 1955-6, later completed his thesis on anti-popery at Oxford (1967), having already begun teaching at Warwick. 1960-1 saw visits from two Oxford students: A. M. Johnson, who studied the history of Chester before moving to University College, Cardiff; and Robert Beddard, the historian of the Restoration church, who had been an undergraduate in London, and who subsequently held college fellowships in both Cambridge and Oxford. In subsequent years, the registers reveal other visitors, including Colin Brooks, who was researching taxation and public opinion during the Restoration (1968-9), Lionel Glassey, who was working on the commission of the peace in later Stuart and Hanoverian England (1967-9), and Julia Buckroyd, who was studying ecclesiastical affairs in Restoration Scotland (1974-5), not to mention historians of Restoration political thought like Mark Goldie, and of the Cromwellian army like Henry Reece (both 1975-6), as well as the historian of seventeenth-century taxation and state formation, Mike Braddick (1985-6). Such students presumably had other opportunities for attending specialist seminars, and as such few became very regular attendees. For those studying further afield, trips to London may have been less feasible, although the seminar certainly attracted postgraduates from beyond the 'golden triangle'. John Newton, who attended in 1954-5, had studied at Hull under the great Reformation historian, A. G. Dickens (1910-2001), before becoming an IHR research fellow

¹² D. T. Whitcombe, *Charles II and the Cavalier House of Common, 1663-1674* (Manchester, 1966), p.x.

during the closing stages of his PhD (1955), and then becoming a Methodist minister.¹³ G. V. Chivers presumably came to London in 1957/8 to research relations between the City and the state, the subject of his 1962 Manchester PhD. Other students from Manchester included P. R. Seddon (1963-4) and Keith Lindley (1964-6). Others attended from Lancaster, Southampton, and Birmingham.

For at least some non-London students, attendance at the seminar marked the end of a day at the old PRO in Chancery Lane (closed in 1997), or else in the old British Library (until 1998). For some, there were practical reasons for prolonging their day in London, in terms of not being able to get cheap trains or buses home until later in the evening, but it would be unwise to dismiss the intellectual attractions of the IHR. Even if the Thursday seminar has sometimes been regarded as less rigorous than others, ‘junior’ members of the audience (especially PhD students) certainly found it intimidating. This doubtless reflects the fact that the seminar has always attracted some of the brightest students from further afield. As early as 1955-6 the seminar was attended by a graduate student from Australia, Donald Kennedy, who subsequently taught for forty years at the University of Melbourne. More often, students came from the United States. During 1953-4, the attendees included G. R. Abernathy, years before he became an assistant professor at the University of Alabama (1960) and began to publish.¹⁴ The following year saw visits from C. R. Niehaus during the research for his 1957 Harvard thesis on law reform during the ‘Puritan revolution’, and before his appointment as an assistant professor at MIT (1960). From Boston University came John Battick (1961-2), who completed his PhD on Cromwell’s ‘Western design’ in 1967, before moving to the

¹³ John A. Newton, ‘A. G. Dickens (1910-2001): a personal appreciation’, *Historical Research*, 77.195 (2004), 5-8. Dickens subsequently became a professor at King’s and then IHR director.

¹⁴ E.g. G. R. Abernathy, ‘Clarendon and the Declaration of Indulgence’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11.1 (1960), 55-73.

University of Maine, where he remained until 1997.¹⁵ Later in the decade the seminar was attended by Sears McGee from Yale (1967-9), who subsequently had a distinguished career at Santa Barbara, as well as Robert (Roy) Ritchie from UCLA (1967/8), who later became a professor at San Diego and research director at the Huntington Library. For many scholars who had illustrious careers, in other words, the seminar was part of their induction into, and involvement with, academia; those who attended regularly during extended research trips to England invariably enlivened proceedings with fresh perspectives, and for them the seminar clearly performed a useful social function. The PhD process can be a lonely one, all the more so during prolonged trips away from one's home country, and the seminar – as well as its sociability – can clearly be invaluable.

What also emerges from the registers is how reliant the seminar has always been upon PhD supervisors to encourage – and perhaps instruct – their students to frequent the IHR. Some came to London to study, presumably having been advised by teachers and mentors. In the case of Lotte Glow (later Mulligan) this presumably meant George Yule, her undergraduate tutor at Melbourne (1948-50). Glow attended the seminar from 1955-8, before completing her research in Adelaide, and then teaching at La Trobe until her retirement in 1995. Influential US scholars in this respect included D. H. Willson at Minnesota, whose students included the historian of parliamentary elections, J. K. Gruenfelder, who attended as a PhD student (1961-2) before taking up a post at Wyoming. Visitors from Berkeley included students of Thomas Barnes such as Karl Bottigheimer (1962/3), Stephen Stearns (1962-4) and Howard Nenner (1966/7). Students from Yale included those supervised by J. H. Hexter, including Caroline Hibbard (1968-70); those from Princeton included Robert Brenner (1966/7) and Rachel Weil (1985/6), both of whom were supervised by Lawrence Stone. Indeed, the value of attending the seminar has evidently been instilled by supervisors into

¹⁵ <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/findingaids/193/>.

their students over successive ‘generations’. Having attended as an Australian student in the 1950s, Donald Kennedy perhaps ensured that Carolyn Polizzotto, his student at Melbourne, attended the seminar while studying civil war Puritanism in London in the early 1970s. Similarly, Ann Hughes began attending the seminar as a student of Brian Quintrell, who had himself attended during postgraduate research. Hughes has been attending ever since, and at least one of her own students, Sean Kelsey, has become a loyal ‘friend of the seminar’. Such lineages can be traced back to the origins of the seminar, which was attended in its first year by David Underdown, in later years by his student Mark Kishlansky (1948-2015), who was in London as a PhD student from Brown in 1973/4, and then by Kishlansky’s own students, such as Victor Stater (1983/4).

In addition to students, the seminar has also benefitted from attendance by more ‘senior’ academics, some of whom appeared more or less regularly and frequently, sometimes over decades. This is true of many scholars from around the UK. The registers reveal that David Hebb, who completed a Bedford College PhD on piracy in early Stuart England (1985), attended from 1973 until at least 1986. Having begun attending as a PhD student in the mid-1960s, Keith Lindley’s name appears in the registers into the 1980s, and he certainly continued to attend thereafter. The same was true of Rosemary O’Day, who first attended in the late 1960s as a student working on clerical patronage at King’s, and whose name appears throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, while she was working at the OU. Ruth Spalding, the biographer of the civil war MP, Bulstrode Whitelocke, and the editor of his substantial diary, attended the seminar every year from 1966 until at least 1986.¹⁶ More strikingly, such loyalty is also evident with scholars based further away, for many of whom the rhythm of the academic year involved trips to London as soon as teaching ended. Anyone familiar with the IHR will have noted the tendency for attendance at seminars to change in

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Spalding.

the last weeks of the summer term, as people like Henry Horwitz arrived from the US.¹⁷ Some scholars, moreover, spent prolonged periods of research leave in London, to the great benefit of many seminars. During 1960/1, Paul Seaver (1932-2020) – then of Reed College and later of Stanford – attended every session, and although not everyone was so assiduous, the registers certainly reveal a succession of visiting scholars, including Royce MacGillivray (Waterloo, 1966-7), Wilfrid Prest (Adelaide, 1973), Stephen Foster (Northern Illinois, 1971-2), and Brian Levack (Texas, 1975), as well as Fritz Levy (Washington, 1979-80). Another, Charles Korr from the University of Missouri at St Louis, was probably introduced to the IHR by his mentor, Professor S. T. Bindoff. Having attended as a student, Howard Nenner returned to the seminar during sabbatical leave from Smith College (1972/3). Like so many others, Levy and Nenner became familiar faces at the seminar for many years, sometimes long after their retirement, and the registers confirm just how loyal many visiting historians have been. Howard Reinmuth – another student of D. H. Willson at Minnesota – attended the seminar whilst in 1973/4 and 1985/6, presumably while on leave from the University of Akron. Roy Schreiber attended in the mid-1960s, while completing his London PhD, and then again as an IHR fellow, and subsequently returned to the seminar in 1974/5 and in 1983/4, while on leave from the University of Indiana. Likewise, Patricia Crawford, who began attending as a graduate student from Australia in 1965, returned fairly regularly during periods of leave from the University of Western Australia until at least 1981. It was surely this loyalty – rather than just cultural change – which ensured that she moved from being recorded as Mrs Crawford to P. M. Crawford, Dr P. Crawford, and Patricia Crawford, and eventually as ‘Pat’ or ‘Trish’.¹⁸

¹⁷ Horwitz – who certainly attended the seminar in 1977/8 – completed his Oxford DPhil in 1963, and taught at Iowa 1963-2004.

¹⁸ Sara Mendelson, ‘Patricia M. Crawford, 1941-2009’, *History Workshop Journal*, 71.1 (2011), 289-92.

III Speakers

Such patterns – as well as others relating to shifts in intellectual trends – can also be discerned using evidence about the third dimension of the seminar’s history: its speakers.

Here too the evidence is imperfect. The identity of speakers was only recorded – sporadically – from the mid-1970s, and little evidence survives about paper titles before 2001.

Nevertheless, even this scrappy evidence highlights the culture of the IHR, and permits broader conclusions to be drawn about the ongoing value of its seminars.

In memory and reputation, the Seventeenth Century seminar is held to have sourced its programme from within the ranks of regular attendees, and this is somewhat true. In 2003/4, three convenors – Champion, Roy, and Miller – gave *four* papers between them, while three further talks came from people at the History of Parliament. Sometimes this involved convenors stepping in to fill gaps in the programme, and regular attendees being prevailed upon to help out. Indeed, five of these speakers reappeared on the programme the following year. These are extreme examples, although they reflect the challenges that all convenors face: being able to find speakers, particularly for slots at the start of the autumn term; needing to fill in when speakers pull out at short notice; and – perhaps most importantly – the extremely tight budgets that are available to bring speakers to London. In that sense, it is a miracle that the seminars survive. That they *thrive* reflects careful management and curation. Here, of course, such challenges have been offset by IHR fellowship schemes, including those sponsored by the Mellon Foundation, the great merit of which has been to attract scholars from outside London. Such fellowships – which are extremely valuable in a context where few History departments can offer postdoctoral funding – are often thought

about in terms of the advantages they give to younger scholars; equally important is the dynamism that such people bring to the seminars within which they become embedded.

However much each year's programme is a product of necessity, it also involves virtues. IHR seminars clearly have a role in supporting the discipline, nationally and globally, but they also need to serve the interests of the scholarly community in London, where departments often lack research seminars. As such, there is value in providing a forum for local PhD students – as part of their induction into the scholarly community – as well as for more established scholars. This was evident on 11 March 1976, for example, when a paper was given by Hans Pawlisch, a PhD student at King's, working on the Tudor conquest of Ireland.¹⁹ It has, quite rightly, been evident ever since, in terms of papers by the convenors' own PhD students. Traditionally, such papers are some of the first that graduate students deliver, and since the prospect can be daunting there is value in being able to do so before familiar faces. Similarly, since the skills involved in asking questions and contributing to discussions tend to be acquired only gradually, this too is something that can best be fostered within a familiar setting.

More broadly, the image of an insular seminar – with speakers drawn from London colleges – needs modification. Thus, while not much is known about every speaker from the 1975/6 session, it is noteworthy that they included Julia Buckroyd and Henry Reece, PhD students from Cambridge and Oxford respectively, as well as Lynn Beats, a student of Anthony Fletcher's at Sheffield. Other papers were delivered by Robin Gwynn and Ian Gentles, to both of whom we shall return. The following year saw another paper by Buckroyd (a fairly loyal attendee), while 1979/80 saw a paper from Michael Weinzierl, a PhD student from Austria, and another from Stephen Roberts, who was in the final stages of a PhD with

¹⁹ Pawlisch was an IHR fellow in 1976-7; his paper was subsequently published: 'Sir John Davies, the Ancient Constitution, and Civil Law', *Historical Journal*, 23.3 (1980), 689-702.

Ivan Roots at Exeter, and who was then an IHR fellow. Then, as now, the seminar recruited speakers from the widest pool of bright PhD students, and as far as possible the aim has always been to offer a *blended* programme, involving scholars both local and global, and those at different stages of their career. In 1983/4, an unusually large audience – including luminaries like Nicholas Tyacke, Peter Lake, Linda Levy Peck, and Mark Kishlansky – heard a paper from Pauline Croft, a colleague from Royal Holloway. Recent years have seen papers from some of the most important scholars in the field of early modern studies, including Lake himself, Tom Cogswell, Tim Harris, David Cressy, John Marshall, Kenneth Fincham, Colin Davis, Mark Jenner, Adam Fox, Alan Macinnes, Bernard Capp, Brian Cowan and Steve Pincus, and many more. As this selective list also indicates, the seminar remains genuinely international.

Here too, the available evidence reveals that the seminar has always benefitted from its links to loyal friends. Any number of speakers can be identified who have long-standing links to the seminar. Having attended in the 1960s, while producing a PhD on puritanism in Old and New England, Michael Finlayson returned as a speaker in 1976/7, as a tenured historian at Toronto. Michael Braddick, whose most recent paper was in February 2021, has been associated with the seminar since 1985, when he first appeared in the registers as a Cambridge PhD student. Jaqueline Eales, who last gave a paper in 2019, has been attending since being a PhD student in the early 1980s. Ann Hughes, who most recently appeared in June 2022, has been attending since 1973. Such examples could be replicated, and the list of speakers in recent years confirms patterns that are evident from the earlier registers, in terms of the frequency with which the seminar attracts a loyal following amongst key players in the field. Similarly, the list of speakers since 2001 suggests that those who attended the seminar as students and junior academics continue to direct their own students towards its sessions. These include any number of students who worked with Mark Kishlansky, Tim Harris, and

Steve Pincus, and indeed those who were supervised by Hughes and Braddick. Here too it is possible to discern evidence of scholarly lineages. In recent years, papers have been given not just by Peter Lake, but also by his PhD students (David Como, Bill Bulman), and even by their students in turn (Noah Millstone, Richard Bell). Speakers like Sonia Tycko, a student of Mark Kishlansky, provide a link to the very earliest incarnation of the seminar, attended by Kishlansky's own supervisor, David Underdown.

Another somewhat unfair characterisation of the Thursday seminar involves the notion that papers have tended to lack thematic range, as well as methodological and conceptual sophistication. Thus, while the quality of papers – and discussions – may always have varied, the seminar has always been ecumenical, and although there may always have been a tendency to favour some kind of 'political' history, 'political history' has always been defined very broadly. Nowadays, the IHR boasts a huge range of seminar series, and while some of these specialise on particular themes and approaches (such as cultural, social, economic, and religious history), the Thursday seminar can legitimately claim to be generalist, and to have reflected shifting scholarly interests over time. Whether or not the quality of papers has sometimes been mixed, the *diversity* of papers is central to the seminar's appeal, and to the value of the seminar format.

In part, this can be demonstrated through the interests of the convenors. Latham and Lockyer ranged widely, at least in terms of the students they supervised, and the 'political' focus of its audience and its papers has always embraced local dimensions, as well as religious perspectives, at least in terms of church politics. As academic specialisms have solidified, this intellectual breadth was maintained more obviously by means of a larger group of convenors, who brought expertise in economic history (Roseveare) and intellectual history (Champion). Champion's involvement certainly positioned the seminar as a venue for new kinds of intellectual history, which ranged beyond canonical authors like Hobbes and

Locke, and which explored connections between canonical thinkers and their political, religious, and economic contexts. Other convenors helped to ensure chronological breadth, at least from the civil wars (Roy) through to the later Stuarts (Miller). (That the seminar has focused less obviously on the pre-civil war decades reflects relations with the Tudor-Stuart seminar, to which we will return.)

This scholarly breadth – as well as shifting scholarly interests – is certainly demonstrated by the list of papers that survives for the years since 2001. The seminar rightly remains a focal point for scholarship on core aspects of seventeenth century history, in terms of the civil wars and Restoration, but it is possible to trace the continued vibrancy of religious history, and even of economic history, local history, and urban history. It is also possible to demonstrate how these sub-disciplines have evolved, as with growing interest in the history of Catholicism, and how these sub-disciplines have been re-imagined, not least by bringing them into dialogue with other fields of expertise. It is also possible to trace the emergence of newer fields – such as print culture – as major dimensions of early modern studies, as well as the waxing and waning of the ‘new British history’. Likewise, and more recently, it is possible to trace a resurgence of interest in the 1650s, and in the kind of political and religious radicalism that was somewhat side-lined by ‘revisionist’ scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. Beyond this, it is possible to highlight even greater breadth, in terms of the seminar providing a forum for scholarship on colonial, imperial and transnational history, and on state formation, as well as work that relates to literary studies, art history, social history, and gender history, not to mention newer fields like environmental history, memory studies, medical history, and the history of emotions. Fairly frequently, moreover, the seminar hosts papers that might otherwise be expected to be given in other places. This reflects the reality that loyalty to a seminar sometimes involves being ‘tribal’, and not attending other meetings, and there is value in attending a ‘generalist’ seminar and being exposed to different topics

and sub-disciplines. It also reflects the possibility that speakers benefit from the contrasting perspectives that different audiences offer.

IV Conclusions and prospects

As befits a gathering of historians, the story of the seventeenth century British history seminar involves both continuity and change, and sheds light not just upon the value of the IHR but also of the kinds of seminars that it hosts, while also prompting reflections about the future of such activities in an evolving academic landscape.

That the ‘Thursday’ seminar has continued to evolve is clear. Recent years have seen different formats being embraced, from joint papers and paired papers to book launches and roundtable discussions. Convenors are rightly concerned not just with offering a ‘mixed economy’ of papers by both senior and junior scholars, but also about achieving a healthy gender balance. The onset of the pandemic, of course, necessitated other changes, some of which may become permanent. After a couple of papers were cancelled once the ‘lockdown’ was introduced, sessions quickly resumed ‘remotely’ – via Zoom – and while this format was sub-optimal in many respects, it also attracted larger and more diverse audiences. Attendance thus involved old friends as well as new faces from across the globe, who would otherwise be unable to attend. It was also possible to secure speakers who might not otherwise have been able to offer papers. As possibilities for ‘in-person’ seminars have returned, moreover, convenors are determined to run ‘hybrid’ seminars that combine the advantages of ‘remote’ and ‘in person’ formats.

The response to Covid indicates that the seminars must and can adapt, and there are clearly other challenges to be navigated. The broad history of IHR seminars indicates that specific groups have come and gone, and there is no necessary reason for any one seminar to

remain on the books indefinitely. As noted earlier, there are anomalies in the range of seminars that currently exists. Some seminars were created following personality clashes amongst convenors, and have survived long after such disputes were forgotten. One particular oddity involves the existence of – or overlap between – the ‘Monday’ (Tudor and Stuart) and ‘Thursday’ (Seventeenth Century) seminars. Historically, this awkwardness was navigated through an informal temporal boundary – set at 1640 – which is now honoured in the breach. Discussions have periodically taken place about the possibility – or desirability – of merging these two groups (perhaps to create a weekly early modern British history seminar), only to encounter logistical difficulties and the conservatism of some convenors. Other challenges might be even more intractable. The IHR clearly suffered when the British Library moved to new premises on Euston Road; fewer people now pop across to the IHR for a cuppa and a seminar after a day’s research. The death of the Anglo-American conference in 2015 makes the IHR a less obvious focal point for visiting scholars towards the end of the summer term, and seminars might now be less central to the evolving mission of the IHR, which has dramatically diversified its activities in recent years. Increasingly tight finances make it harder to sustain full programmes of speakers, and pressures are increasing to find other funding models – including external sponsorship – that might only be feasible for certain seminars. It also seems that fewer PhD supervisors make students aware of the IHR, and of the benefits that seminars offer.

Perhaps the most serious challenge to seminar culture involves the inexorable rise of the academic conference, and indeed of the kind of mega-conferences (such as NACBS) that lack a tight chronological or thematic focus, that are curated from applications rather than involving invited speakers, and that revolve around panels of short papers, or even conference posters. To the extent that this trend has prompted debate, fears have been expressed about quality control, in terms of organisers who are incentivised to accept

speakers for financial reasons, and in terms of younger scholars being encouraged to extend their CVs by giving many more papers, and by engaging in a very instrumental kind of ‘networking’, rather than participating in a more meaningful ‘community’. Too often, conference programmes lack time to discuss papers properly, and many lament that the short-paper format is poorly suited to the development of meaningful arguments. Some people fear that the art of writing a 45-minute paper, which is not merely a thesis chapter or a fully-formed article, and which can support discussion and debate for thirty minutes or more, is being lost, or that speakers don’t think it worth investing time in preparing a formal presentation. While the Seventeenth Century seminar has certainly experimented with different formats, it remains wedded to the idea of speakers giving substantial papers, which can be subjected to meaningful interrogation by a somewhat stable group of attendees, and one whose specialisms vary greatly.

Such challenges mean that IHR seminars face a difficult future, and only time will tell whether they continue to inspire the kind of loyalty that has been evident in the past. In the case of the ‘Thursday’ seminar, two further examples of such loyalty are striking, not least because they highlight its international importance. The first involves Robin Gwynn, the leading expert on Huguenots in early modern Britain. Remarkably, by the time that Gwynn completed his London PhD, in 1976, he had been attending the seminar for more than a decade. Moreover, after securing an academic post at Massey University in New Zealand – where he taught from 1970 to 1995 – Gwynn continued to attend the seminar, as in 1983/4 and 1984/5, and then into his retirement. His most recent paper was in 2015. The second example involves Ian Gentles, who first attended in 1966/7 as a young PhD student working with Ian Roy; who continued to attend after securing a post at York University in Toronto; and who appears in the register throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as paper-giver and audience member. Indeed, this loyalty – to both supervisor and seminar – ensured that Ian has

continued to attend since then, and that he is one of those loyal friends who has also directed his own students towards it. His most recent appearance involved a special trip to London for a session in honour of Ian Roy in 2019, over half a century after first attending the IHR.

However, a final instructive example of loyalty involves Stephen Porter, who completed his PhD – on property destruction in the civil wars – with Ian Roy in 1983. Porter's attendance is first recorded in 1975, and it continued until at least 1986, the point at which the paper trail goes cold, and he highlights perhaps the most important dimension of seminar culture. Porter is fondly remembered as someone who was instrumental in making the Seventeenth Century seminar a welcoming and helpful forum, and whatever qualms may once have been expressed about its intellectual rigour, there can be little doubt about its supportive atmosphere.²⁰ Whether or not the Thursday seminar has been an unusually relaxed gathering, lacking the stuffiness and hierarchy that were evident elsewhere, its key strengths have always been those of the seminar format more generally. At their best, seminars offer a distinctive kind of scholarly community, making it possible to interact with a diverse group of people, whether IHR regulars or visitors from further afield, and to develop lasting relationships with other attendees. The utility of the seminar, in other words, is not just a matter of the papers that are delivered, but also of the expertise upon which it is possible to draw on a regular basis. The benefits also include being able to encounter a diverse range of topics, and to engage with substantial papers in a meaningful fashion. In both contexts, the sociability involved, and even the 'silo' effect – whereby many people confine their attendance to one seminar group – might be valuable rather than problematic. At their best, seminars demonstrate the advantages of loyalty, sociability, and eclecticism, things which are linked and mutually reinforcing, and which foster scholarly development for individuals and

²⁰ <https://thecharterhouse.org/blog/tribute-to-stephen-porter/>.

the 'field' alike. Such things cannot easily be replicated with other scholarly formats, and as such they should be both cherished and nurtured.