

Chronicling “Bloody Mary”: Richard Grafton’s Depiction of the English Reformation

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This paper will discuss Richard Grafton’s depiction of the English Reformation, focusing specifically on the reign of Mary Tudor—a time when Protestantism in England faced great opposition. Grafton’s historical accounts of the reign of Mary, published in the 1560s and early 1570s, will be compared to the accounts of her reign given in historical works published by Grafton’s contemporaries. In this way, it will be shown that Grafton’s treatment of political and religious events in the reign of Mary has a unique “story to tell” about this period of England’s history, and that Grafton, much more than his fellow chroniclers, sought to tarnish Mary’s image.

Richard Grafton, born in England in 1507, was apprenticed to the London Company of Grocers in 1526. He became involved in printing activities during the reign of Henry VIII and by 1540 had set himself up as a printer in London. During the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) he held the position of Royal Printer. When the reign of Mary I began in 1553, Grafton ceased to serve as Royal Printer. Instead, however, he sat as a Member of Parliament for London from 1553-4 and from 1556-7. He also served as the warden of the Grocers’ Company in 1555 and 1556 and was involved in the running of Christ’s Hospital and Bridewell Hospital in London. In 1563 Grafton sat as a Member of Parliament for the last time, for the town of Coventry. From 1562 until his death in 1573, Grafton began producing short, concise chronicles, as well as one longer work of English history. All his histories were written in English, not Latin. The short, cheaper works were intended for popular consumption by Elizabethans at a time when literacy rates were at their highest for the Tudor period and when inexpensive reading material of all kinds was becoming increasingly widespread.

Grafton can be classified as one who was involved in the growth of the printing industry in England and who, among other civic activities, catered to the growing number of literate Elizabethans from various middling social levels who were eager to read histories of their nation.

However, Grafton's life was not as simple and uncontroversial as it appears on the surface. During the reigns of four Tudor monarchs, Grafton lived through most of the major political and religious developments and controversies of sixteenth-century England, and in several cases he was closely involved with significant events and prominent people of his day.

As a young man, Grafton witnessed the arrival of the Reformation in England. In 1533 Henry VIII orchestrated the severing of all ecclesiastical ties between England and Rome and set himself up as the head of an independent, national church of England, but he made few alterations to traditional Catholic doctrines and practices. Still, Protestant ideas and writings, largely Lutheran in origin, had been infiltrating England and making converts even before Henry VIII's break with Rome. Grafton was one of these converts to Protestantism.

The mid-fifteenth century invention of movable type made the mass production of books both possible and feasible by the early sixteenth century. An important aspect of sixteenth century Protestantism was an increased emphasis on literacy and the idea that everyone should have access to Bibles written in vernacular languages. From 1537 to 1540 Grafton played a large role in the effort to produce and distribute an English Bible. He was known to both Thomas Cromwell (Henry VIII's chief minister 1533-40) and to Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (Archbishop 1532-56). Both men were favorable to Protestantism, and Grafton and his associates worked with their assistance and approval. By 1540 Grafton was overseeing the printing of an approved English edition of the Bible in London.

However, until Henry VIII's death in 1547, Grafton experienced religious persecution and brief periods of imprisonment for espousing a brand of Protestantism that was sometimes too radical for the government's liking. His fortune changed with the accession of Edward VI, whose regime championed the Protestant cause. Grafton was promptly named Royal Printer and given monopolies over the printing of various church texts, as well as the printing of parliamentary acts and statutes. At this time also, under the leadership of Archbishop Cranmer, the Church of England's practices and doctrines were drastically altered, distancing them from Catholicism and bringing them much closer to the theology of continental Protestantism.

The Protestant cause in England suffered a severe blow in 1553 when Edward VI died at the age of fifteen. According to the succession laid out in Henry VIII's will, he was to be succeeded by his elder half-sister, Mary. The daughter of Henry VIII's first wife, Mary was as strongly Catholic as Edward had been Protestant, and she was determined to restore England to the Church of Rome and reestablish Catholic practices. An attempt was made by some of Edward's leading ministers, alarmed by the prospect of a Catholic monarch, to keep Mary off the throne. They sought to replace her with Lady Jane Grey, a Protestant daughter of one of Edward's cousins, but their attempt was unsuccessful.

At Edward's death, Grafton printed Lady Jane Grey's proclamation, in which she was named Queen, and on it he named himself as "Queen's Printer." Once Mary had secured the throne for herself, Grafton was stripped of his office and spent some time in prison before being pardoned. Mary reigned for five years, during which time many Protestants experienced persecution and death. Opponents of Protestantism who had lost secular and church offices or who had been imprisoned during Edward VI's reign were released and restored by Mary I's government. Many prominent Protestants left England at this time and went to Germany and Switzerland. Grafton, after his initial imprisonment, was not persecuted but he ceased printing and instead concerned himself with hospital administration, serving as warden of the Grocers' company for two years and sitting in two Parliaments.¹

Four years after Mary had been succeeded by her Protestant-sister, Elizabeth I, Grafton began producing chronicles. His *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* was first published in 1562 and successive editions of it followed in 1563, 1564, 1570 and 1572. In 1568 and 1569 his much lengthier *A Chronicle at Large* was issued, but not reprinted. He also issued a very brief *Manual of the Chronicles of England* in 1565 and then presented it to the Stationers' Company. Beginning in 1565, Grafton engaged in a spirited rivalry with John Stow (d. 1605), who was beginning to publish his own short chronicles. Each accused the other of poor historical accuracy and methods. This rivalry came to an end with Grafton's death in 1573. Stow's *A Summary of English Chronicles*, first published in 1565, was republished in 1566, 1567, 1570 and six more times before his death in 1605. Other works by Stow include *The Annals of England*, first published in 1592 and *A Survey of London*, first published in 1598.

Another work of history that should be mentioned is *Cooper's Chronicle*. The work was begun by Thomas Lanquet, who got only as far as the birth of Christ before he died. It was finished by his contemporary, Thomas Cooper (Bishop of Lincoln and then Bishop of Winchester during Elizabeth's reign) and published in 1549. In 1560, Cooper brought it up to the year 1558 and republished it. It is by no means a work of exclusively English history. Accounts of sixteenth century English events are scattered between lengthy accounts of the activities of Charles V and German Protestant Princes, and the Habsburg-Valois wars. Both Grafton and Stow, however, drew heavily upon its excerpts dealing with sixteenth century England when composing their own chronicles.

Perhaps the most famous historical work of the early years of Elizabeth's reign is John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, better known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Foxe (1516-1587) was an Oxford scholar who fled abroad during the reign of Mary. After his return he published his work of Protestant hagiography in English in 1563. "His stories, from the medieval crypto-Protestants burned for heresy to the Protestant martyrs who passed through the fiery trials of the Marian persecutions, portrayed England as the land of a new chosen people destined to lead the way toward the kingdom of God on earth."² The later editions of Grafton's chronicles reveal that Grafton was familiar with Foxe's work.

A feature of Grafton's chronicles that attracts notice is his treatment of the failed attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne after Edward VI's death and the role played in this by Edward VI's chief Minister, John Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland. Thomas Cooper's 1560 account names Northumberland as the leading mind behind the plan to supplant Mary and depicts him as a dangerous and ambitious schemer who nearly brought England to a bloody civil war.³ John Stow, in his 1565 chronicle, models his account of this event very closely on Cooper's, plagiarism being a common and acceptable historical practice at the time. However, Stow omits a few of the most unflattering things Cooper had written about Northumberland.⁴ Grafton, like Stow, often borrowed from *Cooper's Chronicle* for accounts of recent history, but when it came to the Duke of Northumberland he broke with Cooper. In Grafton's first short chronicle, his 1562 *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, he does not single out Northumberland as being most responsible for Edward VI willing the crown to Jane; he spreads the decision out to include the Council and also "divers learned of the realm." He says nothing about violating an act of Parliament or Henry VIII's will. He downplays the idea that Mary was loved by the common people, and

says nothing about fear of a bloody civil war. Most significantly, he claims that all of Northumberland's actions stemmed from decisions and instructions of the Council, who then held Jane to be the rightful Queen of England. Rather than an ambitious plotter and traitor, Grafton implies that Northumberland's actions were quite legal and correct, that he obeyed the Council and the woman whom the Council then supported as Queen.⁵

Thus it can be seen that both Stow and Grafton put forth accounts of Northumberland's role and conduct in the attempt to make Lady Jane Grey the Queen that were much less negative than Cooper's account. Grafton, however, went considerably further than Stow in this effort. This becomes even more apparent when examining their accounts of Northumberland's execution, which occurred not long after the failure of the attempt to install Jane in Mary's place. *Cooper's Chronicle* of 1560 specifically mentions Northumberland's apostasy: "Before his death hoping to obtain pardon (as most men did think) he recanted and forsook that religion that in King Edward's time he had set forth and maintained."⁶ Neither Stow's nor Grafton's chronicles contain any mention of Northumberland's attempt to save his life with a last-minute switch in religions. Stow merely notes that he was beheaded on August 22, 1553.⁷ Grafton was even more vague than Stow about Northumberland's demise. Grafton's chronicle states only that "certain of them that offended were put to execution."⁸

The most obvious explanation for the difference between Cooper's account of Northumberland and Grafton's and Stow's accounts of Northumberland is the fact that both Grafton and Stow enjoyed that patronage of Northumberland's son, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester. Both Grafton's 1562 *Abridgement* and Stow's 1565 *Summary* were dedicated to Robert Dudley. It makes sense that both Stow and Grafton might seek to curry favor with their patron by providing accounts of his father that either avoided some of the more embarrassing details of his career or sought to defend him.⁹

In Grafton's case, however, it goes much further. For him, Northumberland was more than just the father of his current patron. In a sense, he had once been Grafton's patron and while in power he had presided over the furthering of Protestantism. This was a cause that Grafton clearly supported and one that he had also been directly involved in during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Indeed, Grafton's own religious views may have precluded his writing about Northumberland's

apostasy. Simon Renard, Emperor Charles V's ambassador to England, said in 1553 that Northumberland's words of recantation had "edified the people more than a month of sermons."¹⁰ Unlike Archbishop Cranmer at the stake three years later in 1556, Northumberland did not repudiate his recantation just before his death. If Grafton wanted to bestow a semblance of martyrdom upon Northumberland, his embarrassing recantation would have to be suppressed. Unlike Stow, Grafton in his 1562 *Abridgement* also provided brief eulogies for the executed Jane and her husband, Guildford, who was Northumberland's son.¹¹

It must be remembered that Grafton had both personal and religious reasons for sympathizing with Northumberland and Jane, and for holding a grudge against the Marian regime. Grafton had been imprisoned for printing Jane's proclamation. There is evidence that he felt very bitter. John Foxe, in his *Acts and Monuments* of 1563, notes that Grafton was one of the people excluded from Mary's first general pardon.¹² Grafton himself relates that Mary "appointed certain commissioners to call before them all such persons as she had exempted out of her general pardon... which persons were taxed and fined with the loss of their offices and livings that it was pitiful to understand."¹³ Cooper and Stow make no mention of Mary's general pardon. It is clear that Grafton felt a personal involvement in the "story" of Mary's accession to the throne. He certainly did not approach it with neutrality or detachment.

Many examples can be given to show how Grafton depicted the five years of Mary's reign, during which the Reformation came to a halt, Protestants were put on the defensive, and Roman Catholicism was officially restored. In his 1560 chronicle, Cooper wrote that in 1553 one of Mary's preachers, Master Bourne, Canon of St. Paul's, was preaching against Protestantism before a crowd that became unruly and began to mutter against Bourne. Then, someone in the crowd hurled a dagger at Bourne, who stopped preaching and jumped back. Cooper notes that "one Master Bradford a preacher of King Edward's time... and one John Rogers" spoke to the crowd and calmed the people and then guided Bourne safely away from the tumult.¹⁴ Cooper said nothing else about John Bradford and John Rogers.

The account of this incident that appears in Grafton's 1562 *Abridgement* is extremely similar to Cooper's account, but there is one significant difference. Grafton's account notes that Bradford and Rogers were later "both burnt" by Mary's government.¹⁵ Stow's version of the incident, like Cooper's, does not mention Bradford and Roger's fates.¹⁶

Grafton, with his one additional phrase, implies that Protestants are morally superior and will even help their enemies, while the Catholics are ingrates. Cooper and Stow passed up this subtle opportunity to make the Protestants look good and the Catholics look bad.

Cooper's Chronicle, Grafton's *Abridgement* and Stow's *Summary* all contain passages about the changes in bishops that occurred at the beginning of Mary's reign, when those appointed during Edward's reign were put out, and those who had been deprived of their bishoprics during his reign were restored. Cooper, however, also described a change at the popular level. He wrote:

In this time the people showed themselves so ready to receive their old religion that in many places of the realm, understanding the Queen's pleasure, before any law was made for the same, they erected again their altars and used them the mass and Latin service in such sort as was wont to be in King Henry's time.¹⁷

A passage identical to this one appears in Stow's 1565 *Summary*.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, this passage does not appear in Grafton's *Abridgement*. In fact it is virtually the only passage relating to religion in *Cooper's Chronicle* that is not carried over, in some fashion, into Grafton's work. Grafton, it would seem, had no use for any passage that so clearly described a voluntary return to Catholicism in "many places of the realm." Grafton chose to omit any reference to an occurrence that called into question the amount of support that Protestantism enjoyed in England and that also increased Mary's stature. At some point between 1565 and 1570, Stow seems to have reconsidered the inclusion of this occurrence in his *Summary* for it does not appear in the 1570 edition.

Cooper's Chronicle of 1560 notes that in October of 1553, Mary ordered that a disputation take place, between Catholic and Protestant theologians, "concerning the presence of Christ in the sacrament," and that it continued for six days. The Catholics, led by one Doctor Weston, Dean of Westminster, declared themselves the winners while the Protestants claimed that their arguments had not been properly refuted and that the Catholics could not rightfully be both disputers and judges.¹⁹

The version of this disputation that appears in Grafton's 1562 *Abridgement* is identical to the one in *Cooper's Chronicle* of 1560 except that there is an extra sentence at the end.

And for a final conclusion, Doctor Weston broke forth in a heat one day, and said to the [Protestant] preachers, you have the word and we have the sword, therefore we will give no place unto you.²⁰

Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* contains a lengthy account of this disputation, claiming to contain everything that was said, and also noting that Doctor Weston "behaved himself outrageously in checking and taunting." In addition, Foxe notes that "divers and uncertain rumors be spread abroad of the disputation had in the convocation house."²¹ Nowhere in Foxe's report of the disputation does Doctor Weston say anything similar to the remark reported by Grafton in his 1562 *Abridgement*. This leads one to wonder about the accuracy of Grafton's account. Still, the account of the disputation contained in Grafton's 1569 *A Chronicle at Large* makes it clear that Grafton was familiar with Foxe's version, but he still preserved Doctor Weston's reputed remark.

To say that the Protestants have "the word" while the Catholics have "the sword" creates a vivid, intriguing and symbolically loaded image. One need only think of John 1: 1-3.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything that was made.

English Protestants were adamant that they were the sole possessors of pure religious truth, as found in scripture, free of Roman and papal corruption. Grafton's passage, which notes that Catholics acted as both disputers and judges conveys the belief that the Protestants could win any disputation—a battle of words—as long as the disputation was conducted fairly. The Gospel of John calls Jesus "the Word." If the Protestants have "the word," as stated in Grafton's passage, then it could be taken to mean that they also have Jesus Christ—surely the ultimate embodiment of religious truth. Similarly, Protestant reverence for "the word," meaning scripture, is what led to English Bibles (printed by Grafton) being placed in all English Churches before 1553.

As for Mary and her fellow Catholics, according to Grafton's passage they have only "the sword"—the coercive power of the secular state; they do not have the power of religious truth, "the word" or "the Word," on their side. This one remark that Grafton attributed to Doctor

Weston, in a sense, turns the reign of Mary into a struggle between truth and tyranny. However much Mary's government wielded its "sword" against Protestants, the Protestants nevertheless won a moral victory because they possessed "the word" – a big piece of propaganda couched in a few words. Stow's 1565 *Summary* does not even mention this disputation.

More examples could be given of similar ways that Grafton shaped his accounts of events in Mary's reign. Often they are small and subtle, but there are many of them, and taken as a whole their impact is significant. However, before concluding, it is interesting to note how Grafton ended his account of the reign of Mary. The account of the death of Mary in 1558 and the accession of her Protestant-sister Elizabeth that appears in Grafton's 1562 *Abridgement* provides more praise for Elizabeth and far harsher criticism of Mary than the account in *Cooper's Chronicle* of 1560.²² Stow, in his 1565 *Summary*, was content merely to use a condensed version of Cooper's account.²³ In this case Grafton was not satisfied with Cooper's account. He was determined to give one final denunciation of

Queen Mary, whose government as before appeareth was not so much disliked of many as it was condemned almost of all, as well for the severity and shedding of much innocent blood, as also for the waste and spoil of the treasure of this realm, the loss of Calais and making strangers over-privy to the state and secret affairs of the same.²⁴

At this point, having examined Grafton's depiction of the reign of Mary Tudor in his 1562 *Abridgement of the Chronicles* of England, certain things are clear. Grafton borrowed much of his material from Cooper, but he frequently altered it in small but significant ways, drawing it further away from being merely factual and closer to being Protestant propaganda. Grafton also produced some well-crafted images in his chronicles, using the image of a sword and the idea of "the word" to depict both state persecution at the hands of the Catholics and the ultimate truth of the Protestant religion.

As a chronicler working in the 1560s and early 1570s, Grafton is unique in his coverage of the reign of Mary I. Cooper's 1560 *Cooper's Chronicle* did not deal exclusively with England, and while it was concerned with many religious aspects of the period in question, it lacked the propagandist nuances of Grafton's work and put forth a less coherent

“story” of the period. The Protestant zeal which led Grafton to vividly depict historical figures as heroes and martyrs or villains and tyrants is utterly lacking in the chronicles of John Stow.

Grafton rarely missed an opportunity to shape an event or a character in order to elicit an emotional or religious response in favor of the Protestant cause and against papists, Queen Mary, Canon Bourne, Doctor Weston, or Roman Catholicism in general. Grafton’s coverage of Mary’s reign seems to be very much colored by his own enthusiasm and his own bitterness. The reader is not left in doubt as to where Grafton stands on the political and religious issues that he lived through and experienced. He published his first *Abridgement* in 1562, only four years after the death of Mary and the accession of Elizabeth, and one year earlier than the English version of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. Grafton was possibly the first, or certainly one of the first, in Elizabethan England to produce a work of exclusively English history that also functioned as Protestant propaganda and helped to perpetuate the myth of “Bloody Mary.”

NOTES

1. This biographical information is taken mostly from two works by J. A. Kingdon, *Incidents in the Lives of Thomas Poyntz and Richard Grafton: Two Citizens and Grocers of London* (London: Rixon and Arnold, 1895), and *Richard Grafton: Citizen and Grocer of London* (London: Rixon and Arnold, 1901). Two more concise sources are *The House of Commons 1509-1558*, vol. 2, ed. S. T. Bindoff (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982), and *The Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

2. M. H. Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993), 996.

3. Thomas Cooper, *Cooper’s Chronicle* (London, 1560), 359, STC 15218.

4. Stow’s account says nothing about Northumberland persuading Edward VI to leave the crown to Jane (in violation of an act of Parliament and Henry VIII’s will) or about the people being suspicious because he had married his son Guildford to Jane. There is also no mention of the people taunting Northumberland as he was being taken back to London. See John Stow’s *A Summary of English Chronicles* (London, 1565), 221, STC 23319.

5. Richard Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* (London, 1562), 150-151, STC 12148.

6. Cooper, *Cooper’s Chronicle*, 360-361, STC 15218.

7. Stow, *A Summary of English Chronicles*, 224, STC 23319.

8. Richard Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* (London, 1562), 153, STC 12148.
9. Eleanor Rosenberg, *Leicester Patron of Letters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 65-74.
10. David Loades, *John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland 1504-1553* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 268.
11. Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, 156, STC 12148.
12. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 2 (London: George Virtue, 1844), 1093.
13. Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, 153, STC 12148.
14. Cooper, *Cooper's Chronicle*, 360, STC 15218.
15. Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, 152, STC 12148.
16. Stow, *A Summary of English Chronicles*, 223, STC 23319.
17. Cooper, *Cooper's Chronicle*, 361, STC 15218.
18. Stow, *A Summary of English Chronicles*, 225, STC 23319.
19. Cooper, *Cooper's Chronicle*, 362, STC 15218.
20. Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, 153-154, STC 12148.
21. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 2, 986.
22. Cooper, *Cooper's Chronicle*, 377-378, STC 15218.
23. Stow, *A Summary of English Chronicles*, 241, STC 23319.
24. Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, 166, STC 12148.