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Fen Plantation: Commons, Calvinism, and the Boundaries of Belonging in Early Modern England

Elly Dezateux Robson

Abstract In the first half of the seventeenth century, several foreign plantations were established on wetlands drained during a wave of ambitious state-led projects across eastern England. The lines of solidarity and separation forged by this little-known episode in the history of migration pose important questions about how emergent notions of nationhood intersected with local and transnational, religious and economic communities. This article investigates the causes and consequences of the settlement of Calvinist refugees on drained commons in Hatfield Level. It argues that fen plantation expands understanding of the relationship between English agricultural improvement and imperial expansion in the British Atlantic, as migrant communities acted in the service of empires and states while forging transnational Protestant networks. As Calvinists and cultivators, however, the settlers were met with hostility in England. While the crown encouraged foreign plantation as a source of national prosperity, Laudian church authorities identified it as a threat to religious conformity, the state, and society, muddying depictions of English governors as guarantors of refugee rights. Local efforts to violently expel settlers from Hatfield Level, meanwhile, were rooted in fen commoners' defense of customary rights, as parallel communities sought to enact rival environmental and economic models. The settler community interpreted these experiences through the lens of transnational Protestant adversity, entangling their quest for religious freedoms with their remit as fen improvers. Moving beyond dichotomous arguments about xenophobia, this article traces the transnational imaginaries, national visions, and emplaced processes through which collective identities and their sharp edges were constituted in early modern England.

> [T]hey with divers[e] others poore straingers being incurraged to transplant themselves and families from their owne countries into the said drayned lands, there to inhabite, and further to improve those grounds, and the greatest inducement . . . soe to doe was the assurance of the free exercise of religion.
>
> —Petition of Jacob Meyer and Christian Vandevarte, on behalf of the "poor French and Dutch men" in Hatfield Level, to the House of Lords, 10 December 1641[1]

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[1] Petition of Jacob Meyer and Christian Vandevarte to the House of Lords, 10 December 1641, HL/PO/JO/10/1/113, Parliamentary Archives, London. (This repository hereafter abbreviated as PA.)

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Of several foreign settlements established on wetlands drained during a wave of ambitious ventures across eastern England in the first half of the seventeenth century, the greatest archival trace is left by the Sandtoft plantation in Hatfield Level. Instigated in 1626, this flagship project of agricultural improvement promised to make *terra firma* of sixty thousand acres spanning Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, and Nottinghamshire at the head of the Humber estuary. Wetland improvement relied not only on investment in hydraulic works but also on labor to cultivate and make land profitable. Foreign settlement was sanctioned by the English crown and orchestrated by Dutch investors who recruited Calvinist refugees from northern France and the Low Countries. Incentivized by promises of land and religious liberty, the newcomers unsettled boundaries of belonging within England. The stranger church at Sandtoft was founded at a time of official hostility to foreign Calvinism, as the archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, enforced conformity to the Church of England in the 1630s. The settlers also endured some of the most sustained violence against foreigners in seventeenth-century England at the hands of fen communities who, with the outbreak of civil war in 1642, launched a riotous campaign to reclaim the wetland commons that had been drained, enclosed, and settled.

The Sandtoft community and its experiences in England have yet to receive sustained attention.[2] For historians of fen drainage, violence against foreign settlers has been incidental to a struggle between center and locality.[3] Studies of migrant communities, meanwhile, have interpreted these local attacks as an assertion of national identities: "xenophobic assaults" driven by "anti-alien sentiment."[4] The spectacle of intercommunal conflict has also overshadowed official interventions to restrict the settlers' religious rights. Their reception eludes the terms of a polarized debate in which scholars have either branded the English populace as "notoriously xenophobic" or, conversely, deemed England "a veritable oasis of tolerance."[5] Contemporaries' use of the resonant language of plantation to describe the foreign

[2] For the most detailed studies to date, see Jean Tsushima, "Melting into the Landscape: The Story of the 17th Century Walloons in the Fens," in *From Strangers to Citizens: The Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland, and Colonial America, 1550–1750*, ed. Randolph Vinge and Charles Littleton (Brighton, 2001), 106–12; G. H. Overend, "The First Thirty Years of Foreign Settlement in the Isle of Axholme, 1625–56," *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, no. 2 (1889), 281–331.

[3] Keith Lindley, *Fenland Riots and the English Revolution* (London, 1982), 199–200, 207–9; Eric H. Ash, *The Draining of the Fens: Projectors, Popular Politics, and State Building in Early Modern England* (Baltimore, 2017), 153–54, 220–21; Heather Falvey, "Custom, Resistance, and Politics: Local Experiences of Improvement in Early Modern England" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2007), 306–8, 362.

[4] Andrew Spicer, "'A Place of Refuge and Sanctuary of a Holy Temple': Exile Communities and the Stranger Churches," in *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, ed. Nigel Goose and Lien Luu (Brighton, 2005), 91–110, at 103; Nigel Goose, "'Xenophobia' in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England: An Epithet Too Far?," in Goose and Luu, *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 110–35, at 110.

[5] Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London, 1997), 49; Goose, "Xenophobia," 129. For further discussion of xenophobia in early modern England, see Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here amongst Us: Policies, Perceptions, and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (London, 1996), 9; Lien Luu, "'Taking the Bread out of Our Mouths': Xenophobia in Early Modern London," *Immigrants and Minorities* 19, no. 2 (2000): 1–22.

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settlement in the fens instead situates it alongside colonial projects in the seventeenth-century British Atlantic, in which Calvinist refugees served as improvers of untamed environments. Any investigation of the global connectedness of imperial polities must be tempered, however, by investigating the socially and ecologically emplaced processes through which identities were forged on the ground.[6] Together, these lenses illuminate the complex lines of solidarity and separation propagated by the Sandtoft plantation, as nascent notions of nationhood collided with local and transnational communities and their religious and economic practices. Such intersections can be understood by recalling Stuart Hall's insight that cultural identity is "not an essence but a positioning," a matter of becoming as much as being, even as it has "real, material, and symbolic" histories and effects.[7]

In tracking Atlantic connections between Irish and American plantations and central efforts to subdue the unruly peripheries of the British Isles, scholars have argued that Britishness was constructed through these processes.[8] Investigating experiments in foreign plantation *within* England both expands and complicates this rich picture of national and colonial entanglements. Contemporaries spoke of the "recouering of a lost country" in the fens that would be "planted" with inhabitants, but the associations stretched beyond rhetoric.[9] Recent studies by Kate Mulry and Keith Pluymers have explored how projects of environmental reform propelled the expansion of political authority and new claims to resources both within England and in new overseas colonies.[10] In the process, Mulry argues, "contemporaries continually reassessed what it meant to live a distinctively English life and debated the cultural, political, and territorial limits of Englishness."[11] If plantation was pivotal in redefining the parameters of national identity, its Englishness was often ambiguous. The strands binding empire and state were thickened by diasporic networks of religious refugees who formed communities that both transcended and acted in the service of particular polities. The Sandtoft plantation's transnational Calvinism mirrored imperial schemes in the Americas, where—as Owen Stanwood has

[6] For a recent call for global microhistories, see John-Paul Ghobrial, "Introduction: Seeing the World Like a Microhistorian," *Past and Present*, no. 242, S14 (2019): 1–22, at 6–7.

[7] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London, 2013), 392–401, at 394–95.

[8] Jane H. Ohlmeyer, "A Laboratory for Empire? Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford, 2004), 26–60; Jane H. Ohlmeyer, "Civilizinge of Those Rude Partes: Colonization within Britain and Ireland, 1580s–1640s," in *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford, 1998), 124–47; Nicholas Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560–1800* (Baltimore, 1987); Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001); Aonghas MacCoinnich, *Plantation and Civility in the North Atlantic World: The Case of the Northern Hebrides, 1570–1639* (Leiden, 2015).

[9] Humphrey Bradley, "A proiect ffor the drayning off the fennes," 2 April 1693, Lansdowne MS 74, fol. 180r, British Library, London (this repository is hereafter abbreviated as BL); James I to sewer commissioners in the Great Level, 17 April 1605, Additional MS 35171, fol. 206r, BL.

[10] Kate Luce Mulry, *An Empire Transformed: Remolding Bodies and Landscapes in the Restoration Atlantic* (New York, 2021); Keith Pluymers, *No Wood, No Kingdom: Political Ecology in the English Atlantic* (Philadelphia, 2021); Keith Pluymers, "Taming the Wilderness in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Ireland and Virginia," *Environmental History* 16, no. 4 (2011): 610–32. See also Eric H. Ash, "Reclaiming a New World: Fen Drainage, Improvement, and Projectors in Seventeenth-Century England," *Early Science and Medicine* 21, no. 5 (2016): 445–69; Ash, *Draining of the Fens*, 285–91.

[11] Mulry, *Empire Transformed*, 19.

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shown—Protestant refugees played a crucial role as experts, investors, merchants, and settlers.[12] The English crown's collaboration with Dutch capitalists and refugee settlers in Hatfield Level was one instance of a model that was extended across English commons, Irish plantations, and American frontiers in the seventeenth-century British Atlantic.

Generating collaboration and conflict between national, transnational, and local communities, fen plantation exposed fault lines and fulcrums of collective identity. Literary scholars have pointed to a burgeoning culture of English and British nationhood in this period, fashioned in London theaters, the first printed national atlases, and poetic perambulations of the landscape.[13] Yet, there can be no unequivocal confidence that collective identities, and their exclusive edges, were defined primarily by the nation.[14] The budding "imagined community" of the nation overlapped and competed with powerful claims made by communities of religious and economic practice. Even as the break with Rome and institution of the Church of England reformulated national identity, the Reformation generated solidarities between Protestants across Europe.[15] While migrant communities could face animosity from their English neighbors, shared religious conviction, guild affiliations, and family ties could also span cultural and linguistic gaps.[16] Worship and work might bridge, reinforce, or divide geographically defined communities. Responses to the Sandtoft plantation reveal that English governors were not unified in the ways that they imagined the national community. Settlers' labor in Hatfield Level fastened them to the crown's agenda to integrate marginal localities into the nation. As a refugee congregation unified by transnational Calvinism, however, their religious rights were at odds with Laud's efforts to tightly define a distinctively English Protestantism. Different arms of the state pulled in different directions: for the crown, foreign plantation was a source of national prosperity while for church authorities, it posed a threat to national piety.

Local communities, moreover, had by no means been subsumed by a collectively imagined nation, even as governors sought to make wetlands environmentally and economically English through improvement.[17] Executed in the interests of the "univ[e]rsall comon weale," drainage projects ran roughshod over local customary

[12] Owen Stanwood, *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire* (New York, 2020).

[13] Richard Helgerson, "The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England," *Representations*, no. 16 (1986): 50–85; John M. Adrian, *Local Negotiations of English Nationhood, 1570–1680* (Basingstoke, 2011); Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge, 1996).

[14] Benedict Anderson identifies racism rather than xenophobia as the exclusive edge of modern nationalism: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006), 145–58.

[15] Patrick Collinson, "England and International Calvinism," in *International Calvinism, 1541–1715*, ed. Meena Prestwich (Oxford, 1985), 197–223; Ole Peter Grell, "The Creation of a Transnational, Calvinist Network and Its Significance for Calvinist Identity and Interaction in Early Modern Europe," *European Review of History* 16, no. 5 (2009): 619–36.

[16] Scott Oldenburg, "Toward a Multicultural Mid-Tudor England: The Queen's Royal Entry Circa 1553, 'The Interlude of Wealth and Health,' and the Question of Strangers in the Reign of Mary I," *English Literary History* 76, no. 1 (2009): 99–129.

[17] On the concept of community, see Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepard, "Introduction: Communities in Early Modern England," in Communities *in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric*, ed. Alexndra Shepard and Phil Withington (Manchester, 2000), 1–17.

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rights; discursively casting the "idlenesse" and "turbulent dispositions" of fen commoners outside of the nation while materially excluding them from access to common land.[18] Rural communities in early modern England were often bounded by a local sense of place rather than identified with the territory of the nation-state. Environmentally specific customary rights—for instance, to common grazing or wood—were pivotal to defining collective economic identities and rooting them in the landscape via embodied practices. Andy Wood has written of how custom "ordered the rhythms of work and leisure, the nature of exploitation, and the structure of communities" and argues that these local identities "endured alongside the increasingly national articulation of economic life."[19] Like nations, local communities were imagined as wholes greater than the sum of their parts, defined by jurisdiction over rights and resources, and made at their margins. Steve Hindle has observed "the intense localism, even the parochial xenophobia" of early modern communities in response to rapid socioeconomic change.[20] The terms stranger and foreigner were relational and could refer to someone from a neighboring parish, another county, or a different nation.[21] Extending the term xenophobia to all geographical boundaries, however, risks collapsing national and local communities into one another and obscures their interrelated but distinct historical development. The economic lives of settlers and commoners in Hatfield Level wove their identities into the landscape, locality, and nation in very different ways.

Working across petitions, letters, wills, witness testimonies, church registers, books, and ballads, in what follows, I examine how collective identities were articulated and constituted through social and institutional practices. Both church authorities and fen communities perceived Sandtoft settlers as infringing upon their jurisdiction, spiritual or material, but wielded very different tools of marginalization. Jacob Selwood has pointed to the importance of investigating the modes and meanings of exclusion, arguing that "the tendency to use violence and disorder as barometers of antipathy can distract us from the importance of daily practice in defining and policing difference."[22] In riotous acts of exclusion, commoners mobilized customary practices to target the material infrastructure of improvement: settlers' bodies, homes, and church, as well as fences, drains, and crops. Governors, however, were more likely to deploy institutional and legal coercion—that is, the *threat* of state-sanctioned violence—to police the parameters of legitimate belonging.[23] Such

[18] James I to sewer commissioners in the Great Level, 17 April 1605, Additional MS 35171, fol. 206r, BL.

[19] Andy Wood, "The Place of Custom in Plebeian Political Culture: England, 1550–1800," *Social History* 22, no. 1 (1997): 46–60, at 51; Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013), 12.

[20] Steve Hindle, "Exclusion Crises: Poverty, Migration, and Parochial Responsibility in English Rural Communities, c. 1560–1660," *Rural History* 7, no. 2 (1996): 125–49, at 126–27. See also K. D. M. Snell, "The Culture of Local Xenophobia," *Social History* 28, no. 1 (2003): 1–30.

[21] Brodie Waddell, "Neighbours and Strangers: The Locality in Later Stuart Economic Culture," in Locating Agency*: Space, Power and Popular Politics*, ed. Fiona Williamson (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), 103–32; Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 309–29, at 315.

[22] Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (Farnham, 2010), 6.

[23] Susan D. Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 1 (1995): 1–34, at 15–16.

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mechanisms were used by Laudian authorities to coerce conformity from stranger congregations, but also by the crown to impose improvement on recalcitrant fen commoners. As Calvinists and cultivators, the Sandtoft settlers were caught at the sharp edge of contesting religious and economic communities within England. They experienced both Laudian repression and local riots as forms of violence and, in their appeals for relief, moved adeptly between narratives of transnational Protestant adversity and discourses of national improvement.

PLANTING PRODUCTIVITY: REFUGEES, STATES, AND EMPIRES

From the turn of the seventeenth century, advocates of fen improvement insisted that reforming wetlands would provide a wellspring of wealth. Crops planted on drained and enclosed land would employ the poor, feed the nation, create commodities for export, profit landowners, and boost royal revenues. While hydraulic schemes were financed by private investors, the crown stood to benefit financially, as a major fen landowner, and politically as well. Eric Ash has identified fen improvement as a crucial means through which sovereignty was asserted and the state's governing apparatus expanded.[24] While flagship projects in the fens sought to redefine the economic nation, they were often transnational in execution, relying on foreign expertise, investment, and migration. After decades of false starts in the East Anglian Great Level, Charles I instigated the first large-scale drainage project in the northern fens of Hatfield Level in 1626. His contract with the engineer Cornelius Vermuyden—who acted on behalf of a cohort of Dutch investors, known as Participants—stipulated that each party would receive a third of drained land, leaving fen communities with just a third of their commons.[25] Land and capital alone could not alchemize wetlands into profit, however; improvement of the fens relied on labor. In an era before mechanization, enormous inputs of human energy were required to transform environments. First, a veritable army of Dutch drainage workers arrived to excavate new waterways, block old ones, and build banks. Once land was reclaimed, tenant farmers were needed to make it productive and profitable: to plough, sow, and harvest, invest their lives, labor, and material goods in the land, and pay rents to new landowners.

The foundations of foreign plantation were laid in the venture's early stages. In 1628, Charles I sold his lands in Hatfield Level and Manor to Vermuyden, reaping a windfall profit of £16,800 and retaining a financial stake through fee-farm rents worth £1,228 a year. A clause in this contract granted Vermuyden permission to erect a chapel for "the exercise of religion . . . in the English or Dutch language."[26] While plantation remained implicit, provision of a foreign church was intended to attract Calvinist refugees to the Level. It mirrored the

[24] Ash, *Draining of the Fens*, 1–14.

[25] "Articles of agreement between Charles I and Cornelius Vermuyden," 24 May 1626, in William Peck, *A Topographical Account of the Isle of Axholme* [. . .], 2 vols. (Doncaster, 1815), 1:appendix 2, i–iv.

[26] Contract between Charles I and Cornelius Vermuyden, 27 December 1628, R/HCC/D/3, Nottingham University Library (this repository hereafter abbreviated as NUL); Lord Treasurer Weston to the Attorney General, [1629?], SP16/154, fol. 130, National Archives (this repository hereafter abbreviated as TNA).

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blueprint that Vermuyden had developed following his first English hydraulic project in the early 1620s, when two hundred "poor Low Country strangers" had settled on drained land in Canvey Island (Essex) and founded a reformed church.[27] Vermuyden did not remain long in Hatfield Level, quickly moving on to larger, more lucrative, schemes, and his Dutch drainage workers did not settle there either.[28] Instead, the Dutch Participants recruited French, Flemish, and Walloon refugees to farm their new estates in England. As early as spring 1628, some optimistically shipped tenants across the North Sea, only to find that their lands were not yet fully drained. Others contemplated bringing over Walloon settlers but had misgivings about the venture's viability.[29] Migration to the Level likely began in earnest in the early 1630s.[30] In January 1636, the Participants further incentivized settlement by pledging to pay the salary of a reformed minister to preach in French and Dutch.[31] Several months later, the archbishop of York observed a "new plantation" of two hundred families, reporting that settlers "come into the kingdome daily in great numbers . . . and more are daily expected to come by ships full," with two such vessels harbored at Hull and Harwich.[32] By 1645, the Sandtoft congregation numbered over one thousand souls, and new arrivals from France were still trickling in several years later.[33]

The Sandtoft settlement usually features as an idiosyncratic example within the history of migration to early modern England.[34] In crossing the channel to seek safety in England, the settlers traversed a route well worn by continental Protestants fleeing counter-Reformation. From the mid-sixteenth century, England's reforming monarchs and ministers welcomed such migration as a spur to theological and economic change. In 1550, Edward VI established the first foreign reformed church at Austin Friars, a former priory in London, while the following year his regent oversaw the settlement of Flemish weavers at the recently dissolved Glastonbury Abbey. Repurposing these monastic locations made a bold statement about the direction of the English Reformation.[35] As religious persecution and war intensified in

[27] A pass for Cornelius Vermuyden, 14 January 1623, PC/31, fol. 561, TNA. For further details of the Canvey community, see Basil E. Cracknell, *Canvey Island: The History of a Marshland Community* (Leicester, 1959), 20–28.

[28] They may have followed Vermuyden south to work on other drainage schemes or returned home. None of the Dutch drainage workers who testified in 1628 appear in the settlers' later church registers; see "Informations taken by Robert Portington," 18–20 August 1628, SP16/113 fols. 62–67, TNA; Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 291–92.

[29] Piet van Cruyningen, "Dutch Investors and the Drainage of Hatfield Chase, 1626 to 1656," *Agricultural History Review* 64, no. 1 (2016): 17–37, at 28; J. Korthals-Altes, *Sir Cornelius Vermuyden: The Lifework of a Great Anglo-Dutchman in Land-Reclamation and Drainage* (London, 1925), 81; Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 289–90.

[30] The earliest record of Sandtoft as the settlement's location appears in Map of Hatfield Level, 1633, MR1/336, TNA. By 1634, about 130 families had arrived. See Letter of Peter Bontemps to the Participants, 13 June 1636, translated from Latin, in Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 297–98.

[31] "An agreement of the Participants for a minister of the gospel amongst the French and Dutch Protestants," 16 January 1634, HCC/9111/1, fols. 319–20, NUL.

[32] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636, SP16/327, fol. 84, TNA.

[33] Petition of Peter Berchett et al., 15 November 1645, HL/PO/JO/10/1/196, PA; J. H. Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum* [. . .], 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1897), 3, pt. 2:2119.

[34] See Goose and Luu, introduction to *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 17.

[35] Roberta Gilchrist, *Sacred Heritage: Monastic Archaeology, Identities, Beliefs* (Cambridge, 2020), 168–70.

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France and the Low Countries in the 1570s, up to twenty thousand refugees reached England.[36] The newcomers settled in London and in provincial towns in the south-east, where they established reformed churches and flourishing artisanal industries while maintaining active trade, family, and religious links to the European mainland.[37]

The community in Hatfield Level diverged from these earlier patterns of migration in several significant ways. It was established at a time of declining migration to England, in a lull between major waves in the late sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries.[38] Rather than arriving organically, settlement was incentivized and organized by the crown and Participants. Northerly and isolated, the rural community was tasked with occupying and cultivating drained land. These features suggest intersections with plantations established in the British Atlantic in the same period. In the early seventeenth century, the word *plantation* offered a versatile agricultural metaphor for transformation. It could describe the planting, or establishment, of reformed religion and rooting out of papacy. More literally, it meant the act of cultivating land. These religious, economic, and environmental endeavors crystallized in the noun, describing colonial settlements in Ireland and America. Tracing plantation in its early-seventeenth-century Caribbean contexts, Paul Musselwhite has argued that it formed a "hybrid public-private" entity, retaining potent "civic connotations" while affording planters the "freedom, authority, and investment capital to construct their exploitative machine."[39] Atlantic plantation was justified by arguments for the transplantation of civilized rule, religion, and agricultural practices into regions where locals were depicted as barbarous and land as wilderness. In the fens, the language of plantation likewise interwove settlement, reformed religion, and agricultural improvement. The community described how they had been "invited to plant those drained places"; religious officials addressed "the whole congregation of strangers there planted"; and a map inscribed the post-drainage landscape with "the new cutt and passages, banks, wayes, howses, and plantac[i]ons."[40]

[36] Lien Luu, "Alien Communities in Transition, 1570–1640," in Goose and Luu, *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 192–210.

[37] Nigel Goose, "Immigrants and English Economic Development," in Goose and Luu, *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 136–55; Charles G. D. Littleton, "The Strangers, Their Churches and the Continent: Continuing and Changing Connexions," in Goose and Luu, *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 177–91; David Trim, "Immigrants, the Indigenous Community, and International Calvinism," in Goose and Luu, *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 211–22; Silke Muylaert, *Shaping the Stranger Churches: Migrants in England and the Troubles in the Netherlands, 1547–1585* (Leiden, 2021).

[38] Luu, "Alien Communities in Transition," 194–99.

[39] Paul Musselwhite, '"Plantation," the Public Good, and the Rise of Capitalist Agriculture in the Early Seventeenth-Century Caribbean', *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 20, no. 4 (September 2022): 598–99. See also: Paul Musselwhite, 'Private Plantation: The Political Economy of Land in Early Virginia', in *Virginia 1619: Slavery and Freedom in the Making of English America*, ed. Paul Musselwhite, Peter C. Mancall, and James Horn (Williamsburg Virginia, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 150–72.

[40] Petition of James de Con et al., 10 December 1640, and "Copy of Dr. Farmery's direction to the French and Dutch refugees," n.d., HL/PO/JO/10/1/44, PA; Certificate of Charles Harbord, surveyor-general, 1 November 1633, SP16/250, fol. 13, TNA.

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The relationship between land and labor, climate and character was a vexed one for early modern improvers and colonists, due to prevalent humoral theories that held that porous human bodies and temperaments were inflected by their environments.[41] On the one hand, environmental change was required to create orderly subjects, but on the other, industrious labor was foundational to environmental change. This chicken-and-egg conundrum led to a series of anxieties. How far could Indigenous inhabitants be reformed? Would English settlers tame wastelands, or would they degenerate under their influence? When juxtaposed to the apparent "pastoral savagery" of the Gaelic Irish, John Montaño has shown, cultivation and enclosure acted as markers of English civility, ideologically and materially driving plantation.[42] By contrast, the first planters of Virginia described civilizable Algonquians and abundant resources. This optimism was abandoned, however, after Indigenous resistance to the colony reached a bloody peak in 1622. Pluymers argues that English writers on America subsequently reached for tropes taken from Ireland, whereby uncivilized and rebellious locals were held responsible for rendering a fertile land inhospitable and unprofitable.[43] Accordingly, only the plantation of industrious and civil Protestant settlers could reform environments, unlock resources, and pacify conflict.

This dynamic can be observed not only at the Celtic fringe or colonial frontiers, but also in English wetlands subjected to drainage. Materially, the recovery of large expanses of fenland offered profitable potential that rivalled colonial ventures. Rhetorically, fen dwellers were represented as the inverse of ideal—productive and obedient—subjects. Mulry has traced how husbandry writers and drainage promoters depicted idle, disorderly, sick, and sinful inhabitants as infected by unhealthy and disfigured wetlands. Wetland improvement promised to integrate them into the "political body of the English nation," acting as an instrument of social reform by setting the poor to work and creating ordered environments.[44] In practice, however, there were limits to the malleability of fen commoners, who often fiercely opposed such projects, regarding them as a means of exclusion from their common lands rather than inclusion in the commonwealth. In the early years of the Hatfield Level project, drainage workers were confronted by huge local riots, numbering hundreds of commoners, which were repressed only by violent force, royal proclamations, and heavy fines.[45] Defending wetland ecology, the pastoral economy, and their customary rights, commoners were not willing to be improved or to enact improvement. Drainers' rhetoric about disorderly fen dwellers, and their experiences of riotous resistance on the ground, formed an important context for decisions to transplant a tractable workforce of migrants to Hatfield Level.

While some scholars have suggested that the centralizing state's territorialization of land in early modern Britain should be understood as a process of "internal

[41] Anya Zilberstein, *A Temperate Empire: Making Climate Change in Early America* (New York, 2016), 129–30.

[42] John Patrick Montaño, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2011), 4, 17–18.

[43] Pluymers, "Taming the Wilderness," 622–26.

[44] Mulry, *Empire Transformed*, 100, 110. See also Todd A. Borlik, "Caliban and the Fen Demons of Lincolnshire: The Englishness of Shakespeare's *Tempest*," *Shakespeare* 9, no. 1 (2013): 21–51, at 22.

[45] See Privy Council orders in response to riots in 1628, PC2/38, fols. 419, 479–80, 485, 491, TNA.

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colonialism," the term *internal* may be misleading.[46] Any characterization of fen improvement as a closed circuit of center and periphery is complicated by the vital role played by European networks of capital, expertise, and labor. Likewise, not all planters in England's Atlantic colonies were English, or even British. Investors and landowners struggled to recruit sufficient numbers of Protestant planters to occupy settlements with risky environments and hostile locals.[47] Calvinist refugees represented an ideal solution, peopling plantations that harnessed their hopes of economic opportunity and religious refuge to national and imperial ambitions. One early precedent for the Sandtoft settlement can be found in a colony of forty Calvinist families from the Low Countries, who settled at Swords, County Dublin, after 1567. Sir Henry Sidney, lord deputy of Ireland, described how he had "caused [them] to plant and inhabit there" and praised their productivity and piety: "how diligently they wrought" and "how godlie and cleanly" they lived.[48] In 1590, it was suggested that "Hollanders" might likewise settle English fenlands. Fresh from a stint as a military governor in the Netherlands, Sir William Russell brought Dutch drainers over to assess his Cambridgeshire estates. Soon after, he wrote to the Privy Council with the first proposal for a foreign plantation in the fens. Although his lands were now "desolate & unp[ro]fittable," he maintained, Dutch settlers "will by their successe, industrie & skill greatlie enco[u]rage the inhabitants adjoining, whoe are now doubtfull or carelesse."[49] Whether in Irish plantations or English fens, Calvinist settlers were depicted as possessing the moral and material qualities to improve unruly lands and societies.

As the Hatfield Level project began in the late 1620s, several other plantations relied on partnerships with foreign merchants and settlers. After James VI of Scotland's failed project to establish a lowland Scot plantation on Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, for instance, the highlander Earl of Seaforth established a Dutch and Walloon fishing settlement on the island in 1628.[50] Two years later, a group of French Huguenots approached Sir Robert Heath (who, as attorney general, was heavily involved in litigation over the improvement of Hatfield Level) with proposals to settle his newly granted territory known as Carolana in North America.[51] The projects through which empire and state were expanded were often transnational in scope.

[46] Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (London, 1975), chaps. 3 and 4; Mark Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies: Class, Capital, and the Literature of Early Modern English Colonialism* (New York, 2003), 1–3, 6–10; Carl J. Griffin, "Enclosure as Internal Colonisation: The Subaltern Commoner, Terra Nullius and the Settling of England's 'Wastes'," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 1 (2023): 95–120.

[47] Montaño, *English Colonialism in Ireland*, 140–53. On the transportation of indentured servants from England to America in this period, see Anna Suranyi, "Indenture, Transportation, and Spiriting: Seventeenth Century English Penal Policy and 'Superfluous' Populations," in *Building the Atlantic Empires: Unfree Labor and Imperial States in the Political Economy of Capitalism, ca. 1500–1914*, ed. John Donoghue and Evelyn P. Jennings (Leiden, 2016), 132–59.

[48] Henry Sidney, "Sir Henry Sidney's Memoir of His Government of Ireland (Continued)," *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, no. 5 (1857): 299–323, at 306.

[49] Sir William Russell's petition and answer, ca. 1590, Lansdowne MS 110, fols. 19–22, BL. See also Gladys Scott Thomson, *Family Background: Four Studies of the Russells* (London, 1949), 161–71.

[50] MacCoinnich, *Plantation and Civility in the North Atlantic World*, 270–78.

[51] A similar although unsuccessful scheme was proposed again in the 1640s; see Thomas Leng, "'A Potent Plantation Well Armed and Policeed': Huguenots, the Hartlib Circle, and British Colonization in the 1640s," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2009): 173–94, esp. 175–77.

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Improving landowners and imperial governors tell only half the story of foreign plantation in the seventeenth-century Atlantic. These settlements were lobbied for and financed by Calvinist merchants, as part of networks of religious solidarity and commercial interest that underwrote a "Protestant international" spanning Europe and its expanding empires.[52] England's territorial expansion—via land reclamation and colonization—was rivalled by the Dutch Republic, its Protestant neighbor across the North Sea. The model for refugee settlement on drained land had been established in earlier Dutch hydraulic projects. The war-torn emergence of the Dutch Republic in the late sixteenth century led to a flood of refugees, finance, and skills from the southern Netherlands, then controlled by the Catholic Spanish Hapsburgs. As the republic's population rose dramatically, the annual rate of land reclamation also accelerated: from eight thousand hectares between 1565 and 1590 to thirty-six thousand hectares between 1590 and 1615.[53] This endeavor was understood as a moral act (fulfilling a God-given power to conquer waters and make land anew), a profitable project, and territorial bulwark against the Catholic Spanish.[54] Such schemes were not limited to the borders of the Dutch Republic. Land reclaimed by Dutch drainers in sixteenth-century Germany, for instance, was settled and farmed by religious refugees from the Low Countries, who exported their produce internationally.[55]

Diasporic Calvinists placed their resources at the service of domestic and imperial projects, seeking strategic opportunities for settlement, free trade, and free worship in places as far flung as Scotland and Brazil, Spitsbergen and Manhattan.[56] Many capitalists from the Low Countries who financed drainage schemes across Europe were also heavily involved in colonial trade.[57] In the early seventeenth century, one of the leading advocates for the establishment of the Dutch West India Company was Willem Usselincx, a merchant, speculator, and polemicist who had lost a fortune in

[52] J. F. Bosher, "Huguenot Merchants and the Protestant International in the Seventeenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1995): 77–102, at 77. See also David Ormrod, "The Atlantic Economy and the 'Protestant Capitalist International,' 1651–1775," *Historical Research* 66, no. 160 (1993): 197–208.

[53] Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge, 1997), 32.

[54] Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London, 1991), 34–50.

[55] Salvatore Ciriacono, *Building on Water: Venice, Holland, and the Construction of the European Landscape in Early Modern Times*, trans. Jeremy Scott (Oxford, 2006), 195–98, 207, 209. See also Heinz Schilling, "Innovation through Migration: The Settlements of Calvinistic Netherlanders in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Central and Western Europe," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 16, no. 31 (1983): 7–33.

[56] Joris van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company: Economic Interests and Political Decision Making in the History of Dutch Brazil, 1621–1656* (Leiden, 2021), chap. 3; Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670* (Cambridge, 2001), 210–15, 246–49; Frank Lestringant and Ann Blair, "Geneva and America in the Renaissance: The Dream of the Huguenot Refuge, 1555–1600," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 2 (1995): 285–95; Owen Stanwood, "Between Eden and Empire: Huguenot Refugees and the Promise of New Worlds," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013): 1319–44; April Lee Hatfield, "Dutch Merchants and Colonists in the English Chesapeake: Trade, Migration and Nationality in 17th-Century Maryland and Virginia," in Vinge and Littleton, *Strangers to Citizens*, 296–305.

[57] Raphaël Morera, "Environmental Change and Globalization in Seventeenth-Century France: Dutch Traders and the Draining of French Wetlands (Arles, Petit Poitou)," *International Review of Social History* 55, no. S18 (2010): 79–101, at 82, 84–85.

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a drainage project in Holland. Usselincx envisaged the company as a means to aid southern Netherlanders suffering under the yoke of Spanish tyranny by providing Calvinist havens in the New World.[58] Likewise, several leading Participants in Hatfield Level were investors in the Dutch West India Company (Marcus van Valkenburg and Willem van Wely) and the English East India Company (Isaac van Peene and John Corselis).[59] One of the wealthiest merchants in London, Sir William Courten, held lands in Hatfield Level and other recently improved forests and fens. Heading an "Anglo-Dutch business empire" that spanned the Atlantic, he was also the chief architect and financer of the English colonization of Barbados in the mid-1620s and later founded the Courten Association as a rival to the English East India Company.[60]

The Participants in Hatfield Level were animated by profit and solidarity. They initially envisaged it as settlement that would produce commodities for Dutch markets, seeking license to export grain, meat, cheese, and butter from Hull to Holland across the North Sea.[61] This conveniently located English outpost had many advantages when compared to the restrictive conditions and considerable risks of settlement and trade across the Atlantic in the 1630s.[62] Cohorts of Participants based in Dordrecht and Amsterdam administered their lands from afar, delegating practical affairs to agents in England. However, some of the Participants with the largest investments—for instance, the van Valkenburgs (whose family had fled Antwerp) and Sir Philibert Vernatti—migrated to England, where they were naturalized as denizens and built new houses in the Level. Others, like the Corselis brothers and Courten, were London merchants descended from Flemish refugees.[63] The family histories of Participants in England may have driven their initial efforts to secure religious rights for their refugee tenants. In the plantation's early years, Vernatti, the van Valkenburgs, and the Corselises signed the agreement to pay for a minister, provided temporary places of worship, and intervened with central authorities on the congregations' behalf.[64]

[58] Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*, 139–40, 176–78, 182, 247.

[59] Ole Peter Grell, *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London: The Dutch Church in Austin Friars, 1603–1642* (Leiden, 1989), 260, 265; Ole Peter Grell, *Calvinist Exiles in Tudor and Stuart England* (Aldershot, 1996), 16; van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company*, 103–4; "A List of the Several owners of the Level of Hatfield Chace," 1635, HCC/9111/1, fols. 62–63, NUL.

[60] John C. Appleby, s.v. "Courten, Sir William (c. 1568–1636)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6445; Grell, *Calvinist Exiles in Tudor and Stuart England*, 9–16.

[61] Korthals-Altes, *Sir Cornelius Vermuyden*, 79. Rapeseed from the Level was exported to Rotterdam in the 1630s; see van Cruyningen, "Dutch Investors and the Drainage of Hatfield Chase," 34. For similar conditions in earlier Dutch proposals to drain the Great Level, see "Proposed conditions to be observed between the King and the French [*sic*] contractors," 1622, SP14/18, fols. 150v–51r, TNA. L. E. Harris suggested that Hatfield Level should be understood as a Dutch rather than English undertaking. See L. E. Harris, *Vermuyden and the Fens: A Study of Sir Cornelius Vermuyden and the Great Level* (London, 1953), 43.

[62] Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*, 247–49.

[63] Grell, *Dutch Calvinists*, 48, 161, 260; Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 287–88; George Stovin, "A brief account of the drainage of the Level of Hatfield Chase," ca. 1762, HCC/9111/1, fols. 17, 27, 239, 255, 323, 365, NUL; Map of Hatfield Level, 1633, MR1/336, TNA. For a full discussion of the Dutch investors in Hatfield Level, see van Cruyningen, "Dutch Investors and the Drainage of Hatfield Chase."

[64] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636, SP16/327, fol. 84, TNA; Petition of James de Con et al., 10 December 1640, and "Copy of Dr. Farmery's direction to the French and Dutch refugees," n.d., HL/PO/JO/10/1/44, PA; "An agreement of the Participants for a minister of the gospel amongst the French and Dutch Protestants," 16 January 1634, HCC/9111/1, fols. 319–20, NUL.

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Despite—or perhaps because of—its transnational scope, foreign investors, ministers, and settlers involved in the Sandtoft plantation were anxious to stress that productive migrants would bring tangible benefits to their host nation. Historians of migration have often emphasized the inherent work ethic of Protestant refugees and their pioneering contributions to England's economic development.[65] In Hatfield Level, however, entwined industrious and godly identities were actively constructed to claim national belonging, drawing on improving discourses that situated labor and innovation as the motor of England's wealth and power. In 1641, for instance, the Dutch engineer Johan Liens published a pamphlet outlining the contribution that fen improvement had made, and would make, to the commonwealth, drawing on his experience as "director of the workes" in Hatfield Level and other fen projects.[66] The "rude and ignorant" locals could not spearhead improvement, he insisted. Commoners instead resisted it through their "uncivill" and "unruly actions and neglects," because "minds wanting providence are alwayes backward and indisposed to any new thing be it never so good." For Liens, piety and productivity were indivisible. If incentivized by religious and economic freedoms, his Low Country compatriots would rent drained lands "at a dearer rate by half then any native." They would also bring valuable knowledge of manufacturing oil, soap, and cloth, using the new industrial crop of rapeseed grown by many settlers in Hatfield Level.[67] Escalating profits would accrue from the manufacture and export of these commodities, Liens estimated, correcting England's balance of trade by bringing gold flowing into the kingdom. In 1636, Sandtoft's first minister had used similar arguments to demand Participants' material support for his congregation's religious rights. Without a church and minister, settlers would depart, and it was in the landlords' interests that "the Levill should be inhabited and cultivated by the strangers . . . since both by their sobriety and laborious industry they are well suited to the same lands."[68] Depicted as uniquely capable of improving the fens, godly settlers wove the land and their identities into the English commonwealth through labor.

The Sandtoft settlement sat at the epicenter of a decade in which foreign plantation was considered a viable strategy to improve English common lands, particularly where local resistance was fierce. Bidding to drain Eight Hundred Fen in the mid-1630s, for instance, one anonymous projector (quite possibly Liens) proposed a plantation of French and Dutch tenants, with new stranger churches and "free liberty" to export produce.[69] The rationale for foreign plantation was clearly

[65] Bernard Cottret, *The Huguenots in England: Immigration and Settlement, c. 1550–1700*, trans. Peregrine and Adriana Stevenson (Cambridge, 1991), 2–8; Robin D. Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain* (London, 1985), 1–3; Goose, "Immigrants and English Economic Development."

[66] Petition of John Liens to Charles I, 1637, SP16/375, fol. 84, TNA.

[67] I[ohan] L[iens], *A Discourse concerning the Great Benefit of Drayning and Imbanking* [. . .] (London, 1641), 10, 7. On Liens's authorship, see A. W. Skempton and Margaret Knittl, "Liens, Johan or John (fl. 1627–1641)," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. A. W. Skempton, 3 vols. (London, 2002), 1:406–8.

[68] Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 297–98.

[69] "Another proposal for draining the Eight Hundred Fen," [1635?], SP16/307, fol. 62, TNA. Liens became director of works in Eight Hundred Fen and the Lindsey Level soon after; see Skempton and Knittl, "Liens," 406–7.

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articulated in 1637, when efforts were made to recruit settlers from Hatfield Level to the newly enclosed Galtres Forest, forty miles south in Yorkshire. One of the two new English landlords in Galtres, John Gibbon, had bought Vermuyden's lands in Hatfield Level and was therefore familiar with the Sandtoft community's religious priorities. When seeking royal permission to erect a stranger church at Galtres, Gibbon was explicit that it was an incentive to facilitate improvement. The land was "wild barran and unmanured," and locals refused to "pay any considerable rent for that w[hi]ch they say have beene their commons." By contrast, the settlers were "industrious men and skilfull in the manuring of grounds" who would pay "reasonable" rents.[70] Visions of plantation were also integrated into the most ambitious drainage project of the era in the Great Level. When Charles I briefly assumed direct control of the scheme in 1639, his plans included "an eminent town" called Charlemont, a new English community in the model of foreign settlements.[71] Although Charlemont did not materialize, the next Great Level undertaker, William Russell, Earl of Bedford, established a foreign plantation at Whittlesey just a few years later. He was likely influenced by his engineer, Vermuyden, and coinvestor, Vernatti, who had both been involved in the Sandtoft settlement.[72]

The colonial dimensions of foreign plantation in the fens were not lost on contemporaries. A ballad called "The Draining of the Fens" played with watery metaphors to encourage English drinking and disparage Dutch drainage. This song probably circulated at the time of the second phase of the Great Level project in the early 1650s but was first captured in print in 1661. It concluded with these lines:

> Why should we stay here then and perish with thirst?
> To th' new world in the moon away let us goe;
> For if the Dutch colony get thither first,
> 'Tis a thousand to one but they'l drain that too.[73]

The final frontier of ambition stretched beyond English wetlands and the scarcely imagined limits of the Americas into outer space, where lunar resources might similarly be exploited. The ballad's opposition between Dutch and English interests was likely accentuated in light of the Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654), triggered by imperial competition. In Hatfield Level, however, Dutch merchants were not colonial rivals but valuable collaborators. Moreover, produce and profit from Sandtoft plantation ultimately circulated within England rather than being drained abroad.[74] As the financial risks of the Hatfield Level venture became evident, ambitions of a Dutch-owned colony supplying Dutch markets had faded. By the early 1640s,

[70] Petition of Robert Long and John Gibbon, 6 June 1637, SP16/323, fol. 55, TNA.

[71] William Dugdale, *History of Imbanking and Drayning of Divers Fenns and Marshes* [. . .] (London, 1662), 214–15. Charlemont was also the name of a fort in County Armagh, Ireland, built in 1602 by its namesake—Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, the Lord Deputy of Ireland—during the Nine Years' War: see James O'Neill "The Cockpit of Ulster: War along the River Blackwater, 1593–1603," *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 72 (2013): 184–99, esp. 194–96.

[72] Ash, *Draining of the Fens*, 190.

[73] *Wit and Drollery Joviall Poems: Corrected and Much Amended* [. . .] (London, 1661), 231–33. For discussion of this ballad, see Todd A. Borlik and Clare Egan, "Angling for the 'Powte': A Jacobean Environmental Protest Poem," *English Literary Renaissance* 48, no. 2 (2018): 256–89.

[74] *Wit and Drollery Joviall Poems*, 233.

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many Participants had sold their estates to English landlords, who inherited the foreign tenants with the land.[75] The Sandtoft settlers were left in a precarious position. The ballad's verses indicate how tropes of the industrious, valuable migrant often relied on the shadow story of a deleterious migrant presence, which could be readily mobilized to serve military, economic, or religious agendas. Valorizing adjectives did not attach themselves to the Dutch and Scottish prisoners of war whose forced labor underpinned the later phases of Great Level drainage.[76] Belonging was slippery. Understanding the foundations of the Sandtoft settlement through the lens of plantation can help make sense of the migrants' ambivalent reception in England. The very practices that forged the plantation—reformed religion and improved cultivation—placed the community in contention with confessional nationhood and local custom.

COERCING CONFORMITY: FOREIGN CHURCHES AND NATIONAL RELIGION

As the crown incentivized religious settlement and Dutch drainers situated their tenants as industrious Protestants, the parameters of English Protestantism were changing. In the early 1630s, Archbishop Laud charted a new direction for the Church of England; one that prioritized national conformity and marginalized foreign Calvinism. Protestantism was foundational to the development of national identity in early modern England and Britain. This process was fueled by a litany of real and imagined Catholic plots to overthrow Protestant authority, often thought to be orchestrated by foreign powers or papal agents.[77] Scholars have highlighted, however, that any picture of unified national Protestantism is challenged by affinities with foreign Protestants and conflicts between the established church and English dissenters.[78] It becomes more complicated still when considering Laud's time at the helm of the Church of England in the 1630s.

While foreign reformed churches in England had held "immense symbolic importance for the Church of England's internationalist Protestant identity" since the reign of Edward VI, Laud broke with this trajectory. He instead sought to bracket a distinctively English Protestantism from the subversive and schismatic implications of continental Calvinism. Anthony Milton has argued that Laud and his allies redefined the English church as not just "the best" but "the only" reformed church, articulating an exceptional status as simultaneously "Reformed and Catholic."[79] Rescripting

[75] Only members of the van Peenen, de Witt, van Valkenburg, and Vernatti families settled permanently in the Level. See Will of Sir Gabriel Vernatt of Hatfield, Yorkshire, 23 October 1655, PROB 11/250/447, TNA; George Stovin, "A brief account of the drainage of the Level of Hatfield Chase," ca. 1762, HCC/9111/1, fols. 17, 27, 239, 255, 323, 365, NUL; van Cruyningen, "Dutch Investors and the Drainage of Hatfield Chase," 29, 36.

[76] Sonia Tycko, "The Legality of Prisoner of War Labour in England, 1648–1655," *Past & Present* 246 (2020): 35–68.

[77] Colley, "Britishness and Otherness," 317–21.

[78] Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, "The Trials of the Chosen Peoples: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland," in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge, 1998), 3–30, at 9–15.

[79] Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), 511, 525–27.

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national doctrine according to Arminian teachings, Laud emphasized uniform liturgy, clerical hierarchies, ceremonialism, and the "beauty of holiness" manifesting in changes to church interiors and sacramental rituals. He also demanded an unprecedented degree of conformity, and ministers and congregants who refused were excommunicated and fined.[80] These interventions disrupted previous religious accommodations and produced controversy in universities and parish churches alike, alienating even moderate Puritans and provoking accusations of popish tendencies.[81] Laud's efforts stretched beyond England, moreover, to encompass Britain and its Atlantic colonies. Migration to New England was restricted to those in possession of a certificate of religious conformity, while English doctrine was extended to Ireland and Scotland (with dramatic consequences). Laud also worked to tighten control over English churches in the Netherlands, perceived as a hotbed of transnational Protestant activity.[82]

In doing so, Laud displaced popery as the foreign other against which national religious identity had been formulated since the Reformation. His policy of national conformity abandoned the solidarities, pluralities, and ambiguities that had characterized prior relations with foreign reformed churches. One pressing concern for Laud was the possibility that stranger congregations were harboring English Puritans, infecting the nation by acting as "great nurseries of inconformity."[83] By locating nonconformity as foreign, Laud was able to sharply delineate the religious doctrine, practice, and identity that he sought to imprint on English worshippers. Stranger churches became an "anti-type of true religion," and their religious freedoms in England were dramatically curtailed.[84] In April 1634, as newly enthroned archbishop, Laud summoned foreign congregations in his Canterbury diocese, confronting them with questions about their birthplaces, liturgical practices, and willingness to conform. Although stranger churches coordinated nationally and mobilized influential contacts to intercede on their behalf, this flurry of activity failed to avert Laud's course of action. In September 1635, all English-born strangers were instructed to attend parish churches, with first-generation migrants permitted to receive English liturgy translated into their mother tongue.[85]

Conformity was a political and theological project, as religious hierarchy and obedience became integral to a vision of monarchical authority and social unity during

[80] Peter Lake, "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity, and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Basingstoke, 1993), 161–84, at 164–66. See also Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c.1700* (Oxford, 2007), chaps. 5 and 6.

[81] Michael Questier, "Arminianism, Catholicism, and Puritanism in England during the 1630s," *Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006): 53–78: John Walter, "'Affronts and Insolencies': The Voices of Radwinter and Popular Opposition to Laudianism," *English Historical Review* 122, no. 495 (2007): 35–60.

[82] Anthony Milton, s.v. "Laud, William (1573–1645)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16112.

[83] William Laud, *Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud*, ed. William Scott and James Bliss, 10 vols. (Oxford, 1847–1860), 5:323. See also William Laud, "The State of the French and Dutch Churches in England," 17 April 1634, SP16/265, fol. 157, TNA; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud, 1573–1645* (London, 1940), 244–57; Ole Peter Grell, "From Uniformity to Tolerance: The Effects on the Dutch Church in London of Reverse Patterns in English Church Policy from 1634 to 1647," *Dutch Review of Church History* 66, no. 1 (1986): 17–40, at 17–21.

[84] Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 523.

[85] Grell, "From Uniformity to Tolerance," 21–26.

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Charles I's eleven-year rule without Parliament. Warning against summoning Parliament in 1628, Laud explained to Charles that if the church "had more power, the kinge might have more both obedience and service."[86] Laud's focus on foreign churches was likewise driven by concerns about this "divided body from both state and church" being jurisdictionally independent and subversive. In his early paper on the "dangers" of these churches, which he wrote for the Privy Council as bishop of London in 1632, temporal and theological concerns were indivisible. Strangers' divergent beliefs and institutions fed into wider social separation, whereby "few, or none of them, marry with any of us, but only one with another." From here, Laud escalated the scale of the threat: their failure to integrate into the Church of England "must needs work upon their affections, and alienate them from the state," he speculated, so that "they which are now a church within a church, will in time grow to be a kind of another commonwealth within this." He even insinuated that stranger congregations might aid foreign enemies in France and the Low Countries, pointing to their strategic locations in southeastern port towns. He proposed punitive remedies: surveillance through a national census of strangers and the enforcement of conformity via excommunication, fines, and even the removal of strangers' economic freedoms.[87] Laud consequently posited coerced integration into the religious nation as a panacea for the dangers that foreign Calvinists posed to English subjects.

The newest stranger congregation in England, at Sandtoft, soon became a target and exemplar of Laudian conformity. The community was unified by shared histories of persecution, a common identity as religious refugees, and hopes for free worship according to Calvinist precepts. In petitions to English authorities, settlers often identified as "poore Protestant strangers . . . both French and Dutch."[88] These linguistic terms encompassed the adjacent dialects of Walloon and Flemish refugees from the southern Netherlands (now Belgium) and French families from Normandy and other places.[89] French speakers were predominant, but Dutch speakers formed a vocal minority, numbering forty families in 1655.[90] Settlers' precise paths to England remain obscure. After a period of relative peace, counter-Reformation resurged in Europe in the 1620s, with renewed conflict between the Dutch Republic and the Catholic Hapsburgs and the erosion of Huguenot freedoms in France.[91] It is possible that the refugees first fled to the Dutch Republic, where they were recruited to plant the fens. Once in Hatfield Level, they formed a single congregation knitted together by dense kinship networks. Their transnational Calvinism was reflected in their first

[86] As cited in Milton, "Laud, William (1573–1645)."

[87] Laud, *Works of the Most Reverend Father in God* [. . .], 6:22–27. For his later reiteration of such views, see Laud, 7:134-6; Laud, *The history of the troubles and tryal of the Most Reverend Father in God and blessed martyr* [. . .] (London, 1695), 120, 164–66, 377–78. On the theological and political dimensions of Laud's attitude to foreign reformed churches, see Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 512–23.

[88] Petition of French and Dutch Protestant strangers, 16 April 1656, SP18/126, fol. 159, TNA.

[89] Tsushima, "Melting into the Landscape," 108; Petition of Robert Long and John Gibbon, 6 June 1637, SP16/323, fol. 55, TNA; Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636, TNA, SP16/327, fol. 84; Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:1899–900, 2115–16, 2123, 2321, 2335, 2562–64.

[90] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:2115–16.

[91] Luu, "Alien Communities in Transition," 195–99.

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minister, Peter Bontemps, who was trained by French ministers at Leiden University in the Dutch Republic before being dispatched to Hatfield Level by the Walloon Synod of the Low Countries in 1634.[92] Settler wills and the Sandtoft Church register (1641–1685), of which a partial transcription survives, not only disclose communal relationships but also constituted them spiritually, legally, and affectively.[93] Fourteen large families dominated the settlement, each containing between ten and thirty identifiable individuals spread across several households. Yet significant numbers seem to have arrived alone or with little extended family: seventy-five of 159 surnames surface only once in the records, split evenly by gender. Most married into larger families, but in 1655 congregants noted "some young people who live by themselves."[94] Certain figures acted as linchpins, serving as church elders or deacons, providing credit, witnessing wills, and heading up petitions.

The congregation's exercise of religious freedoms relied on material conditions as much as formal rights. Of primary importance was a reformed pastor able to deliver the word of God in their mother tongues, and the salary to pay him. A second priority was to erect a physical church. In its early years, the Sandtoft congregation gathered in Vernatti's barn, mirroring the makeshift churches of other foreign reformed congregations and John Calvin's disdain for holy buildings since "we ourselves are the true temples of God."[95] Yet Calvin also emphasized the importance of spaces in which communities of believers could congregate, and the construction of a church evidently held symbolic and practical value for the fledgling congregation. It was a bitter disappointment when the Participants failed to honor promises of financial support.[96] After two years as minister, Bontemps was teetering on the brink of departure for want of salary, while no church had yet been built. These were matters of consequence for the plantation, Bontemps remonstrated to the Participants: it "was relying on this promise that [the settlers] repaired hither; for truly it would be unjust that they who fled their country for the sake of the truth should here pass their life without the exercise of religion."[97] Although Sandtoft Church was built by 1639, the bill of £1,500 was left unpaid by the Participants some twenty years later.[98] It was near impossible to hold Participants to account, one Sandtoft minister complained in 1643, since some "are absent, some live beyond sea, some are dead, and some have convayed divers[e] parcels of that land unto others."[99]

As their patrons' support waned, the Sandtoft settlers were left vulnerable to a more existential threat from English ecclesiastical authorities. While many stranger congregations evaded Laud's injunctions, Sandtoft—which did not join the national

[92] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636; SP16/327, fol. 84, TNA; Robin D. Gwynn, *The Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain*, 2 vols. (Eastbourne, 2015), 1:84.

[93] The transcribed register documented 144 baptisms of 499 in the original register and a scattering of marriages and burials; see HCC/9111/1, fols. 360–66, NUL. A total of five hundred named settlers can be identified in the register and other records.

[94] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:2115.

[95] As cited in Spicer, "'Place of Refuge and Sanctuary of a Holy Temple,'" 100.

[96] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:1759–60.

[97] Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 297–98.

[98] Petition of Letitia Kemeys, 27 November 1660, HL/PO/JO/10/1/300, PA; Overend, "Isle of Axholme," 302–3.

[99] Petition of John D'Espagne, December 1643, HL/PO/JO/10/1/162, PA. For similar complaints by his successor, see Petition of Peter Berchett et al., 15 November 1645, HL/PO/JO/10/1/196, PA.

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networks of foreign churches until 1647—was among a minority of "smaller provincial churches" that experienced their full force.[100] The "new plantation" was brought to Laud's attention in June 1636 by his former mentor and close ally, Richard Neile, the archbishop of York. In this alarming missive, Neile identified the community as a subversive pocket of foreign Calvinism. Governed by a consistory of minister, elders, and deacons, he charged, their place of worship was offensively informal and they administered baptism and the sacraments "after their own manner, and . . . homely fashion." In doing so, they "indevored to bring the forme of a French Church into England," contravening Laud's injunctions and breaching boundaries defined by the nation.[101] Neile's reports further fueled concerns about collusion between English Puritans and foreign Calvinists. The congregation straddled the Lincolnshire-Yorkshire border; some lived within Neile's diocese, but the remainder fell under the jurisdiction of John Williams, the bishop of Lincoln and a Puritan adversary of Laud's. In a second letter to Laud in September 1636, Neile insinuated that Williams had been aiding and abetting congregants by falsifying their attendance at parish churches in Lincolnshire while covertly permitting them to worship freely.[102]

Like Laud, Neile drew a clean line between the Sandtoft congregation's spiritual deficiencies and their deleterious impact on the nation. Concerns about conformity bled into "the politick part of this business," widening the scope of suspicion. "[W]ith what . . . safety to this state such a plantation should be permitted to be of strangers," Neile wondered ominously, "that upon advantage may become as vipers nourished in our bosomes." Fears for national security were compounded by economic concerns, as improving associations between labor, profit, and food were inverted to reframe migrants' industriousness as a drain on the commonwealth. The Participants "doe not employ any Englishmen," Neile complained, and their tenants "take the bread out of the mouthes of English subiectes by overbidding them in the rentes of the land that they houlde, and doeing more worke for a groat than an Englishman can do for sixpence." In a final flourish, he stressed their poverty, decrying "in what cottages thes people live, and how they fare for foode."[103] These aspersions located foreignness as much as nonconformity as the source of settlers' separation from church, state, and society.

Before long, the settlers were advertised as an exemplar of integration, resituated within the parochial community of worship. In autumn 1636, Neile informed Laud that their minister, Bontemps, had departed, and the materials assembled to build their chapel had been sold. As a result, many "resort[ed] to the churches of the parishes in which they dwell, and there demeane themselues very devoutly, even those that vnderstand not the English tongue."[104] Conformity was extended to settlers

[100] Grell, "From Uniformity to Tolerance," 28. Sandtoft Church was admitted into the colloquium of French Churches in September 1647: see A. C. Chamier, ed., *Les actes des colloquies des Eglises Francaise et des Synodes des Eglises Etrangeres, refugees en Angleterre, 1581–1654* (Lymington, 1890), 103–7. From 1648 until the 1670s, congregants at Sandtoft were in frequent contact with the *coetus* of the Dutch and French churches of London: see Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:2115–16, 2564.

[101] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636, SP16/327, fol. 84, TNA.

[102] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 18 September 1636, SP16/331, fol. 108, TNA. See also Archbishop Neile's report of his own diocese, January 1637, SP16/345, fol. 156, TNA.

[103] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636, SP16/327, fol. 84, TNA.

[104] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 18 September 1636, SP16/331, fol. 108, TNA; Archbishop Neile's report of his own diocese, January 1637, SP16/345, fol. 156, TNA.

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living in Lincolnshire later that year, after Bishop Williams was imprisoned during a highly politicized Star Chamber case arising from his liberal attitudes toward Puritans. In his absence, Neile collaborated with the Lincoln diocese chancellor John Farmery, another enemy of Williams.[105] By 1638, settlers were attending services in parish churches, delivered by a former Roman Catholic, Etienne Cursol, using a French translation of the Book of Common Prayer. Farmery boasted that "French people ther doe conforme very cheerfully, and the Dutch people by their example are very willing to doe the like."[106] This news spread nationally. When the bishop of Norwich evicted a stranger congregation from their chapel of seventy years, he brandished the example of Sandtoft settlers' "great alacrity" in conforming.[107] Those proposing foreign plantations in fens and forests in the late 1630s, meanwhile, were anxious to pledge that new churches would deliver conforming services.[108]

Beneath the semblance of harmonious compliance in Sandtoft, conformity provided an instrument of exploitation. Farmery had a record of abusing his office, and the Laudian agenda provided fresh opportunities to line his own pockets.[109] By threatening dissolution and imprisonment, Farmery and Cursol extorted £200 from the Sandtoft congregation in return for both permission to construct and consecrate their church and exemption from parish taxes. It was for this reason that Sandtoft Church was built in Lincolnshire in 1639, at the peak of Laudian repression. Once it was complete, however, the pair resumed ecclesiastical prosecution of settlers who failed to attend parish services.[110] Settlers living in Yorkshire faced similar parish taxes and church fines levied by local officials, amounting to £800.[111] Conformity therefore acted as a double-edged sword. Settlers experienced the narrow terms of inclusion in the national community as a tool of repression, exclusion, and exploitation.

With the recall of Parliament in 1640, Protestant affinities across national borders were unambiguously restated. The tide turned against Laud as he was accused of subverting temporal authority and introducing popish practices and placed in custody on

[105] Brian Quintrell, s.v. "Williams, John (1582–1650)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29515. For Farmery's grievances against Williams, see Petition of Dr John Farmery to the King, [1621?], SP14/124, fol. 212, TNA; Petition of John Farmerie to the King, 26 July 1635, SP16/294, fol. 99, TNA; C. E. Welch, "The Downfall of Bishop Williams," *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 40 (1964–65): 42–58, at 54–55.

[106] Answer of Dr. John Farmery, commissary for Archbishop Laud for co. Lincoln, [1635?], SP16/310, fol. 1, TNA. See also Cottret, *Huguenots in England*, 133.

[107] W. J. C. Moens, *The Walloons and Their Church at Norwich: Their History and Registers, 1565–1832* (Lymington, 1888), 277.

[108] Petition of Robert Long and John Gibbon, 6 June 1637, SP16/323, fol. 55, TNA; "Another proposal for draining the Eight Hundred Fen," [1635?], SP16/307, fol. 62, TNA.

[109] "Complaints of the country against Dr John Farmery," 28 April 1629, SP16/540/1, fol. 82, TNA; Petition of the inhabitants of the deanery of Newport Pagnell, [1642?], SP16/493, fol. 107, TNA.

[110] Petition of James de Con et al., 10 December 1640, and "Copy of Dr. Farmery's direction to the French and Dutch refugees," n.d., HL/PO/JO/10/1/44, PA; *Journal of the House of Lords* (London, 1767–1830), 4:165. While the church was not complete by 1638, it appeared on Josias Arlebout's map of Hatfield Level in 1639; see Spicer, "'Place of Refuge and Sanctuary of a Holy Temple,'" 103; van Cruyningen, "Dutch Investors and the Drainage of Hatfield Chase," 29; "A true and perfect plott of [. . .] the Levell of Haitefeild Chass," 1639, HCC/9044, NUL.

[111] Petition of Jacob Meyer and Christian Vandevarte to the House of Lords, 10 December 1641, HL/PO/JO/10/1/113, PA.

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charges of high treason, leading to his eventual execution.[112] He was specifically censured for suppressing the French and Dutch churches in England and creating "division between them and us" although of "the same religion."[113] The Sandtoft congregation were remarkably quick to capitalize on this favorable political climate to unmask the coercion behind their conformity. Petitioning the House of Lords, they presented a transnational Calvinist identity as "strangers refugees for cause of religion." Ecclesiastical interventions had inflicted "cruell oppressions," they stated, recounting Farmery's "menaces" and denouncing Cursol as a "Franciscan Friar thrust upon them violently." The heavy church fines had even forced some settlers to flee England.[114] The Lords acted decisively, condemning Farmery and Cursol, dismissing all ecclesiastical cases, and granting broad religious freedoms.[115] Laud's fall also allowed the Sandtoft congregation to align with other stranger churches in England. Appealing to Charles I to restore their religious freedoms in September 1641, the foreign churches specifically requested that Sandtoft Church be brought under their jurisdiction.[116] Sandtoft congregants expressed equal anxiety to be "united . . . under one discipline," lamenting that they were "destitute of all spiritual consolation."[117] Laudianism therefore gave way to a renewal of transnational Protestant solidarities at multiple levels.

Overt hostility to foreign Calvinism in England was short-lived. When Charles II's Act of Uniformity resurrected the principle of conformity in 1662, foreign churches were officially exempted.[118] Meanwhile, anti-Catholic sentiment persisted and grew as a significant force in politics, foreign policy, and the popular imagination. Popery was not, however, the only foreign other at work. Laud's identification of stranger churches as an enemy within contributed to the formulation of a distinctively *national* conforming Protestant identity. This episode suggests long roots to the entanglement of Anglicanism, sovereignty, and nationhood identified by Linda Colley from the late-seventeenth century onward.[119] As with visions of the nation defined by improvement, Laud blurred the lines between migrants' economic and religious identities, but this time in the service of constructing threatening outsiders, rather than godly improvers. Sandtoft settlers' experiences therefore challenge depictions of early modern governors as benign guardians of refugee rights, revealing an expedient approach in which solidarity, tacit acceptance, or animosity might all serve national agendas.[120]

[112] Henry Gee and William John Hardy, eds., *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (New York, 1896), 537–45.

[113] "The Accusation and Impeachment of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury," 1641, in *The Harleian Miscellany* [. . .], ed. Thomas Park and Edward Harley, 10 vols. (London, 1809), 4:469.

[114] Petition of James de Con et al., 10 December 1640, and "Copy of Dr. Farmery's direction to the French and Dutch refugees," n.d., HL/PO/JO/10/1/44, PA; Petition of Jacob Meyer and Christian Vandevarte to the House of Lords, 10 December 1641, HL/PO/JO/10/1/113, PA.

[115] *Journal of the House of Lords*, 4:165.

[116] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:1875–77.

[117] Hessels, 3, pt. 2:1884. As noted above, formal incorporation did not take place until 1647. Sandtoft's former ministers Etienne Cursol and John d'Espagne later proved troublesome schismatics for the French Church in London; see Gwynn, *Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain*, 1:105–8, 537–38, 593–94; *Journal of the House of Lords*, 5:263, 267.

[118] Act of Uniformity, 1662, 14 Car. II, c. 4.

[119] Colley, "Britishness and Otherness," 316–22.

[120] See Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage*, 43, 61–62, 111.

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EXPELLING IMPROVERS: BODIES AND ANIMALS

National improvement, transnational settlement, and local custom converged in conflict over land in Hatfield Level. With the outbreak of civil war in 1642, the Level was convulsed by a wave of riots in which commoners reclaimed enclosed lands and sabotaged drainage works. These were conflicts in which different configurations of ownership and work harnessed the natural world to different models of economy and society. Resistance to improvement was most visible in Epworth Manor, Lincolnshire, where tenants' assertive defense of wetland commons was underpinned by a medieval deed enshrining their customary rights.[121] In 1652, witnesses testified before a parliamentary inquiry about a decade of escalating disorder in the Level, describing how rioters had not only targeted crops and sluices but also settlers and buildings.[122] Unlike Laud's campaign for conformity, these acts of exclusion were not articulated as a defense of national interests and identities against foreign interlopers: commoners' collective identities were founded in local customary rights and fostered animosity to improvers of all nationalities. Recourse to sabotage, trespass, and interpersonal violence in the commons operated in tandem with commoners' persistent efforts to uphold their land rights in central courts against the claims of the crown and Participants. In testimony, commoners invariably referred to settlers as "Participants tenants" rather than "strangers," defining them in economic relation to their landlords and, by extension, through their role in producing improvement.[123] It was these tenants, however, who bore the direct brunt of property destruction, physical violence, psychological intimidation, and material deprivation.

Although pursued by uniquely violent means, the exclusion that Sandtoft settlers suffered was not entirely novel. In the century before drainage, a long-running legal dispute over access to shared commons saw the inhabitants of Haxey Parish in Epworth Manor exclude their neighbors from Misterton Parish, across the county border in Nottinghamshire. By defining them as "forreners," the Haxey community solidified the once-porous geographic boundaries of custom.[124] While the Haxey-Misterton dispute hinged on competing claims to common resources, the Hatfield Level project caused friction between a community defined by pastoral custom and newcomers implementing arable agriculture on enclosed land. Settlers made up the vast majority of Participants' tenants and cumulatively rented thousands of acres, residing in particularly high numbers in Belton Parish in Epworth Manor, where Sandtoft Church was built.[125] In the plantation's early years, its settlers may have harbored hopes of peaceful coexistence with local communities. At his death in 1637, the Participant Michael Corselis not only left £5 to "the poor of the Level" but also £3 to the poor of Belton where he lived and 40 shillings apiece to

[121] Lindley, *Fenland Riots and the English Revolution*, chap. 6.

[122] Examination of witnesses by the Darley and Say committee, 29 February, 5–6 May and 14 May 1652, SP18/37, fols. 21–86, TNA.

[123] Deposition of John Clesby, SP18/37, fol. 85, TNA.

[124] Edmund Lord Sheffield and inhabitants of Haxey and Owston v. inhabitants of Misterton, 1596/7, E134/39Eliz/East14, TNA.

[125] Joy Lloyd, "The Communities of the Manor of Epworth in the Seventeenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1999), 30–33, 275–77. See also Answer of Dr. John Farmery, commissary for Archbishop Laud for co. Lincoln, [1635?], SP16/310, fol. 1, TNA; Map of Hatfield Level, 1633, MR1/336, TNA.

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other parishes in Epworth Manor.[126] From the outset, however, both settlers and commoners defined the Level as a distinct social space overlaid onto the existing structures of parish and manor. In individual wills and collective petitions, the settler community constructed new economic identities as husbandmen and yeomen "of the Leville" or "inhabitants of the newly-improved grounds."[127] Meanwhile, when all adult men in England were required to offer an oath of allegiance to Protestantism and Parliament in 1642, some Lincolnshire parishes reserved a separate entry for those "in the Levill" or "the French."[128]

Improved and customary economies relied on mutually exclusive ecologies. The winter floods that fertilized fen pastures destroyed new crops, while drainage led to the loss of wetland resources like fish, waterfowl, and grasses. Improvement also imprinted a marked spatial differentiation between existing communities and newcomers. Fen villages were clustered on higher ground where flood risk was low, while settler houses and new crops such as rapeseed, with its striking yellow flower, populated the floodplain. In late 1642, Epworth commoners opened floodgates to drown up to eight thousand acres in the Isle of Axholme. This action created a hostile environment for settlers and the improved agriculture, destroying "all the houses thereon buylt and the cropp of rapes and corne thereon sowen and growing, and also what was stacked on the land."[129] One saboteur allegedly declared, "[K]eepe them drowned deepe enough and they wilbee poore enough," while another hoped to make settlers "swim away like ducks."[130] This vivid metaphor transfigured settlers into waterfowl, who—ironically unable to adapt to the wetland environment—would be forced to forsake their new homes.

The confrontations between commoners and settlers illuminate how their identities became embedded in different versions of the fen environment: customary or improved, pastoral or arable. The self-organization that had historically shaped local governance of the commons was transmuted into vigorous bonds of association and solidarity among the rioters, which may even have been formalized in a collective pact. When Alice Hill, an English tenant, begged for her flax to be spared by a rioting crowd in 1650, one commoner replied, almost apologetically, "that they had swore all together to destroy all & if they should save hers they should breake theire oath."[131] Commoners' words and actions were suffused by pastoralism. The most frequent tactic used to reclaim enclosed lands was animal trespass, in which livestock trampled

[126] Will of Michael Corselis of Belton, Lincolnshire, 1 November 1637, PROB11/175/224, TNA.

[127] Will of Andrew Clerban, husbandman of Hatfield, Yorkshire, 29 November 1658, PROB11/283/668, TNA; Will of Charles Bandrad, husbandman of Belton, Lincolnshire, 23 April 1652, PROB11/221/455, TNA; Will of James Decamps, yeoman of Belton, Lincolnshire, 31 May 1652, PROB11/221/871, TNA; Will of Sir Gabriel Vernatt of Hatfield, Yorkshire, 23 October 1655, PROB 11/250/447, TNA; Petition of Jacob Meyer and Christian Vandevarte to the House of Lords, 10 December 1641, HL/PO/JO/10/1/113, PA; Petition of Peter Berchett et al., 15 November 1645, HL/PO/JO/10/1/196, PA; Petition for a minister, c. 1681, HCC/9111/1, fols. 321–22, NUL.

[128] Protestation Return, Crowle Parish and hamlets, Lincolnshire, 1642, HL/PO/JO/10/1/98/32, PA; Protestation Return, Belton Parish, Lincolnshire, 1642, HL/PO/JO/10/1/98/27, PA.

[129] Affidavits of Edward Hill, husbandman of Sandtoft and Jacob Vernoy, yeoman of Haxey Parish, 10 February 1646, HL/PO/JO/10/1/202, PA.

[130] Depositions of Edmund Aukland and William Wroot, SP18/37, fol. 52, TNA; Deposition of Thomas Roade in Sir Thomas Abdy and Sir Thomas Barneham v. Gregory Torr et al., 1648–49, E134/24Chas1/East4, fol. 2v, TNA.

[131] Deposition of Edward Hill, SP18/37, fol. 53, TNA.

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and grazed on crops. During one such incident, a settler named Samuel Pincheon declared, "I will as soone loose my life as my corne." To this overt identification with improvement, a commoner retorted by separating producer from product: "[W]ee will save thy life but will destroy thy corn."[132] After commoners seized Anthony Massengarb's livestock, his wife, who had recently given birth, begged them to leave a cow to feed her children. The rioters refused and instead promised to provide the cattle with "a good pasture," a reference to reestablishing the commons.[133] Another witness mentioned that a halter used to lead livestock had been placed around the neck of settler Nicholas Morrell, a humiliating and animalizing incident that left him "soe galled that it had a very greate impression upon the flesh."[134]

As these exchanges indicate, settler bodies became sites of practical and performative violence. During riots in autumn 1645, attacks on the productive apparatus of fences, crops, and farming equipment were accompanied by beatings and threats to pull down settlers' houses and church.[135] At the apex of unrest in summer 1651, Sandtoft Church, a windmill, and eighty-two houses were demolished in ten days.[136] Confrontations were often accompanied by physical attacks. Johan du Moulin, a "servant of the Participants," was subject to grievous assaults on at least three occasions as rioters seized goods and crops. One severe beating, he testified, had left him "almost dead in his owne garden soe that hee hath never beene his owne man to this day"—implying that his assailants had expropriated his physical and mental independence as much as his property. Such acts were intended to deprive settlers of shelter and safety. After his house was destroyed, du Moulin was forced to live in a dry ditch with eight children for a summer; a privation shared by at least one other settler and his family. Du Moulin recalled that commoners had passed the ditch morning and evening "with fire in theire hands and flung the fire amongst them," saying, "[W]e will roote you out, you shall stay noe longer."[137] These traumatic events took a psychological toll on victims. When Anthony Massengarb was ordered by a commoner to "kill thy dog or else I will kill thy wife or some of thy children," his wife became so terrified that "shee was not well ever since."[138]

The collision between commoners' customary claims to the land and strangers' religious motives for settlement is evident in accounts of attacks on Sandtoft Church. Once a small island at the confluence of several meandering rivers, the very land on which the church stood was a product of drainage, which had relocated it to the west bank of the New River Idle. As an emblem of the religious freedoms that had brought settlers to the Level, the church held tactical value, but there is no evidence that rioters were motivated by anti-Calvinism.[139] Close reading of witness

[132] Deposition of John Bracer, SP18/37, fols. 62–63, TNA.
[133] Deposition of Anthony Massengarb, SP18/37, fol. 54, TNA.
[134] Deposition of Francis Letty, SP18/37, fol. 56, TNA.
[135] Petition of Peter Berchett et al., 15 November 1645, HL/PO/JO/10/1/196, PA.
[136] Report of Darley and Say, 2 June 1653, SP18/37, fols. 13–19, TNA.
[137] Deposition of John Mylner, SP18/37, fol. 56, TNA; Deposition of John Bracer, SP18/37, fol. 63, TNA. John Mylner is an Anglicization of Johan du Moulin, recorded in the Sandtoft Church register.
[138] Deposition of John Wray, SP18/37, fol. 56, TNA.
[139] On dissenting religious beliefs in the Isle of Axholme, see Lloyd, "Communities of the Manor of Epworth in the Seventeenth Century," 197–98, 231.

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accounts reveals instead the pastoral practices that commoners extended to claim this space. In October 1651, their advocates—who included the radical Leveller leader John Lilburne—confronted the stranger congregation outside Sandtoft Church, barring entry and declaring commoners' possession of the land. Soon after, the church was transformed into a "cowhouse" in which an ox was slaughtered and hung up.[140] The church continued to act as a lightning rod at times of heightened tension. When Participants attempted to re-enclose the disputed lands after the Restoration, rioters again broke the windows, seats, and pulpit of the recently renovated building.[141] A few weeks later, they drove sheep into the church and "pickt their maggetts out . . . leaving greate quantities of them in a most offensive mannor." In another mocking ritual, a cow was buried in the place where the communion table once stood, with commoners claiming to honor the dead animal.[142] While settlers interpreted these acts as sacrilegious desecration, repeated use of animal bodies also asserted symbolic claims to the pastoral commons. Such rituals echo violence against cattle in Ireland in the same period. During the 1641 Irish uprising against English rule, rebels in Mayo staged a performative trial and execution of English cattle, which Pluymers argues arose from "myriad simmering disputes . . . over enclosure, grazing rights, and rent" precipitated by plantation.[143] Animals were a crucial means through which changes in property and ecology were affected, occupying and altering land alongside humans. In the Americas, European horses, cattle, and sheep acted as "as agents of empire . . . occup[ying] land in advance of English settlers."[144] In Ireland, English breeds of cattle inhabited enclosed property and served colonial markets while displacing the mobile grazing practices of the Irish. In the fens, however, sheep and cows served as enactors and emblems of the exercise of common rights.

Although it commanded far less attention than Sandtoft Church in accounts of violence, another prominent settler building was attacked in 1651 and again a decade later. A windmill, owned by settler spokesperson Jean Amory, both represented and facilitated improvement as a technology used to extract oil from the new crop of rapeseed.[145] In 1651, 160 rioters used swords and axes to break into the mill where settler men, women, and children were hiding. Reporting these events to the House of Lords, Amory feminized the building and its occupants: rioters "dragg'd the woman out by the heeles & thrust all out of the mill," he recounted, before transferring the female pronoun to the windmill to describe how they "flung her downe & tore her to peeces."[146] After the Restoration, Amory entered Epworth Parish Church to broadcast a Lords' order reinstating Participants' enclosures—a temporal act in sacred space that mirrored Lilburne's proclamation of commoner rights outside Sandtoft Church a decade earlier. The provoked

[140] Depositions of John Amory and Abraham Lottie, SP18/37, fols. 45–46, TNA.

[141] *Journal of the House of Lords*, 11:139.

[142] Affidavit of Elizabeth Foster, 23 August 1660, HL/PO/JO/10/1/298A, PA.

[143] Keith Pluymers, "Cow Trials, Climate Change, and the Causes of Violence," *Environmental History* 25, no. 2 (2020): 287–309, at 291.

[144] Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford, 2002), 211.

[145] "William Dugdale's Diary," 19 May 1657, in H. C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1956), 283.

[146] Deposition of John Amory, SP18/37, fols. 47–48, 61, TNA.

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congregants snatched the order from Amory's hands, and several months later his rebuilt windmill was again torn down. As it was destroyed, its assailants cried out, "[D]owne with the poss[ess]ion of the Particip[an]ts, farewell order of the Howse of Lords."[147] Such direct assaults on material structures in the Level were intended to target the distant landlords and national authorities that propelled and profited from improvement. Whether in dramatic incidents or daily activity, however, the struggle over land rights was enacted through settlers' arable improvements and commoners' pastoral practices in the fens.

The potential for anti-improvement sentiment to be articulated in xenophobic terms was demonstrated by John Spittlehouse, a Fifth Monarchist who briefly served as an assistant solicitor to the Epworth commoners. In a 1653 pamphlet outlining the commoners' case, Spittlehouse vindicated their violence as a defense of national liberty rather than local custom. Denied the rights of "freeborn Englishmen," they sought to preserve their "just rights against strangers and forreigners."[148] This binary throws into stark relief the absence of such language among Epworth rioters. Nationality was mentioned just once by witnesses at the parliamentary inquiry in 1652, when John Bracer described rioters' demolition of his house. As the assault occurred, Bracer's wife was in labor and beseeched the rioters, "[W]ill you have noe more pitty on me, I am an English woman." They were indifferent to her appeal to shared identity, however, and instead defined their actions in relation to Bracer's labor in the Level, replying, "[Y]ou must parte away and follow your husband."[149] Even those formally included in the manorial community faced retribution for participating in improvement—like William Wroot, an Epworth yeoman, freeholder, and commoner, who was left in "feare of his life" after renting drained lands.[150]

Foreign farmers were not the only instruments of improvement, and nor were they the only targets of violence. Two decades before the regicide of 1649, Epworth rioters were threatening to kill Charles I for instigating the drainage project.[151] More accessible targets emerged in the form of legal officials tasked with suppressing riots and upholding new land rights. While supervising workers repairing torn-down enclosures in June 1647, for instance, the deputy sheriff of Lincolnshire was pursued by an armed crowd who cried out, "Kill him kill him, knock him downe let him never goe further."[152] On several occasions, violence was fatal. After Epworth commoners reoccupied enclosed lands in the mid-1650s, they were made liable for sewer taxes, previously paid by the Participants, to maintain the new drainage infrastructure. Armed clashes ensued when officials seized commoners' livestock for nonpayment. In September 1659, a sewer collector's assistant was murdered in mysterious circumstances. Less than a year later, a fracas between sewer officials and some Epworth commoners resulted in the death of another assistant, who was a local

[147] Affidavit of John Amory, 10 March 1662, HL/PO/JO/10/1/313, PA.

[148] John Spittlehouse, *The case and appeal of the inhabitants, freeholders and commoners of the Manor of Epworth* [. . .] (London, 1653), 3.

[149] Deposition of John Bracer, SP18/37, fol. 63, TNA. It is unclear whether Bracer was himself a foreign tenant, since his name does not match any in the Sandtoft Church register.

[150] Deposition of William Wroot, SP18/37, fol. 59, TNA.

[151] Information of John Linsedge, 18 August 1628, SP 16/113, fol. 62, TNA.

[152] Affidavit of Edmund Aukland, 6 July 1647, HL/PO/JO/10/1/239, PA.

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laborer, and the fatal shooting of a commoner.[153] By 1662, sewer collectors complained of "long experience of the violence & barbarous usage" by commoners "in killing some & desperately wounding others."[154] Conflict in Hatfield Level arose from divergent definitions of legitimate land rights and water management, which were materially enacted by rival communities. Customary memory and pastoral practices defined commoners' collective rights and identities and legitimated such attacks on the infrastructure and agents of improvement.

CULTIVATION AND CALVINISM: INTERPRETING VIOLENCE

For the Sandtoft settlers, these traumatic events in Hatfield Level were located on a continuum with past persecutions. If custom provided a framework for commoners' collective action, reformed religion bound together the Sandtoft community's economic activities, kinship relations, and linguistic differences. Johannes Müller has argued that the reproduction of diasporic Protestant identities involved a telling and retelling of the past that blurred homeland and host societies and notions of then and now.[155] Settlers' petitions and witness statements reveal how their experience as beleaguered agricultural improvers became entangled in past and present struggles for religious freedom. Like Liens in his 1641 pamphlet, they activated the language of improvement and industrious labor to claim belonging within the nation and appeal for action to uphold their land rights. Petitioning the House of Lords about local violence in November 1645, settlers emphasized that the "landes were before of little or noe use or value" but through their "great industrye, chardge, and labor" had "become very fruitfull and comodious to the commonwealth." They consequently demanded the right to "enjoy the long labour of our hands so dearly bestowed upon that land."[156] This rationale for settlement ran through not only appeals to English authorities but also their communications with foreign brethren. As attacks escalated in autumn 1650, the congregation sent two delegates 180 miles south to seek advice from the stranger churches in London. The land, they again insisted, had been cultivated with "great care," generating "great profit to the public." If Epworth inhabitants succeeded in upholding their customary rights, however, it would revert to mere "commons and briars." In this case, they begged time "to be able to take the little we have . . . to another place in the realm in which it will please God to give us sustenance."[157] This imminent uprooting appeared as the inverse of their transplantation to the Level, rendering them refugees and returning the commons to wilderness. Material violence always had spiritual implications for the settlers: their hope was that "our poor

[153] Petition of Hatfield Level Participants, 26 June 1660, and affidavits of Nathaniel Reading and John Amory, 21 June 1660, HL/PO/JO/10/1/293, PA; Petition of Hugh Girdler, ca. 1661, HCC/6002, fols. 478–79, NUL; Order of sewer court, 1661, HCC/6002 fols. 485–86, NUL.

[154] Affidavit of William Tomkinson, 10 March 1662, HL/PO/JO/10/1/313, PA. For earlier complaints of violence against sewer officials, see Record Book of the Hatfield Level Sewer Commission, HCC/6002, fols. 26, 52, 59, NUL.

[155] Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt: The Narrated Diaspora, 1550–1750* (Leiden, 2016), 9–13.

[156] Petition of Peter Berchett et al., 15 November 1645, HL/PO/JO/10/1/196, PA.

[157] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2: 2180–81.

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church may be relieved from its ruins, and . . . the imminent disasters which loom over our heads ready to overwhelm us."[158]

The settler community was acutely sensitive and adaptive to the rapidly changing political and religious landscape of the mid-seventeenth century. Appealing to Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell in spring 1656, petitioners mobilized religious affinities to secure central intervention. The petition pivoted on the desecration of Sandtoft Church in 1651, foregrounding spiritual suffering over worldly damages: their "estates and livelyhood" were not "deare to them in competition with theyr religion." Despite rioters' "irreligeos practices," the devout congregants had continued to assemble at their "noisome and ruinated" church. The struggle over Sandtoft Church was located within stories of subjection and solidarity that spanned space and time. The petitioners not only recounted previous trials—how they had "fled hither from persecution for protection"—but also invoked Cromwell's recent intercession on behalf of "the distresed Protestants" in Piedmont, and implored him to likewise intervene in their fen ordeals.[159] The Commonwealth's godly agenda therefore offered a shared language to communicate settlers' plight, in which commoner attacks threatened religious and economic reform. The resulting order to suppress riots aimed not only to restore "the improvers just righte" but also to secure "free exercise" of "religious worshipp."[160] This zealous petition can be contrasted with a more tempered account when conflict flared again after the Restoration. Testifying about his recently demolished windmill in 1662, Amory asserted dual identity as both Yorkshire yeoman and French Protestant. Settlers' temporal and spiritual activities dovetailed: they had initially "peaceably enioy[ed] the freedome of their religion" and "quietly enjoy[ed]" their lands, before being subjected to twenty years of "barbarous & most unchristian usage." Perhaps wary of the new regime's desire for religious uniformity, Amory's final emphasis fell on the imperative of cultivation. Unless violence was quashed, crops would once more be ruined and settlers compelled to leave the Level.[161]

Settler experiences of fen violence were shaped by transnational narratives of Protestant adversity in more subtle ways. Early modern Protestant identities drew heavily on martyrologies, books that linked stories of historical oppression to current trials faced by reformed worshippers. Their content and production were profoundly transnational in scope. Having fled Marian persecution in England, John Foxe compiled his highly influential *Actes and monuments* (1563) in continental exile. He was embedded in an intellectual network of reforming refugees, several of whom produced similar texts, such as French lawyer Jean Crespin's *Le livre des martyrs* (1554) and Dutch minister Adriaan van Haemstede's *Historie der Martelaren* (1559).[162] Borrowing from and suffusing one another, successive editions of these

[158] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2: 2180–81.

[159] Petition of French and Dutch Protestant strangers, 16 April 1656, SP18/126, fol. 159, TNA. On Cromwell's support for the Waldensians, see Nicole Greenspan, *Selling Cromwell's Wars: Media, Empire, and Godly Warfare, 1650–1658* (London, 2012), 129–43.

[160] Letter to Major-General Whalley, 21 August 1656, SP25/77, fol. 840, TNA.

[161] Affidavit of John Amory, HL/PO/JO/10/1/313, PA.

[162] Thomas S. Freeman and David Scott Gehring, "Martyrologists without Boundaries: The Collaboration of John Foxe and Heinrich Pantaleon," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69, no. 4 (2018): 746–67, at 755–60.

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works formed an intertextual corpus and provided motifs of Catholic brutality and Protestant piety that were evoked at times of religious and political crisis. Ethan Shagan has shown how stories narrated in martyrologies resurfaced in countless English pamphlets that broadcast "worse and worse newes" of the Irish Rebellion in 1641, vividly depicting papist atrocities against English Protestant planters.[163] Incidents in Ireland echoed, for instance, Foxe's graphic description of a pregnant woman burnt as a heretic during Mary I's reign, whose belly burst open and her fetus fell into the fire. Both texts also contained accounts of men, children, and pregnant women "all robb'd, and stripped naked, and exposed to extremity of winde and weather, in a cold winter season."[164]

Strikingly similar images of brutality surfaced in settler statements about attacks on the fen planation. Their 1656 petition, for instance, described how rioters had "expos [ed] them to extremity of cold and famine."[165] Testifying at the parliamentary inquiry, Thomas Sayles recalled how his three young children were put "uppon the snowe who were like there to starve" after his house was destroyed.[166] Several witnesses also emphasized the inhumane treatment endured by childbearing women. In 1660, Elizabeth Foster reported that commoners demolishing her property "struck her cruelly" while she was pregnant and attempted to fling her into the fire with her young child.[167] Although it is unclear whether tales of the Irish rebellion reached the settlers, it is likely that they accessed martyrologies in their mother tongue or at least knew their stories. Such resonances do not suggest that attacks were fabricated. Appealing for clemency in 1651, Epworth commoners frankly admitted that they had "undertaken to vindicate their owne right by a kind of forcible expulsion of the s[ai]d drainers tenants, and ruining some of their houses."[168] Rather, as Jeffrey Alexander has observed of collective trauma, "The truth of a cultural script depends not on its empirical accuracy, but on its symbolic power and enactment."[169] In giving testimony, the Calvinist community may have drawn out details and used language that imbued their fen experiences with rhetorical resonance within a transnational script of Protestant suffering.

Commoners' riotous campaign posed a profound material threat to the Sandtoft plantation. Drained lands in Epworth were occupied by commoners for significant intervals between the 1640s and early eighteenth century, although other parts of the Level remained more peaceful. Precarity is palpable in settler wills written at the height of disorder in the mid-seventeenth century. Most—including Sandtoft's minister—specified burial in local parish churchyards rather than Sandtoft, for practical rather than confessional reasons.[170] When Nicholas Tissen selected the "burying place of Gods people" at Sandtoft, he added the proviso if it "be free then" and named

[163] *Worse and worse news from Ireland* [. . .] (London, 1641).

[164] Ethan Shagan, "Constructing Discord: Ideology, Propaganda, and English Responses to the Irish Rebellion of 1641," *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 1 (1997): 4–34, at 12–13.

[165] Petition of French and Dutch Protestant strangers, 16 April 1656, SP18/126, fol. 159, TNA.

[166] Deposition of Thomas Sayles, SP18/37, fol. 41, TNA.

[167] Affidavit of Elizabeth Foster, 23 August 1660, HL/PO/JO/10/1/298A, PA.

[168] Petition of inhabitants of the Isle of Axholme, 9 July 1651, SP46/96, fol. 52, TNA.

[169] Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge, 2012), 4.

[170] Will of Peter Berchet, Minister of Thorne, Yorkshire, 16 October 1655, PROB11/250/364, TNA.

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a parish church as his second choice.[171] Over time, significant numbers left Hatfield Level to seek a place of greater safety. Many joined the new foreign plantation in the Great Level, about which less evidence survives.[172] According to one seventeenth-century historian, its earliest settlers were "some Frenchmen" from near Doncaster who had "been molested by the peasantry of that place."[173] A French and Flemish congregation was first reported at Whittlesey in 1642 and by 1652 Whittlesey Church was governed by elders who had been living in Hatfield Level a decade earlier.[174] Soon after, the congregation moved to new premises at nearby Thorney Abbey.[175] The Thorney church register clearly indicates the extent of demographic hemorrhage from Hatfield Level, containing 38 percent of surnames in the Sandtoft Church register and 81 percent of surnames on the Sandtoft petition of 1656.[176]

Those who remained continued to situate their lives and labor in Hatfield Level in terms of transnational Protestantism and free worship. Although attacks became less vociferous after the Restoration, the diminished congregation struggled to secure a minister: several declined the post or quickly found another position.[177] The tumultuous fen backwater, with unreliable pay and a waning congregation, was hardly an inviting prospect. When Sandtoft's penultimate pastor complained that he would be forced to desert his flock without a salary, the congregants insisted that they were "absolutely resolved to leave the Level" unless he remained. By the early 1680s, community representatives observed that many lands were "untennanted for want of a minister." They recalled that the promise of a minister had encouraged their ancestors to migrate to the fens and suggested that a new generation of refugees might likewise be recruited to bolster the dwindling plantation.[178] Though born in England, these settlers continued to situate themselves within diasporic narratives that unified the plantation's plight with that of their brethren overseas. Sandtoft Church was dissolved in 1685, however, just months before a huge wave of French refugees reached England with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Sandtoft's final minister cited his congregants' poverty and local opposition as the cause of his departure.[179] A scattering of settler descendants remained

[171] Will of Nicholas Tis of Thorne, Yorkshire, 14 November 1654, PROB11/240/704, TNA. For further discussion of settler wills, see Lloyd, "Communities of the Manor of Epworth in the Seventeenth Century," 273–77.

[172] For discussion of local violence against settlers in Whittlesey, see Falvey, "Custom, Resistance, and Politics," 306–8, 362.

[173] Gregorio Leti, cited in Trevor Bevis, *Strangers in the Fens: Huguenot/Walloon Communities at Thorney, Parson Drove, Guyhirn, and Some Adherents*, 2nd ed. (March, 1983), 8.

[174] Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:1884, 1899–1900, 2211; Protestation Return, Epworth Parish, Lincolnshire, 1642, HL/PO/JO/10/1/98/33, PA.

[175] For similar patterns of leadership by Sandtoft settlers in Thorney Church, see Chamier, *Les actes des colloquies des Eglises Francaise et des Synodes des Eglises Etrangeres*, 103, 114; Hessels, *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum*, 3, pt. 2:1899.

[176] Bevis, *Strangers in the Fens*, 5–6, 8.

[177] Gwynn, *Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain*, 1:678, 761–63.

[178] Petition for a minister, c. 1681, HCC/9111/1, fols. 321–24, NUL.

[179] Gwynn, *Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain*, 1:421; William Minet, "The Ministers of the Church at Sandtoft," *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 13 (1923–29): 408–10, at 409–10.

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into the eighteenth century, renting large farms, becoming landowners, and even writing histories of drainage.[180]

CONCLUSION

Fen plantation was a short-lived experiment that propelled the first wave of large-scale drainage projects in England in the face of local resistance. However precariously imagined or implemented, such experiments were part of the formation of empire and state in the early modern British Atlantic. As David Bell has forcefully argued, "'Small' spaces are not simply spaces that feel the *impact* of global forces. In some cases, they serve as profoundly intense, dynamic laboratories of change in their own right, and the processes of change that occur in them are much more than simple *reactions* to the global forces that impinge on them."[181] The religious and economic tensions that marked the Sandtoft settlement continued to unfold—in intensely local and contingent ways—as Protestant refugees worked and worshipped at frontiers. Fen plantations prefigured schemes that proliferated with the exodus of Huguenots from France in 1685, when scattered refugees sought to create colonies in Protestant European states and at imperial edges. Dozens of Huguenot colonies were established in Brandenburg after 1685, but—although some forty thousand to fifty thousand French Protestants reached English shores—governors' appetite for agricultural plantations of reformed refugees *within* England had faded. Proposals for refugee settlements on ostensibly uncultivated land were overlooked, with new arrivals dispatched to towns with ailing economies or remaining in London.[182] Governors may have been anxious about welcoming foreign Protestants to England at a time when loyalty to the state was associated with conformity to the established church, and these concerns intersected with a drive to increase the mobility of cheap labor within the British Atlantic. Ambivalence reached a zenith when thousands of poor, uneducated, agriculturalist refugees from the German Palatine arrived in London in the early eighteenth century, provoking heated political debate about their religious affiliations and economic contributions. Critics argued that they had "come to devour the land . . . [and] eat the bread out of Englishmen's mouths," closely echoing Neile's denunciation of the Sandtoft settlers some eighty years earlier.[183] After spending a harsh winter in tents outside London's city walls in 1709–10, most were shipped to Ireland, New York, Carolina, or Virginia. This moment has been identified as part of a British "turn away from Europe and towards empire," after which a recently passed act to naturalize

[180] Daniel Byford, "Agricultural Change in the Lowlands of South Yorkshire with Special Reference to the Manor of Hatfield 1600–c.1875" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2005), 128–31; Abraham de la Prime, "The History and Antiquities of the Town and Parish of Hatfield near Doncaster in Yorkshire," [late 1690s], Lansdowne MS 837, BL.

[181] David Bell, "Replies to Richard Drayton and David Motadel," in "Discussion: The Futures of Global History," ed. Richard Drayton and David Motadel, special issue, *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 1 (2018): 1–21, at 17 (Bells's emphasis).

[182] Stanwood, *Global Refuge*, 24–25, 31, 33–34, 86.

[183] Cited in William O'Reilly, "Strangers Come to Devour the Land: Changing Views of Foreign Migrants in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of Early Modern History* 21, no. 3 (2017): 154–87, at 178–79.

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immigrants in England was revoked and refugees were dispatched directly to Britain's colonies.[184]

Arguments for plantations of foreign Protestants were easier to make in imperial contexts, Stanwood has shown, where they provided a bulwark against Catholic rivals and Indigenous heathens and supplied specialist skills to kick-start the Atlantic economy. Lobbying for settlement in Ireland in the 1680s, Huguenot petitioners reasoned that the best way to "to make Ireland useful to you is to plant good colonies of new inhabitants with the opposite religion and morals to those of the Irish . . . [who will] smother the spirit of revolt that is in them." Such pleas fell on fertile ground: Protestant lords promised French refugees advantageous land rights and religious freedoms.[185] Meanwhile, English colonists in Carolina and Pennsylvania distributed pamphlets written in French across English, Dutch, and Swiss cities where many refugees had gathered, to advertise settlement in "fertile and abundant" lands with "liberty of conscience."[186] Sympathetic imperial governors perceived that Calvinist refugees could be put to work at the edge of empire to plant true religion and profitable agriculture and industry. Even so, inclusion of European migrants was shaky: foreign settlers might be agents or subjects of improvement. Drainage projects along the Delaware River in New York in the 1670s were integral to the consolidation of fragile English authority in an area largely inhabited by Swedes, Dutch, and Finns. Like fen commoners, Mulry has argued, the rebellious character of these foreign settlers was diagnosed as a symptom of their marshy habitat. Drawing on practices and rhetoric developed in the English fens, imperial governors sought to make wetlands profitable and their foreign inhabitants governable.[187] Yet acts of improvement were not always sufficient to reform land and labor and make it English. By the second half of the seventeenth century, other less flexible, racialized, forms of exclusion and exploitation had become foundational to the economies and societies of colonial America and the Caribbean. The forced labor of enslaved Africans underpinned plantations—now defined as colonial estates specializing in cash crops like tobacco and sugar—and acted as a motor of the Atlantic economy.[188]

Fen plantation generated affinities and animosities between different types of imagined community, which are not captured by dichotomous arguments about xenophobia. Nationhood was forged in dialogue and in tension with communities that were local and transnational, religious and economic. Examining the Sandtoft plantation directs attention inward, to disaggregate divisions within the metropole,

[184] O'Reilly, "Strangers Come to Devour the Land," 184–86,

[185] As cited in Stanwood, *Global Refuge*, 33–38. See also Robin D. Gwynn, "Government Policy towards Huguenot Immigration and Settlement in England and Ireland," in *The Huguenots and Ireland: Anatomy of an Emigration*, ed. C. E. J. Calidicott, H. Gough, and J.-P. Pittion (Dublin, 1987), 205–24, at 219–22.

[186] Stanwood, *Global Refuge*, 54–57, 81–87, 153–61.

[187] Mulry, *Empire Transformed*, chap. 3.

[188] On the transition from indentured European to enslaved African labor in the early modern British Atlantic, see Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia, 2013), chap. 8; Abigail Swingen, "Labor: Employment, Colonial Servitude, and Slavery in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic," in *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire*, ed. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind (New York, 2013), 46–73. On the environmental dimensions of this transition, see Katherine Johnston, *The Nature of Slavery: Environment and Plantation Labor in the Anglo-Atlantic World* (Oxford, 2022), chap. 1.

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while simultaneously demanding acute peripheral vision. It highlights both the Atlantic dimensions of European migration to early modern England and the European nature of the imperial and domestic projects through which English nationhood was constructed. The conflicts that emerged triangulate histories of local communities and their tightening parameters amid rapid socio-economic change; the interaction of national and transnational Protestant identities after the Reformation; and (trans)national projects of agricultural improvement, underwritten by foreign labor, expertise, and finance. The Sandtoft community consequently blur twenty-first century distinctions between economic migrants, asylum seekers, and colonial settlers. In the context of early modern racial ideas, Kim Hall has observed that English national identity could "rely on both the appropriation and the denial of differences."[189] Whether valorized as improvers or vilified as "vipers," the Sandtoft strangers proved instrumental to governors' efforts to demarcate the national parameters of economic and religious policy.[190] National boundaries defined in relation to the Sandtoft settlers were ultimately extended to English subjects, placing unruly commoners and nonconforming worshippers beyond the pale of commonwealth and church.

Fen riots were not straightforward scenes of popular violence against foreigners, but nor were settlers simply collateral damage in a struggle between the centralizing state and wetland communities. Conflict must be understood in the context of the transnational alliances between English statesmen and foreign investors that propelled wetland improvement and fen plantation, producing parallel communities making rival claims to resources. Settlers' labor underwrote the land rights, rents, and profits claimed by landlords (including the crown and Commonwealth authorities) and their tenancies and livelihoods were, in turn, supported by the state's legal and coercive infrastructure. Careful reconstruction of the way in which commoners articulated violence and settlers experienced these acts, however, reveals that neither community framed their identities primarily in national terms. Fen plantation engendered transnational solidarities among Sandtoft settlers and reinforced local bonds of collective interest and action in Epworth. Commoners mobilized customary practices to organize sustained force against improvement and settlement. For Sandtoft settlers, meanwhile, cultivation of Hatfield Level was inextricable from their quest for free worship. Past and present experiences of violence—in the countries they had fled, under the auspices of English religious authorities, and at the hands of commoners—were woven into a resonant narrative of Protestant suffering that created common cause in the fens and beyond. Whether pronounced in petitions or exclaimed while leveling a windmill, collective identities were neither free-floating nor inherent. They were produced within political and social contexts that lent them rhetorical vitality and material force, stitching difference and belonging into a politicized environment.

[189] Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 1996), 176.

[190] Archbishop Neile to Archbishop Laud, 23 June 1636, SP16/327, fol. 84, TNA.

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