

Extract from *Context* by Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, William Whyte

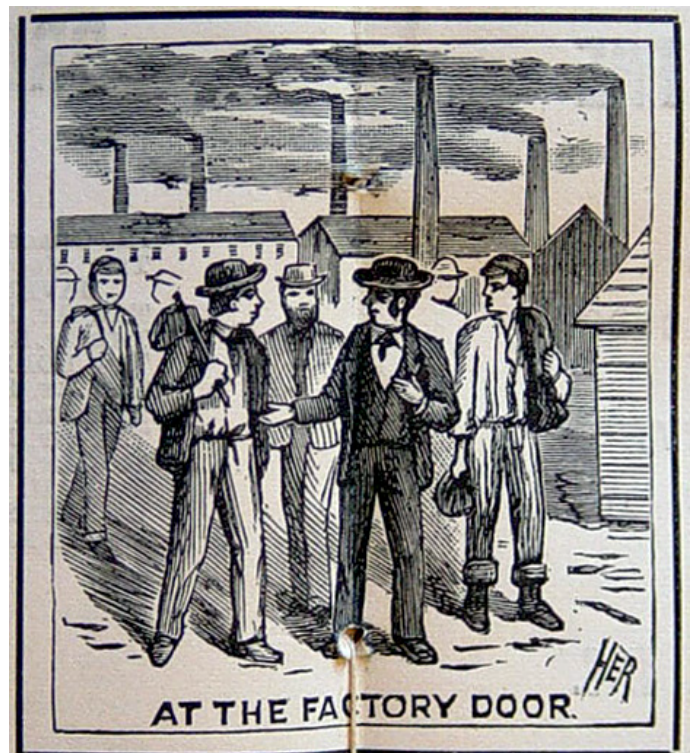
THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND (C.1689-C.1945): CONTEXT

Introduction: a period of transformation

England was transformed in these two and a half centuries. It industrialized, urbanized, and became the centre of the largest empire the world had ever seen. Unsurprisingly, these radical transformations also reshaped religion. The need to serve a hugely increased population produced pressures on the **Established Church**. It also offered opportunities to **nonconformist** congregations (see **Protestant Nonconformity**). The development of new intellectual frameworks challenged Christianity, forcing it to engage with modern ideas about science, politics, history, and philosophy. At the same time, the new, truly globalized perspective of the English led to a rethinking of old notions. All told, England — and the religious life of the English — were changed more in this period than in the thousand years that preceded it.

Population

One of the most important changes in English life was the number of English people. At the start of this period, the population was about 4.86 million. At the end of it, it was nearly 40 million. Moreover, where people lived had also changed. In 1689, 80 per cent inhabited the countryside. By 1945, 80 per cent were town dwellers. Such dramatic shifts had never happened before — the population had never exceeded 5 million for any length of time; and for much of the eighteenth century both the growth of towns and the increase in population were deprecated or even denied. By the nineteenth century, however, the inexorable rise in the number of citizens had become an established fact. And the twentieth century was to witness still greater growth.



Lay readers, licensed by the bishops, went out to meet people in their daily lives, especially in the fast-developing industrial towns and cities.

Origin/Date: 1892

© Stuart Dyas

Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, William Whyte
University of Oxford

Key:

Interactive glossary terms

[Links to other pages on the DVD-ROM](#)