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Published in:

Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society

Publication date:

2004

Citation for published version (APA):

Stoker, D. (2004). Mr Baldwin's sermon and the Norwich printers. *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 13(1), 33-43.

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Mr Baldwin's Sermon and the Norwich printers

David Stoker

The tract collection in the Founders' Library of St David's University, Lampeter, holds a surprising number of locally published materials from all over Britain, dating from the late seventeenth until the mid-eighteenth centuries, including five rare items printed in Norwich during the spring and summer of 1707.¹ These were published as a result of a dispute between the vicar of the united parishes of East and West Rudham in Norfolk, and his neighbours, which became enmeshed in a commercial rivalry between three struggling Norwich printers. They may be seen as a local reflection of contemporary debates about the rights and responsibilities of the Church of England clergy, and standards of public morality in Britain. The debate was only made possible and sustained at this local level by the arrival printing to the city a few years before.

Robert Baldwin was born in Norwich, graduated from Corpus Christi College Cambridge in 1702, and was ordained Deacon in September 1703.² About a year later he was appointed to his new country parishes in the north-west of the county and took up residence sometime during 1705. The following year he was selected by Charles Trimmell, Archdeacon of Norfolk, to preach the sermon at his annual visitation to Burnham Deanery. This was to be delivered at Burnham Westgate church on 9th October 1706 before a congregation made up of local clergy, magistrates and churchwardens, who had come to present their answers to the Archdeacon's visitation articles. It was an ideal opportunity for an ambitious clergyman to secure a reputation as a preacher, and Baldwin decided to reflect upon contemporary standards of behaviour and morality, choosing a text from the Book of Philippians, 1.27 "Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ".

The first half of his sermon was general and relatively inoffensive, pointing out man's duties of "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts", and living "soberly, righteously and godly in this present world."³ He then considered how far short the lives of most Christian come of it.

¹ Four of the tracts (discussed below) are bound together in a single volume, Founders Library shelf mark T753, the fifth is included in T752.

² A Robert Baldwin was christened in St Stephen's church Norwich, 21 January 1680 (*International Genealogical Index*). J. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses: a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge from the earliest times to 1900* (Cambridge, 1922).

³ R. Baldwin, *A sermon preached at the Archdeacon's visitation at Burnham-Westgate* (Norwich, 1706) 4.

There is no great danger 'tis true now, of Mens apostizing from Christianity, to Heathanism, but we have too many sad Instances of those who apostatise from the profession of the Gospel, which they have taken upon themselves in Baptism, to Profaneness and Irreligion, to all manner of Impiety and Lewdness.⁴

Had he finished at this point all would have been well and his congregation would have nodded gravely and returned to their parishes satisfied. However, Baldwin sought to identify one of the causes of the widespread immorality that he saw around him – the example set by the local clergy and magistracy.

... if we look into the World, we shall find to be the sad State of the generality of Christians at this Day and that not only of the lowest, and meanest sort of People, but even of those whose Rank and Quality oblige them by their Example as well as Authority, to contribute all they can to the restraining the Wickedness of others. I believe every one here is sensible of the Truth of what I now say, namely that those who upon account of their Character and Station might justly be expected to live, (at least to outward Appearance) more conformably to the holy Precepts of their Religion, are (to say no worse of 'em) the most infamous in their Lives and Practices.⁵

... for what hopes can there be, even by all the importunity of Council and Persuasion, that were are capable of) of prevailing with Men, to forsake their ways of Sin, and to live suitably to their Profession, when they see those, who are so far above them, in Knowledge and Understanding (as well as in all other Respects) live so contrary to it? How can we expect that they should follow our Advice in denying the Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, when they behold the Lives of these, almost one continued Course of Rioting and Drunkenness, or Lewdness and Debauchery, of Intemperance and Excess?⁶

Baldwin then turned his attention to “the particular Behaviour of those, who are appointed to be Teachers and Instructors of others”, in other words, his brother clergymen, He pointed to “that shameful and scandalous Custom of Drinking, so much practised by us, both at Home in our own Houses, and in compliance with others”,⁷ and the use of obscene language:

We should avoid that filthy, and corrupt Communication which is too frequently observ'd to come out of the Mouths, of a great many of us, to the disparagement of ourselves and the Dishonour of our Ministry. That you may fully understand what I mean; I presume you are all sensible of the great Scandal we lie under (even some of the gravest and learnedest, amongst us) for allowing ourselves that Liberty, which we often do, of entertaining those we converse with, with obscene and immodest Stories.⁸

⁴ Baldwin, *A sermon preached*, 7-8.

⁵ Baldwin, *loc. cit*, 19.

⁶ Baldwin, *loc. cit*, 19-20.

⁷ Baldwin, *loc. cit*, 21.

⁸ Baldwin, *loc. cit*, 23.

Whether Archdeacon Trimnell considered that the reference “the gravest and learnedest, amongst us” referred to him, is open to question, but if so, Baldwin had badly miscalculated. Two years later Trimnell would be appointed Bishop of Norwich, and according to Dean Prideaux, “no bishop has been received with better respects since the memory of any alive”.⁹

Baldwin likewise objected to his colleagues taking part in cock fighting, gaming and other contemporary pastimes: “which for the most part, are attended with such unbecoming Circumstances, and mixt with so much Levity and Indecency, that the allowing ourselves the use of them, cannot but redound to the Dishoner and Disadvantage of Religion”.¹⁰

Finally, he rounded off his sermon with a catch-all appeal to the consciences of his audience.

There are a great many other things, my Brethren, which I am sensible had been necessary to have been mention'd at this Time; as requiring our particular Care and Endeavour to reform. But since it is not our Ignorance that makes our practice so defective, I hope your own Thoughts will suggest them to you.

Robert Baldwin's sermon did not go down well with his congregation, many of whom felt affronted by the young vicar. His words became the talking point of both the Deanery and the Diocese over the next three months, and were the subject of both exaggeration and censure. Given time, though, the dust would probably have settled, had not Baldwin compounded his mistake by deciding to publish his work “to clear it from the Misrepresentations that have been made of it; and that the World may judge, whether the Author deserves the many Complaints that have been made against him for it”.¹¹ He may have been encouraged to take this action by his brother-in-law, who had recently set up a printing press in Norwich.

By chance, Baldwin's decision to publish his sermon came at a decisive moment in the history of printing in Norwich. Francis Burges had established the first press in the city in more than a century and a quarter in September 1701. He had enjoyed a modest degree of success and published a weekly newspaper, *The Norwich Post*,¹² but shortly after Baldwin

⁹ Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Dean and Chapter Records DCN 115/2, ff.225-26. The antiquary Benjamin Mackerell, who knew Trimnell also referred to his “affability, humility and sweetness of disposition” in his unpublished *History of Norwich* (Norfolk Record Office MS. 79 f.120).

¹⁰ Baldwin, *A sermon preached*, p.23.

¹¹ Baldwin, *loc. cit.*, ‘Preface’, p.2.

¹² For further details on Burges and the *Norwich Post*, see D. Stoker, ‘Printing at the Red Well: an early Norwich press through the eyes of contemporaries’ in P. Isaac and B. McKay (eds) *The mighty engine: the*

preached his sermon, Burges fell sick, and he died in November 1706. Two Norwich businessmen quite independently saw Burges' early death as a business opportunity for themselves, and each one decided to set up their own new press and to publish a newspaper, each employing an experienced printer from London. In the December Samuel Hasbart, a local distiller recruited the printer Henry Crossgrove to edit and print the *Norwich Gazette* on his behalf. He was soon afterwards followed by a Norwich bookseller Thomas Goddard, who was Baldwin's brother-in-law. Goddard employed a journeyman printer Sherard Sheffield to print the *Norwich Postman*, but he appears to have retained responsibility for its content. Neither Hasbart nor Goddard was aware of the other's plans, nor had they considered the possibility that Francis Burges's widow, Elizabeth, might wish to continue in business on her own account. In fact she did so, and continued to print the *Norwich Post* until her own death in August 1708.¹³ Whereas in October 1706 there was only one printer in Norwich, making a fairly secure and comfortable living, by January 1707 when Baldwin decided to publish his sermon, there were three, each one struggling for survival. Francis Burges had avoided printing any controversial works, whereas his three successors had to accept any commissions that came their way, and wherever possible seek out new ones.

Robert Baldwin's, *A sermon preach'd at the Arch-Deacon's visitation*, appeared in the middle of February 1707, printed for Thomas Goddard.¹⁴ It was unique among the Norwich sermons of the period in that its reputation ensured that it quickly sold out and warranted a second, and even perhaps a third edition.¹⁵ Goddard is also said to have issued a challenge in the pages of his *Norwich Postman* for any local clergyman to answer his brother-in-law's sermon, but none was forthcoming¹⁶. When, five weeks later *A letter to Mr Baldwin, occasioned by his sermon* did appear, it was from the rival press of Elizabeth Burges¹⁷ and

printing press at work, edited by (Winchester & Delaware, 2000), 29-38, G.A. Cranfield, *The development of the provincial newspaper press 1700-1760* (Oxford, 1962), and R.M. Wiles, *Freshest advices: early provincial newspapers in England* (Ohio, 1965).

¹³ D. Stoker, 'The establishment of printing in Norwich: causes and effects 1660-1760', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8 (1977) 94-111.

¹⁴ The work is dated 1706, but Goddard's press was not established until January 1706/7 and Baldwin's sermon was advertised in his *Norwich Post-man* on 22 February 1706/7.

¹⁵ There are two 1706 entries for this work in the *English Short-Title Catalogue*, with 20 pages and 26 pages respectively (although the first of these is described as imperfect). The edition at Lampeter is dated 1707 and contains 26 pages but is not listed in ESTC.

¹⁶ H. Crossgrove, *Some impartial reflections on Mr Baldwin's sermon and the letters concerning it* (Norwich, 1707), 7.

¹⁷ *A letter to Mr Baldwin, occasioned by his sermon* (Norwich, 1707). It was advertised in the *Norwich Post* 257 3 May 1707, as 'Lately publish'd'.

written by a Magistrate who is described as Baldwin's landlord and was later partially identified as Captain B-----d¹⁸

A letter to Mr Baldwin was issued anonymously, being signed at the end, 'Your faithful Monitor', and carrying a prefatory note "The reason why he that wrote this Letter, does not prefix [sic] his Name, is because he thinks it is sufficient that Mr Baldwin knows who he is". The author claims to have been in the audience of the sermon, but it was only after it had appeared in print that he decided to take any action in rebuttal. He begins by pointing out that any act of public reproof required fine judgement, "which has ever been the Province of those whose years and long administration at the Altar, had filled them with Dignity, Knowledge, Wisdom and Prudence".¹⁹ Baldwin had not lived in the area much more than a year, and so he was not a fit person to criticise his neighbours:

The Persons you pretend to Rebuke were far your superiors in Age, Knowledge and Understanding, by your own confession, *the Gravest and Learnedest*; which renders you guilty of Arrogance and Presumption, in assuming to your self a kind of Superiority or Excellence inconsistent with the reverence and respect due to your betters.²⁰

The writer initially denies that there was any marked immorality among the local gentry and clergy, but mid-way through his tract he changes tack "supposing your *Brethren* and the *Magistrates* had been guilty of those Sins you lay to their charge, yet *You* was the most *Improper* Man to *Rebuke* them".²¹ He claimed that Baldwin had been inattentive in his own parishes compared to his predecessor who, had preached and read prayers each Sunday in both of his churches, whereas Baldwin had refused to preach more than once, claiming a weak constitution. Likewise Baldwin's services lasted only an hour and a quarter, and he had failed to catechise the local youth both at his home and in public. Yet when a neighbouring parish became vacant and there was an opportunity for additional income

..the that poor, weak Constitution of yours, was dragged four long miles to Pray and to Preach, which before could scarce hold out one half mile, or last one quarter of an hour in your own Pulpit.²²

Baldwin was likewise accused of failing to hold a service to commemorate the martyrdom of Charles I on 30th January or on Ash Wednesday.

¹⁸ An inspection of surviving parish and Quarter Sessions records at this time has been unable to identify the full identity of Captain B-----d, but the surnames Barnard and Ballard appear in the two parishes at this time.

¹⁹ *A letter to Mr Baldwin*, 3.

²⁰ *Loc. cit.* 6.

²¹ *Loc. cit.* 11.

²² *Loc. cit.* 13.

These were all sins of omission, but Baldwin's 'Faithful Monitor', went on to hint, albeit in rather vague terms, at other sins of commission – of hypocrisy by Baldwin

I shall ever think, *a lewd proffer* as much contrary to the Gospel of Christ as *any obscene Discourse, Money* offered to delude a Woman as ill design'd as in a moderate *Glass of Wine*, and he who pleads, 'tis no Sin to lye with a Woman, if both Parties consent, may argue as a *Carnal Casuist*, but not as a *Reforming Divine*.²³

Further details of these accusations appear to have been published later, possibly in another unnamed publication, or perhaps in the pages of one of the Norwich newspapers, but in either case they have not survived. Thus one of the later tracts states "C----- B-----d was not content to insinuate in his first Paper, that Mr. *Baldwin* had attempted to debauch a Woman, but (as the Devil would have it) must in terms contradict it in his next".²⁴

The *Letter to Mr Baldwin* finishes with further evidence of bad feeling in the two parishes:

.. that though *Printing your Sermon* moved *my* first Thoughts, and your base reflection on *my Charity* further provoked, yet I will not say I was fully determined to publish this Letter, 'till *your barbarous attempt to ruin several Familys* called it forth, there being no juster Law than that those who are Authors of contriving mischief for others, should fall into it themselves.²⁵

Thomas Goddard, who was continuing to sell copies of the original sermon, now wished to publish a reply from the young vicar to keep the controversy in the public eye. However Baldwin had discovered the perils of going into print, and although the personal accusations against him appeared to demand a response, he decided it would be wiser to keep silent. The bookseller was therefore particularly irritated to discover on 3rd May that *An answer to the letter to Mr Baldwin occasioned by his sermon* was being advertised in Elizabeth Burges's newspaper the *Norwich Post*²⁶. This is another of the tracts associated with the dispute which has apparently failed to survive. Despite its title, it was not an answer to the criticisms of Baldwin but yet another attack on him. It was later described as

.. another malicious exasperating Pamphlet scribb'l'd against Mr Baldwin ... Whether 'twas wrote by C--- B---d's Friend. I'll not determine: But sure I am, the Stile bespeaks its Author a Clergyman, and of no better Principles than the other. But since he has so much Modesty as to conceal himself, (being ashamed of what he has done) I shall pass him over till a fairer Opportunity.²⁷

²³ *Loc. cit.* 18.

²⁴ *A real vindication of the much injur'd Mr Baldwin* ([Norwich], 1707), 15.

²⁵ *A letter to Mr Baldwin*, 19.

²⁶ *Norwich Post* 257, 3 May 1707, described as 'Lately publish'd A letter to Mr Baldwin.

²⁷ *A real vindication of the much injur'd Mr Baldwin*, 16.

As soon as this pamphlet appeared Goddard sent a copy to his brother-in-law, again hoping for a response which he might be able publish, but was disappointed to receive the following note:

Brother.

I have read the Letter you sent me, but it does not answer my Expectations, for I think 'tis more severe upon me than my Antagonist. However, the Title Page goes a great way with many, so 'tis well enough he is SO FAR answer'd.²⁸

Up to this point Samuel Hasbart's printer, Henry Crossgrove, was the only one of the three not to have derived any benefit from the controversy. He was a well educated man with literary ambitions who was later to turn part of his newspaper into a literary magazine,²⁹ and would not willingly pass by an opportunity for self-publicity as that presented by the controversy. He therefore began by writing and printing his own satirical commentary on the events entitled *Some impartial reflections on Mr Baldwin's sermon and the letters concerning it*, which he published anonymously in late May.³⁰

What a Dust has Mr. *Baldwin's* Sermon rais'd? The Letter to him, and the Rejoinder, and these Reflections on 'em all, do him too much Honour. Why should so many Learned Heads be so ill employ'd, as to rake in Dunghills, and give the filthy Vapours vent, which mixing with Sulphury Exhalations, make a Hurly-burly in the middle Region, which have discharg'd their Thunder on *Baldwin*, and the Clouds gather thick and frown upon his Adversary. But hold, I soar too high, and grow dizey. How he who writ last and the Author of this will escape I don't know, whether I am solicitous to be inform'd. I'll leave the two *B's* to Railing, and will limit my self to a few Lines of Raillery.³¹

Henry Crossgrove's 12-page pamphlet was later to be dismissed as "a plain Effluvium of the old Brat of Drollery, and loudly claims a Typographic Author from *Alpha* to *Omega*."³² His object was to poke fun at all those involved and in particular, he enjoys laughing at his rival Thomas Goddard:

Goddard seeing in the Advertisements on the 3d of *May*, *An Answer to the Letter to Mr. Baldwin occasioned by his Sermon*, was mightily surpriz'd, and (tho' Market-day) retir'd into his Closet to consult what was the Meaning that he should not Print it. When he had toss'd, tumbled, and sifted the Business for some time; the Result

²⁸ Crossgrove *Some impartial reflections on Mr Baldwin's sermon*, 7. Exactly how Crossgrove came to read Goddard's correspondence with his brother-in-law is not explained.

²⁹ See J.B. Williams, 'Henry Cross-grove, Jacobite, journalist and printer' *The Library*, 3rd series, (1914), 206-219.

³⁰ Advertised in the *Norwich Gazette* 7 June 1707, price 2d, but appears to have been published a week or more beforehand.

³¹ *Some impartial reflections*, 3.

³² *A real vindication of the much injur'd Mr Baldwin* ([Norwich], 1707), 16.

was, perhaps he does not know that I am his Brother, and has ne'er heard of my Skill in making Epitaphs and in Marshalling a Feast; or perhaps he is an equitable just Man, and considers that we three Printers have much ado to live, so is resolved we shall have Share and Share like.³³

Crossgrove also obtained the text of an old visitation sermon, preached by William Jegon, rector of Swanton Morley, on the subject of criticisms of the clergy, which he proceeded to publish in an attempt to fuel the controversy yet further. Presumably, it was issued without the author's consent, since this work did not even have a proper title: *The following sermon was preach'd some time since at an Episcopal Visitation in Norfolk, and is now publish'd upon occasion of the vile things very freely vented against the clergy of the Church of England, and that too even from the Pulpit very lately*. Jegon's sermon referred back to attacks on the Church of England clergy during his childhood, and was thought to be particularly apt to the present circumstances:

We can't but remember how very low the strain of vilifying ran, when even our habit was made a jest, and they were counted witty who could talk picquantly of a gown and cassock and surcingle forsooth, and with a scornful smile express the word [PARSON] somewhat broadly; and others of some breeding would hug themselves at the happy conceit of ridiculing us in scripture language, and a mighty witticism it was accounted to accost a man by the title of Man of God; And I need not say how much of this obliging temper prevails still. And tho' our function is allow'd by Law and common language somewhat of respect in title, yet to enter in to it is to run the risqué of appearing before the chair of scorers. As for personal qualifications, they are or little regard as the world goes; few or none are of proof against the piercings of that sharp sword in the mouth of revilers.³⁴

Since Baldwin was still unwilling to defend himself, against the criticisms outlined in *A letter to Mr Baldwin* and *An Answer to the Letter to Mr. Baldwin*. Thomas Goddard now decided it was his duty to do so. By the end of May he had found an unnamed person willing to write such an answer.

Tho' I am utterly a Stranger to Mr *Baldwin*, and have no extraordinary Intimacy with his Antagonist, (but as much as I desire) yet considering what barbarous and unchristian Usage he has (I am fully satisfy'd Undeservedly) lately met with, I think I am oblig'd in Justice and Humanity to make this short Essay in his Vindication. I should have been more expedite with this Work, but I knew not but some Grave and Learned Pen would have attempted it effectually e're now.³⁵

³³ *Some impartial reflections*, 6.

³⁴ W. Jegon, *The following sermon was preach'd some time since at an Episcopal Visitation in Norfolk* (Norwich, 1707), p.v. Crossgrove also announced (p.xxxiv) "There is now in the press, and will speedily be publisht, An Appendix to this Sermon. price Three-pence", but this does not appear to have survived..

³⁵ *A real vindication*, 3.

A real vindication of the much injur'd Mr Baldwin, with a brief defence of his sermon, provided the wanted defence of the original sermon.

The only Thing that can be found fault with in Mr. *Baldwin's* Sermon, is That he did not adapt it to the Humours and Consciences of some of his vicious Auditors, but with sacred Truth expos'd Vice and Immorality in their proper Colours, which made the Guilty (witness his Antagonist) seek Occasions to raise Disputes and Contentions about it.³⁶

Regarding the accusations of immorality against Baldwin, the tract dismisses them outright, implying that the clergyman had been the victim of a false statement by the lady concerned:

Here is one Thing, by the Bye I had like to have inquir'd into; namely why Mrs *M-rsh-ll* should chuse to make *Affidavit* of this black Charge against Mr *Baldwin* to *C----- B-----d*, rather than any other *J-----e*. But I consider'd, that perhaps that modest Lady (Modesty being an Essential of a *Ca—br—ge S—mp—ss*) might not have Front enough to assert such a damnable Falshood to a Stranger, tho' it seems she had to so familiar a Friend.³⁷

This publication of *A real vindication of the much injur'd Mr Baldwin* appears to have at last brought the controversy to an end. However, the pamphlet represents a bibliographical puzzle for although it was advertised as having been printed for Thomas Goddard, the typographical materials used show that it was printed by his rival Henry Crossgrove.³⁸ Goddard and his printer, Sherard Sheffield, appear to have parted company at about this time, leaving the bookseller with a fully-equipped press but no printer. This perhaps explains why Goddard and Crossgrove were able to call a truce long enough to collaborate on this publication. It was not long however, before Goddard's press was again in operation manned by his fifteen year old apprentice William Chase, and the three printers were once again making accusations against one another.³⁹ The operators of the three Norwich presses would regularly continue to squabble and make accusations about one another until 1718, when Crossgrove broke away from his erstwhile proprietor Samuel Hasbart and set up on his own account. Hasbart, in turn, employed Robert Raikes to print a fourth newspaper for a few weeks, but he quickly went out of business, taking with him the successor of Francis

³⁶ *A real vindication*, 7.

³⁷ *Loc. cit.* 15-16.

³⁸ The work was advertised in Crossgrove's *Norwich Gazette* 7 June 1707 as printed by Crossgrove for Goddard. It also contains the same typographical materials as Crossgrove's *Some impartial reflections*, although the imprint merely states it was printed in the year 1707 without specifying place of publication or printer..

³⁹ *Norwich Gazette*, 20 December 1707, 17 January 1708/9 and 8 May 5/1708.

Burges' press. Thereafter the city was only able to sustain two printers and two newspapers for the next half century.⁴⁰

Robert Baldwin's reforming sermon gave rise to the first of many local political and religious controversies involving the rival Norwich presses, but it entirely failed in its objective. Baldwin's position in his parish appears to have become untenable and he resigned his living soon after these events to take up another at Somerleyton in Suffolk.⁴¹ He spent the remainder of his life living quietly in his parish and is not known to have published any more sermons.

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⁴⁰ Stoker, 'The reintroduction of printing to Norwich: causes and effects'.

⁴¹ He was Rector of Somerleyton, 1707-1729 and Rector of Blundeston, 1726-29.