

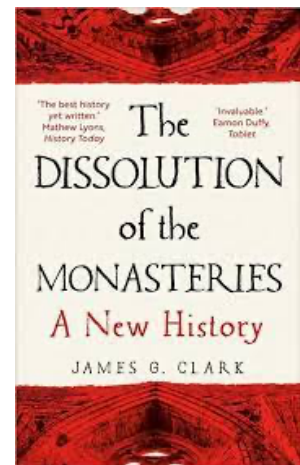
EDITORS' NOTES

BOOK REVIEW

Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries

James G. Clark's blockbuster, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History*, is destined to become a standard text on this disruptive period during the latter part of Henry VIII's rule. The changes wrought between 1536 and 1540 saw the elimination of religious houses, including the Priory of St Swithun in Winchester whose 45 monks were cast adrift. Their numbers fell from around 850 to none. Most were reduced to stone quarries for their new owners, who were largely drawn from Henry's courtiers. Although some changes in religious life and practices were coming to England during Henry's reign as a result of the rise of the European reform movement, the speed and violence of the destruction of the monasteries was a shock move that gathered momentum and seemed to have no planned outcome.

Clark, professor of history at the University of Exeter, builds a formidable miscellany of monastic life before, during and after the Dissolution. He tells the stories of the many thousands of men and women, ordained and lay, whose lives were thrown up in the air by this rapid change. Their world after the Dissolution is also traced as, between 1540 and 1558, England flip-flopped from Henry's quasi-Catholicism to Edward VI's Protestantism, back to Mary I's Catholic restoration and then to Elizabeth's more moderate Protestantism.



Clark challenges the orthodoxy that the religious buildings were immediately demolished, although all had their use changed. He also argues that Henry's subjects retained their attachment to local monasteries by keeping fixtures and fittings to commemorate the role these buildings and the religious orders had in their lives. The fabric might have gone but the respect remained.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History has been praised by the leading religious historians of the Tudor period, notably Diarmaid MacCulloch (*Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation*) and Eamon Duffy, whose Catholic-tinged *The Stripping of the Altars* is also one of the major texts for the Dissolution period.

James G. Clark's *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2021). The hardback (ISBN 9780300115727) is priced at £25.00, and the paperback (ISBN 9780300269956) is priced at £14.99. Both are available at discounted prices online and through booksellers.

TOM WATSON