

**SIR THOMAS SMYTHE (c. 1558-1625)**

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Sir Thomas Smythe is buried in the parish church of Sutton-at-Hone in Kent. His effigy furred in his aldermanic robes lies under a canopy on a banded sarcophagus surrounded by sextants, globes, compasses, ships, barrels, and corded bales. The inscription reads

To the glory of God and to the pious memory of the Honourable Sir Thomas Smith, knight, late governor of the East Indian, Muscovia, French, and Somer Island Companies; treasurer for the Virginia plantation; prime undertaker (in the year 1612) for that noble design, the discovery of the north-west passage; principal commissioner for the London expedition against the pirates, and for a voyage to the River Senega upon the coast of Africa; one of the chief commissioners for the navy royal, and sometime ambassador from the Majesty of Greta Britain to the Emperor and Great Duke of Russia and Moscovia &c. Who having judiciously, conscionably and with admirable facility managed many difficult and weighty affairs to the honour and profit of this nation, rested from his labour the 4<sup>th</sup> day of September, and his soul returning to him that gave it, his body was here laid in the hope of a blessed resurrection.

From those large kingdoms where he sun doth rise,  
From that rich new found world that westward lies,  
From Volga to the flood of Amazons,  
From under both the Poles, on all the Zones,  
From all the famous rivers, lands, and seas,  
Betwixt this place and Antipodes,  
He got intelligence, what might be found,  
To give contentment through the massy round,  
But finding earthly things did rather tire  
His longing soul, than answer her desire,  
To this obscured village he withdrew,  
From hence his heavenly voyage did pursue  
Here summed up all, and when his gale of breath  
Had left becalmed in the port of Death  
The soul's frail bark (and safely landed her  
Where Faith his factor and his harbinger  
Made place before) he did no doubt obtain

That wealth which here on earth we seek in vain<sup>1</sup>

Profits, piety, and patriotism: powerful themes, and ones which plugged into the long dominant whiggish narrative of English state building. They are also represented, of course, in the murals by Frank Brangwyn which surround us this evening. Painted between 1902 and 1909 they depict key episodes from the Skinners' Company history; they include the foundation of Tonbridge School by Smythe's grandfather Sir Andrew Judd – significantly the wistful youth is clutching the globe signifying England's imperial destiny underpinned by the philanthropy of its mercantile elite – and the embarkation of the first exploratory voyage of Sir James Lancaster to the East Indies in 1591. What might have been lost in the company folklore is that the elderly gentleman who gives his blessing to the more dashing Lancaster about to leave for the expedition he has presumably sponsored is none other than our man, Sir Thomas Smythe.<sup>2</sup>

Smythe was perhaps the first English businessman to win global renown. For English readers Samuel Purchas, Richard Hakluyt's heir as the populariser of the English voyages of discovery, described Smythe as 'our honourable Smith ... at whose forge and anvil have been hammered so many irons for Neptune', and elsewhere as 'the stern that with a little local stirring steereth so many ships to port', but his was not merely a local fame.<sup>3</sup> His sponsorship of numerous voyages of exploration and discovery ensured that his name was inscribed on a variety of landscapes around the world: in Virginia Smyth's Hundred comprised between 80,000 and 100,000 acres on the north bank of the James river; as Robert Fotherby explored the coast of Greenland in 1615, he came across a hitherto unknown island (now Jan Mayen); he named it Thomas Smiths Island; in Bermuda the first landfall after the shipwreck of the Virginia bound voyage of 1609 was called Smith Island; the first fort guarding the

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<sup>1</sup> G.E. Cokayne, *The Lord Mayors and Sheriffs of London, 1601-1625* (1897), p.5; J.F. Wadmore, 'Sir Thomas Smythe, Knt. (A.D. 1558-1625)', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 20 (1893), 99-101.

<sup>2</sup> *The Historical Paintings in the Great Hall in London of the Worshipful Company of Skinners ... by Frank Brangwyn, with an Essay and Notes by W.H. Draper* (London, 1909).

<sup>3</sup> S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (London, 1626 edn.), p. 487.

harbour entrance and one of the parishes were also named after him.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile on the shores of the Cape of Good Hope the native Hottentots learned to call the passing ships 'Sir Thomas Smythe's ships'; they had learned their English vocabulary from one Coree, a Hottentot who had been sent to London by ships of the East India Company, and trained in English in Sir Thomas' house in Philpot Lane for six months before being returned (rather incongruously in a suit of bronze armour) to his own people where he now acted as an interpreter for the English merchants stopping off on their way to the east.<sup>5</sup> In 1614 we learn that Smythe's portrait was being admired and copied by native artists at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, who esteemed it 'as a jewel'.<sup>6</sup>

But contemporary assessments were not universally positive, and Smythe's reputation has been damaged by the smear campaign conducted by his enemies in the faction-ridden Virginia Company in the early 1620s. In 1624, Nicholas Ferrar, deputy of the company (and son of John Ferrar, skinner) penned a vitriolic tract intended for publication attributing all the difficulties of the fledgling colony before 1619 to Smythe's mismanagement, by way of demonstrating his unfitness to resume any influence over the colony's development. Smythe was accused of keeping confused accounts – 'all things were uncertain, confused, imperfect, nothing to give satisfaction, but all to increase suspicions and jealousies'. He was guilty of supine negligence, 'it cannot but be adjudged a great fault for him to undertake or continue this government having the rule and care of so many others, as perhaps no man ever before in this kind. The East India, Muscovia, Greenland, French, Somer Islands, and Virginia Companies were at one time upon his shoulders'. He was accused of contempt for the project, wishing that 'so the people were removed Virginia were under the sea... this plantation was set up but to keep the peoples heads on work and

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<sup>4</sup> J. Horn, *A Land as God Made it: Jamestown and the Birth of Modern America* (New York, 2005), p. 237; P. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise. An Englishman's Obsession for an English America* (London and New Haven, 2007), pp. 291-2; H.C. Wilkinson, *The Adventurers of Bermuda: A History of the Island from its Discovery until the Dissolution of the Somers Island Company in 1684* (second edn., 1958).

<sup>5</sup> R. Raven-Heart, *Before Van Riebeck: Callers at South Africa from 1488 to 1652* (Cape Town, 1967), pp. 54, 61, 64, 66, 72, 74, 75, 78, 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East, 1602-1617*, ed. F.C. Danvers and W. Foster (6 vols., 1896-1902), II.246; *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India, 1615-19*, ed. W. Foster (rev. edn, 1926), pp. 126, 357.

chiefly, as his phrase was, to amuse the Spaniard'. He had apparently held back the division of land among the settlers, and he was responsible for the gender imbalance in the population ('a great neglect in sending women). Staple commodities had not been developed and the production only of tobacco and sassafras encouraged, and Smythe had set up monopolies in these commodities for his friend and fellow city bigwig Alderman Robert Johnson. Worse still, following his 'strange courses', he had abandoned the laws of customs of England and set up government by martial law and was responsible for 'most horrid cruelties'. It was a pretty remarkable piece of writing for the man who in the following year was to set up the community, later satirised as the 'Arminian nunnery', at Little Gidding where Ferrar worked on his gospel harmonies.<sup>7</sup> But Ferrar's hostility to Smythe was apparently shared by the colonists who at their assembly declared that 'the happiest day that ever some of them hoped to see was when the Indians that had killed a mare, they wishing whilst she was boiling that Sir Thomas Smythe was upon her back in the kettle'.<sup>8</sup> So, with that image of Smythe being boiled in animal grease, let us proceed to assess his career.

Let us begin with his family background, for it is important that we understand his social formation.<sup>9</sup> The ascent of the Smythe family in sixteenth and seventeenth century England is a demonstration of the social mobility that could take place through trade and favourable marriages. Our Smythe born around 1558 was the son of Thomas Smythe, normally known as 'Customer Smythe' and Alice Judd, the daughter of Lord Mayor Andrew Judd, the founder of Tonbridge School. The customer came from a middling provincial background; his father was a Wiltshire clothier who had married into a local gentry family. Thomas Smythe's marriage to Alice was also

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<sup>7</sup> *Sir Thomas Smith's Mismanagement of the Virginia Company* by Nicholas Ferrar, ed. D.R. Ransome (Roxburghe Club, 1990), Nicholas W. S. Cranfield, 'Ferrar, Nicholas (1593–1637)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9356>, accessed 24 Sept 2008].

<sup>8</sup> *Virginia Company Records*, II.374-6.

<sup>9</sup> The basic biographical details can be gleaned from J.F. Wadmore, 'Thomas Smythe of Westenhanger Commonly Called Customer Smythe', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 17 (1887), 193-208; idem, 'Sir Thomas Smythe'; L.L.S. Lowe, 'Mr Customer Smythe' (University of Oxford B. Litt., 1950); P.W. Hasler (ed.), *The History of Parliament. The House of Commons, 1558-1603* (3 vols., London, 1981), III.405-6; Brian Dietz, 'Smythe, Thomas (1522–1591)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37985>, accessed 24 Sept 2008].

crucial as she inherited the bulk of her father's wealth, the two sons dying soon after their father. The customer began as a merchant and was a founding member of the Muscovy Company in 1555, but moved into customs collection, holding the office of collector of customs from 1558, and handling about 13% of the total customs revenue. The customs were notoriously subject to evasion and corruption, and the government was attracted by the notion that revenue could be maximised if their collection were farmed out (privatised) to a merchant who had more direct experience of the practices of his colleagues. By driving a hard bargain over the rent, the crown could see its revenues rise. When the new Lord Treasurer Burghley decided to move over to customs farming, Smythe was supremely well placed to take on the contract. Under the farm of 1570 Smythe undertook to increase the revenues from the duties on imports to London by £4000 pa and to pay the fees of the under officers. For Smythe there were opportunities for huge profits, as he pocketed the surplus revenue. Although he was repeatedly accused of corruption, usually by jealous rivals themselves seeking to muscle in on the lucrative business of farming, his contract was periodically renewed, and it has been estimated that his own profits amounted to at least £48000 over the eighteen years he held the farm.<sup>10</sup> His success was also due to the fact that the customer had cultivated good relations with key members of the Elizabethan establishment; he was a leading creditor of among others, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester who seems to have dined with him regularly.<sup>11</sup>

The Customer and Alice had an unusually large family: there were six sons, one of whom died in infancy, and seven daughters. Smythe had the resources to ensure that they were well placed, the daughters receiving dowries of £1500, and the sons marrying at least five heiresses between them; three of the sons received knighthoods. Our Thomas, the second surviving son, was the only one to seek his fortunes in trade; his elder brother John was married off to a wealthy Kent heiress and set up at Ostenhanger; of his younger brothers Richard was established as a gentleman at Leeds Castle in Kent, and the black sheep of the family Henry at Corsham in Wiltshire, where the customer had been born; the youngest brothers, Robert and Simon were less

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<sup>10</sup> Lowe, 'Mr Customer Smythe'; G.D. Ramsay, *The City of London in International Politics at the Accession of Elizabeth Tudor* (Manchester, 1975), pp. 154-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1558-1561, 1584-6*, ed. S.L. Adams (Camden Society, fifth series, 6, 1995), pp. 114-5, 119, 334.

successful; the latter turned to soldiering and died on Essex's Cadiz expedition in 1596. The large dowries meant that the daughters made good marriages; the Smythes were nothing if not good networkers. Among our Thomas' brothers-in-law were the senior alderman, Sir Rowland Heyward, a top Exchequer official, Thomas Fanshawe, the Queen's remembrancer, and the lawyer Henry Fanshawe, who married his stepmother's younger sister. The Smythes were well plugged into the mercantile, legal, and governmental elites, and they had implanted themselves into county society.<sup>12</sup>

The genetic lottery however ensured that our Thomas was perhaps less fortunate in his dynastic plans. He married the daughter of Richard Culverwell, a leading London godly merchant (of whom more in a moment), but she died very soon after the marriage. He married again, first to another daughter of a London merchant family, but it was only the third marriage to Sarah, daughter of William Blount, a Gloucestershire gentleman living in London that produced an heir.<sup>13</sup> His only surviving son John proved a disappointment. In 1618 he went off on a newly fashionable European tour with his cousin, Thomas Smythe, heir to Sir John and a tutor or pedagogue, one Captain Brett, who seems to have been a corrupting rather than an improving influence. The cousin was not a good influence either, according to the gossip mongers, 'a more debauched youth every way I have not known for the time'.<sup>14</sup> Soon after his return from his travels, and apparently contaminated by these companions, the nineteen year old John eloped with Lady Isabella Rich, daughter of the earl of Warwick, with whom the boy's father was in dispute over the Rich family's privateering operations. Warwick's son had plundered an enormously wealthy ship belonging to the Mogul Emperor's mother, endangering the trade concessions the East India Company under Smythe's leadership had just secured.<sup>15</sup> There was a reconciliation between father and son, and Sir Thomas agreed to take the new couple in, promising £500 pa if they lived with him and another £300 pa if they lived elsewhere. But the marriage was tense. Isabella 'forgetting her late promise of

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<sup>12</sup> Lowe, 'Mr Customer Smythe'.

<sup>13</sup> Cokayne, *Lord Mayors and Sheriffs*, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. N. McClure (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1939), II.228.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 185-6; W.F. Craven, *The Dissolution of the Virginia Company* (Gloucester, Mass., 1964), pp. 83-4.

for better or worse in sickness and in health', abandoned her husband when he caught smallpox.<sup>16</sup> John recovered, but promptly decided on the advice of the sinister Brett to flee the country, travelling on someone else's passport. He wrote to his father explaining that 'the clamour of his creditors, the high state of expense he was fallen into, the unequal division of his maintenance, the avoiding of some company unfit for him, and the enabling him to live more providently hereafter had caused him to absent himself'.<sup>17</sup> Isabella now joined forces with her father-in-law (himself in 'great spleen') to have Brett clapped into prison.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps young John's promises of reformation bore fruit, for there is no sign of tension between father and son in Sir Thomas' will six years later in 1625. Smythe's charitable bequests amounted to nearly £5,000 (including a number of London properties as endowment), and there were substantial cash bequests to kin, but John received a third of the movables and half of the substantial landed property portfolio, which included Otford Park purchased from the earl of Leicester, and other properties in Bidborough, Tonbridge, Spelhurst, Pesnhurst, Cottington near Sandwich, and Lewisham in Kent, Halsetad in Essex and ? Ringingham in Yorkshire; the other half of the landed property went during her lifetime (with reversionary rights to John) to his widow Sarah who lived on until 1655. John Smythe was a substantially wealthy man.<sup>19</sup>

What was the significance of Sir Thomas' career? The period spanned by his life (1558-1625) witnessed a transformation in the patterns of overseas trade. When he was born, English trade was overwhelmingly concentrated on what has been called the London-Antwerp axis. Antwerp, taking advantage of its favourable position at the head of north-south river routes, and between the trading networks of French wines and Baltic naval stores, had established itself as the leading entrepot for goods from all over the known world; the decision of the Portuguese to use it as the outlet for the spice trade they controlled in the Far East ensured that it was a centre for the acquisition of the luxury commodities of the Far East. From the point of view of the London Merchant Adventurers, the main umbrella organisation for trade at this time, it was a simple matter of shipping cloth, England's staple export in exchange for a

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<sup>16</sup> *Chamberlain Letters*, II. 193-4, 208.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 255.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 265.

<sup>19</sup> The National Archives (hereafter TNA), PROB11/147, fos. 37v-42.

whole range of luxury goods, and raw materials. The result was an increasing concentration of overseas trade on London, from 70% to 88% of total between 1510 and 1550, and a sizeable expansion in cloth exports. These developments were major contributory factors in the take off in London's growth in this period. But it was on very shaky foundations. The English economy was dangerously dependent upon a single commodity, and cloth exports stagnated after a mid-century boom; the trade growth of the Elizabethan period was to be import-led. Worse still, England was dangerously dependent upon a single market, and one then controlled by a potentially hostile power, Habsburg Spain which had already embarked on a collision course with the Elizabethan regime.<sup>20</sup> As William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief minister put it in 1564, 'it were better for this realm ... that the commodities of the same were issued out rather to sundry places than to one, and specially such one as the lord thereof is of so great power'.<sup>21</sup> Commercial considerations were reinforced by strategic ones in the quest for new markets.

Already a number of London entrepreneurs had undertaken the quest for new routes to the riches of the east. In 1553 a group of Londoners, seeing 'the commodities of England to be in small request with the countries and people about us' sponsored an expedition under Richard Chancellor and Hugh Willoughby to find a north-eastern route to the east. They reached the White Sea, travelled overland to Moscow, and opened up a trade with Russia. The Muscovy Company received a charter from Mary Tudor in 1555: among its founder members were Sir Andrew Judd and Customer Smythe; Sir Thomas was also to cut his teeth on the Russian trade.<sup>22</sup> But the quest for new markets was really driven by extraneous developments. The Antwerp mart was destabilised by the civil wars in the Low Countries in the 1560s and 1570s, and the

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<sup>20</sup> I.W. Archer, 'The City of London: Court and Trade', in S. Doran (ed.), *Elizabeth. The Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum* (London, 2003), pp. 33-40; C. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1984), Vol. II, ch. 9; B. Dietz, 'Overseas Trade and Metropolitan Growth', in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500-1700. The Making of the Metropolis* (Harlow, 1986), pp. 115-40; idem, 'Antwerp and London: the Structure and Balance of Trade in the 1560s', in E.W. Ives et al. (eds.), *Wealth and Power in Tudor England* (London, 1978), pp. 186-203.

<sup>21</sup> *Tudor Economic Documents*, ed. R.H. Tawney and E. Power (3 vols., London, 1924), II.45.

<sup>22</sup> T.S. Willan, *The Muscovy Merchants of 1555* (Manchester, 1953); idem, *The Early History of the Russia Company* (Manchester, 1956).

Londoners had to seek out a new entrepot in Hamburg, but it now proved much harder to secure access to the rich Italian textiles and the oriental spices so much in demand among the Elizabethan elite. It was thus the rise in the price of imported goods which drove London's merchants into new areas. Taking advantage of the weakening of Venetian commerce during the 1570s, the Londoners established a presence in the western and central Mediterranean, from where they imported spices, pepper, dried fruit, wine, and silks. The next step was the penetration of the Turkish empire to secure access to the silks and spices of the east which came by an overland route, the Portuguese having failed to establish a full monopoly in the east. In 1578-9 two London merchants, Richard Staper and Edward Osborne sent William Harborne on a secret embassy to Sultan Murad III and secured commercial concessions. In 1581 the small group of merchants who traded there were incorporated as the Turkey Company, and in 1592 they merged with the fledgling Venice Company to form the Levant Company. Thomas Smythe junior may not have been in the front rank in these developments; he was never in the same league as men like Staper, and the other fat cat Levant merchants of the 1590s, John Spencer and Paul Bayning, but he was an investor in these trades and his organising talents were much appreciated; by 1600 he was a governor of both the Levant and Muscovy Companies.<sup>23</sup>

But it was in the next phase that Smythe was really to come into his own. English trading strategies had come to depend on the overland routes to the east. The Muscovy Company sought trade routes eastwards through Persia; the Levant Company depended on the overland routes via the Persian Gulf to Syria. But the flaws in this strategy became clear as the Dutch, taking advantage of Portuguese weakness in the east began to penetrate there. It was also clear that individual enterprise was too high risk in this sector: what Brangwyn's depiction of the heroic Lancaster expedition of 1591 occludes is the fact that the expedition was an utter disaster. It was becoming evident that the joint stock form of organisation was necessary in order to spread

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<sup>23</sup> T.S. Willan, 'Some Aspects of English Trade with the Levant in the Sixteenth Century', *English Historical Review*, 70:276 (1955), 399-410; A.C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (London, 1935), pp. 31, 205; Ian W. Archer, 'Staper, Richard (c.1540-1608)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, May 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49969>, accessed 24 Sept 2008]; idem, 'Bayning, Paul (c.1539-1616)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52003>, accessed 24 Sept 2008].

risks. Elizabeth was going to take some persuading, so she was subjected to a statistical offensive, probably coordinated by Smythe who seems to have had an in at court, demonstrating that the East India trade would be hugely lucrative to royal finances, always a clincher with the queen. The East India Company was granted its charter in 1600 and set forth its first trading voyage in 1601.<sup>24</sup>

Smythe was the first governor of the East India Company and although his service was interrupted as we shall see by his alleged complicity in the Essex rebellion, he resumed office in 1603 and continued except for a break in 1606-7 until 1621. His indispensability in the trade is shown by the Company's regular grants of rewards for his good services, as much as £500 or £800 a shot.<sup>25</sup> King James too was appreciative of Smythe's role. The launch of a new 1200 ton ship *Trades Increase* in 1609 was graced by the presence of James, Anne of Denmark, and Prince Henry. The king singled out Smythe for special honour in presenting him with 'a chain in the manner of a collar better than £200 with his picture hanging on it, and put it about his neck with his own hands'.<sup>26</sup>

That vignette reminds us just how close the ties between the crown and the city were. For all that James is supposed to have hated crowds, there were plenty of occasions such as this one where citizens and courtiers came together. The early modern monarchy appreciated just how much its finances depended on the flow of customs revenue, and the city's role as a supplier of credit both to the crown and its high spending courtiers meant that the worlds of city and court were closely intertwined. The crown also depended on London's merchant community to maintain an orderly capital, for London was essentially self-governing, its rulers selected from among the mercantile elite with markedly less royal interference than was the case in many continental cities. Smythe himself had embarked on a civic career ascending the usual ladder of offices: a captain of the trained bands from 1588, vestryman of St Alphage by 1594, a common councillor from 1595, and hospital governor in the 1590s, master

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<sup>24</sup> P. Lawson, *The East India Company. A History, 1600-1857* (London, 1993), ch.1; *The Dawn of British Trade to the East Indies as Recorded in the Court Minutes of the East India Company, 1599-1603*, ed. H. Stevens (London, 1886), pp. 3, m62, 275, 281.

<sup>25</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Colonial Series*, vols. II-III.

<sup>26</sup> *Chamberlain Letters*, I.292, 294.

of the Haberdashers' Company in 1599, alderman from 1599, and sheriff from October 1600.<sup>27</sup> He was elected member of parliament for Aylesbury in 1597, a seat which his father and brother had previously represented possibly through family connections with the Packingtons who were patrons of the borough.<sup>28</sup> His indispensability to the crown was demonstrated in his being appointed a trade commissioner to deal with the Dutch in 1596 and 1598. He was also a beneficiary of government contracting, acting as purveyor to Elizabeth's army in Ireland. His career, like that of just about every other London tycoon in this period, neatly encapsulates the symbiotic relationship between city and court.

But in February 1601 disaster struck, and Sir Thomas found himself imprisoned in the Tower of London for alleged involvement in the attempted coup d'état of Elizabeth's disgraced favourite, Robert Devereux earl of Essex. Essex had been confined to his house since his unauthorised return from Ireland in September 1599. He had been removed from all his offices except the mastership of the horse and in October 1600 the queen failed to renew his lease of the farm of sweet wines, thereby wrecking his finances, for Essex was the new style peer dependent on commercial concessions and royal offices rather than land. Prey to those who harped on the intolerable slights to his honour, fearful of moves against him by his enemies at court, notably Sir Walter Raleigh, Essex considered a pre-emptive strike, but fatally delayed. The Council seems to have got wind of his plans, and he was summoned to appear before them. Rather than obey, on the morning of Sunday 8 February the earl marched up the Strand through Ludgate into the city of London, at the head of a band of his half a dozen noble followers, 100 gentlemen, and their retinues, crying 'Murder, murder, God save the queen'; the earl claimed that his life was endangered and that the kingdom had been sold to the Infanta of Spain by certain atheists, meaning Raleigh.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> R.M. Benbow, 'Index of London Citizens Involved in City Government, 1558-1603', copy on deposit at Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, London.

<sup>28</sup> *House of Commons, 1558-1603*, III.406-8.

<sup>29</sup> The best analysis of the Essex rising remains M.E. James, 'At a Crossroads of the Political Culture: the Essex Revolt, 1601' in his *Society, Politics, and Culture. Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 416-65. ODNB.

And where did Essex go? To the house of Sheriff Smythe in Gracechurch Street who he had been led to believe would support him with 1000 men from the trained bands. The mayor, aldermen and sheriffs were disturbed at the sermon at St Paul's, and the Lord Mayor issued instructions that Smythe should seek to get the earl to yield and bring him to the Mayor's house. But Smythe found the earl outside his house. Essex seized the reins of the sheriff's bridle, and said 'You shall go with me and send for your company., and I will take the gates for the safety of the city'. Quite what the sheriff said at that point is disputed; some say he promised the earl aid, and told him to keep the streets (contrary to the lord mayor's instructions); and certainly the earl was able to take some arms from his house, though that does not prove Smythe's complicity. Smythe claimed he said that he had no troops to draw upon, that the city was in any case secure, and the gates well kept, so there was no threat to the earl's life, and therefore that he should surrender to the lord mayor. The earl countered, 'If you fear God, love the Queen, or care for religion, look to yourself'. Smythe then took advantage of the earl's apparent distraction – he was looking 'wildly up and down' - to make his escape. He then assisted the lord mayor in the pacification of the city, not joining his brother until 11 pm. London had remained loyal, but it must have been a pretty terrifying experience for the sheriff. The Queen was initially satisfied with his explanations, and thanked him for his service, but as the examinations of the conspirators mounted, the circumstantial evidence against Smythe mounted, and on 14 February he was put into custody with the archbishop of Canterbury, and later on 2 March sent to the Tower. He was stripped of the office of alderman and sheriff.<sup>30</sup>

What was going on here? Was Smythe a traitor? Why should Essex have expected the sheriff's support? Essex undoubtedly had a following in the city. Some members of its establishment had been prepared to support his plans for a more forward policy against Spain in the 1590s, undertaking to underwrite a campaign against Calais using the troops returning from the Cadiz expedition in 1596. He was the darling of a number of puritan preachers who identified him with the militant protestant foreign policy they so aggressively supported. He was also the idol of sections of the London

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<sup>30</sup> TNA, SP 12/278/45, 49, 50, 57, 58, 60; 279/7, 8, 9, 12, 30, 58, 75, 76. The most perspicacious treatment of Smythe's involvement is by D.H. Sacks, 'London's Dominion, the Market Economy and the State', in L.C. Orlin (ed.), *Material London, ca. 1600* (Philadelphia, 2000), pp. 28-34.

apprentices, who bought into his martial ethic, eagerly attending the tournaments of which he was a notable exponent; and the earl was not backward in feeding his ‘popularity’, with notorious acts of self-publicity.<sup>31</sup> We do not know what feelings Smythe harboured towards the earl. He may, as we shall see, have shared some of the sentiments of the militant protestants, and his own family’s political connections had been orientated towards the earl of Leicester who had previously been associated with these forward policies, and whose political heir Essex was. Essex undoubtedly had multiple ties to leading citizens who were prominent among his creditors, and he might have been persuaded of his continuing influence by his ability to promote clients in the East India Company (in which of course Smythe was prominent) as late as September 1600.<sup>32</sup> One of the charges against Smythe was that ‘my Lord desired him to remember his promise to send Mr Wootton the preacher to him’, suggesting that Anthony Wootton, lecturer at Allhallows Barking and one of the earl’s favoured chaplains was acting as an intermediary between the earl and his friends in the city; a few days before Giles Fletcher had told Smythe of rumours that Jesuits planned to murder the earl.<sup>33</sup> There undoubtedly was a febrile atmosphere in early 1601. But in his interrogation Smythe was to claim that he had ‘never spoken to him but once, and that was nine years ago’.<sup>34</sup> It seems, as the historian William Camden asserts, that Essex was relying on ‘other men’s speeches’, and the main responsibility seems to rest with Sir Henry Bromley, who, possibly at the instigation of Essex’s sister, Penelope Rich, tired of the earl’s procrastination, sent him a message from himself and Sir John Scott (Smythe’s brother in law) claiming that Smythe would give support.<sup>35</sup> The whole thing was delusional. Smythe did not command 1000 men; he

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<sup>31</sup> P.E.J. Hammer, ‘The Smiling Crocodile: the Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan “Popularity”’ in P. Lake and S.C.A. Pincus (eds.), *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 95-115; idem, ‘Myth-Making: Politics, Propaganda, and the Capture of Cadiz in 1596’, *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), 621-42; idem, ‘Upstaging the Queen: the Earl of Essex, Francis Bacon, and the Accession Day Celebrations of 1595’, in D. Bevington and P. Holbrook (eds.), *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 41-66; A. Hunt, ‘Tuning the Pulpits: the Religious Context of the Essex Revolt’, in L.A. Ferrell and P.E. McCullough (eds.), *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature, and History, 1600-1750* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 86-114.

<sup>32</sup> Sacks, ‘London’s Dominion’, pp. 31-2.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, SP12/278/57; 279/12.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, SP12/278/58.

<sup>35</sup> W. Camden, *Historie of Elizabeth Queene of England* (1630), p. 174; James, ‘Crossroads’, p. 174.

was captain of the Bishopsgate and Broad Street trained band with 100 pikemen and 200 musketeers.<sup>36</sup> Whatever sympathy Smythe may have had for the godly agenda that Essex in some of his protean self-representations stood for, it was inconceivable that he could support a challenge to the Elizabethan polity. Giles Fletcher, the city remembrancer, and a key Essex client, explained that obedience to the queen and council was required ‘for conscience sake’; although the earl had supporters among the aldermen, yet they ‘being faithful subjects and careful of their estates’, would never have supported ‘so desperate an attempt’.<sup>37</sup> As Mervyn James has put it ‘for the city, the Essexian role however glamorously heroic, was firmly contained within the ordered and religious framework of the realm; outside that framework, he could have no status or standing except that of traitor’.<sup>38</sup>

Smythe’s political rehabilitation began with the accession of James I. He resumed his position as governor of the east India Company, secured a knighthood from the king, and the aldermen offered to reinstate him though he declined. As a ‘religious and discreet gentleman ...likeliest to respect both his Majesty’s honour and the good of your trade’, he was sent on embassy to Russia in 1604-5. He was received in splendour by Tsar Boris Godonov, but any concessions he may have won were rapidly undermined by the tsar’s death and the Polish invasion to impose the crypto-catholic pretender, the false Dimitri. It was a sufficiently sensationalist embassy for it to be the subject of rival accounts on the bookstalls as soon as he returned.<sup>39</sup> Smythe’s general indispensability to the government was also apparent in his election to the 1604 parliament as MP for Dunwich; he sat also in 1614 and 1621 as MP for Sandwich and Saltash respectively. Although not a powerful speaker, he proved a workhorse on committees, especially those relating to trade. He served as commissioner for the navy in 1618 and on the treasury commission in the following year. His diplomatic skills were again called upon in the negotiations with the Dutch in 1619 as tensions in the East Indies mounted.<sup>40</sup> Smythe was back in the driving seat.

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<sup>36</sup> J.H. Leslie, ‘A Survey or Muster of the Armed and Trained Companies in London, 1588 and 1599’, *Journal of Army Historical Research*, 4 (1925), 62ff.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, SP12/279/12.

<sup>38</sup> James, ‘Crossroads’, p. 453.

<sup>39</sup> *Sir Thomas Smithes Voiage and Entertainment in Rushia* (1605).

<sup>40</sup> I have benefited from information contained in the entry on Smythe in the forthcoming History of Parliament volumes on *The House of Commons 1604-1629*,

There is an important dimension to Smythe's persona on which I have not yet touched. And that is religion. It will have become clear that the relations between Essex and the City of London are incomprehensible without an appreciation of the religious dimension of the City's sympathy for the earl. It is tempting to see the world view of the city tycoons of this period as determined only by profit, that religious observance simply provided a canting front for covetousness, 'the Londoners' sin as Henry Smith' silver tongued lecturer at St Clement Dane's described it. To the claim that usurers did good service in the city, the preacher William Fisher replied ' if you take him and look in his mouth, you shall see his teeth all gore blood with eating and devouring of needy debtors'.<sup>41</sup> But London was one of the success stories of the reformation, its leaders investing heavily in the building of a godly ministry through the provision of lectureships, schools, and university scholarships. Individual preachers formed close alliances with leading London merchants, and they were prepared to offer more positive evaluations of businessmen. Not only were merchants responsible for the exchange of necessary commodities, but 'by this trade we have gotten acquaintance with foreign nations and the kingdom of Christ enlarged, by this we have leagues of amity contracted with people of divers languages, by this we have gotten knowledge and experience in several sciences'.<sup>42</sup> It is through this rather different lens that I now want to view Smythe.

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and am grateful to the Director, Professor Paul Seaward for allowing m to read it in advance of publication.

<sup>41</sup> H. Smith, *Sermons* (London, 1591), p. 231; W. Fisher, *A Sermon at Paules Crosse* (London, 1580), sigs. 2r-v.

<sup>42</sup> R. Wilkinson, *The Merchant Royall. A Sermon Preached at Whitehall* (London, 1607), p. 17. For London and the reformation, see H.G. Owen, 'The London Parish Clergy in the Reign of Elizabeth I (University of London Ph.D., 1957); P. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: the Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford, 1970); D. Hickman, 'Religious Belief and Pious Practice Among London's Elizabethan Elite', *Historical Journal*, 42:4 (1999), 941-60; idem, 'From Catholic to Protestant: the Changing Meaning of Testamentary Religious Provisions in Elizabethan London', in N. Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation* (London, 1998), pp. 117-40; N. Tyacke, 'The Fortunes of English Puritanism, 1603-1640', in his *Aspects of English Protestantism, c. 1530-1700* (Manchester, 2001), esp. pp. 113-115; P. Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge; 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy', and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Manchester, 2001); I.W. Archer, 'The Charity of London Widows in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', in D.R. Woolf and N. Jones (eds.), *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 178-206.

His upbringing was profoundly godly. His father Customer Smythe's will of 1591 breathes the spirit of puritan religiosity, as he bequeathed his soul 'into the hands of my most gracious and merciful Lord God the father son and the holy ghost three persons and one almighty eternal and incomprehensible God being most certainly persuaded that my sins which be grievous and heavy are forgiven and my election sealed up in the only blood and merits of my lord and saviour Jesus Christ by whom and by no other means my redemption is made sure and certain according to the unspeakable love of God towards mankind in his eternal and unsearchable counsel and purpose before the foundations of the world were laid'. Historians are sometimes sceptical of will preambles as a guide to religious convictions, but in cases such as this a personal voice does come through. The message is reinforced by the customer's aversion to ceremonial excess: he eschewed 'such vain funeral pomp as the world by custom in time of darkness have long used', but rather I do desire that all superfluous cost may be spared and the same may rather be bestowed upon the poor'.<sup>43</sup> Smythe's mother Alice Judd drawing up her will two years later in 1593 was not so decisively calvinist in her preamble, but she records the themes of the interior decoration of the house at Westenhanger, mainly religious stories. There were two table cloths of the story of Judith and Holofernes, two of the Creation, another of the story of Daniel, and another of the Prodigal Son and coverlets depicting Susanna and the Elders, David and Abigail; the only secular themes were a coverlet of Paris and Helen of Troy and the otherwise obscure 'picture of the cookery'. And she leaves us in no doubt of her puritan credentials in her choice of favoured ministers, Richard Greenham, the moderate puritan lecturer of Christ Church in London (a position secured through the mediation of her kinsman Thomas Fanshawe), and the presbyterian fellow traveller, and lecturer at Lincoln's Inn, William Charke. She additionally left £10 apiece to ten 'other good preachers' and £200 in scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>44</sup> Smith junior was educated at Merchant Taylors' School where he came under the sway of that terrifying pedagogue, Richard Mulcaster, the 'plagosus orbilius' (the great flogger) whose pupils included the poet Edmund Spenser and Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Winchester, who may have overlapped

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<sup>43</sup> TNA, PROB11/78, fos. 179v-81.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, PROB11/91, fos. 324v-7.

with Smith.<sup>45</sup> This was probably about the best protestant education you could get in Elizabethan London.

Godly values were reinforced by marriage ties. Around 1586 the younger Smythe married Judith, the daughter of Richard Culverwell. The Culverwells were at the heart of the godly nexus in Elizabethan London and leading patrons of the international protestant cause. Richard Culverwell negotiated the land transaction that led to the foundation of that puritan seminary, Emmanuel College Cambridge; he was the key backer of the Presbyterians around John Field, and the bequests in his will of 1586 are a roll call of those ministers who were most consistently 'froward' in their opposition to the Elizabethan religious settlement.<sup>46</sup> To his daughter, Judith he bequeathed a chain of gold which had been given him by Jeanne d'Albret, queen of Navarre, as a 'remembrance of the honourable zeal of that good Queen which frankly gave that chain to me and many other her jewels of great value to others for the furtherance and defence of the gospel and such as sincerely profess the same'. The fate of the chain which Richard wanted Judith to transmit to a daughter is alas not known; she died very soon after her marriage to Thomas.<sup>47</sup>

These religious values powerfully shaped our subject's outlook. His own will may not be as assuredly Calvinist as his father's but it breathes a more than conventional protestant piety. 'I commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God to whom I render all my humble thanks for his infinite mercies and blessings bestowed upon me which are more in number than I am able to express especially for the death of his dear son my blessed Lord and only saviour Jesus Christ by whose death and passion I do assure myself of salvation and not by any merits of my own knowing and confessing that the best things that are in me are so far from perfection that they are polluted and defiled cloths and therefore must acknowledge the great and unspeakable

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<sup>45</sup> William Barker, 'Mulcaster, Richard (1531/2–1611)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19509, accessed 24 Sept 2008]; M. Davies and A. Saunders, *The History of the Merchant Taylors' Company* (London, 2007), pp. 122-4.

<sup>46</sup> Brett Usher, 'Culverwell family (*per. c.* 1545–*c.* 1640)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70079, accessed 24 Sept 2008].

<sup>47</sup> TNA, PROB11/69, fo. 71.

goodness of my merciful God the more towards me in giving me assurance of salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ'.<sup>48</sup> He remained loyal to his mother's favoured puritan William Charke, who described Smith in his will of 1617 as 'my dear landlord'. In 1619 Charke's son Ezechiel, another godly minister, edited the works of the fellow puritan Paul Baynes, dedicating the work to Smith, and expressing his desire 'not only to be thankful to you for myself, but much more for the many and great kindnesses a long time continued to my dear parents'. Smith was also the dedicatee of a work by Jonathan Negus, 'one of the worthies of Israel' according to Stephen Egerton. This work was brought to the press by Negus' son William who celebrated Smith's 'good affection and respect' for the father, and a generous allowance given to himself.<sup>49</sup> There are hints in Smith's pronouncements of that stern moralism that characterised puritans and so infuriated their opponents in its lack of compromise and its exasperating self-righteousness. When about to embark on his Russian embassy Smith addressed the sailors warning them of their need of God's mercy on the merciless seas. 'for the preservation of your own healths beware of drinking; for your profit, of gaming; for your ease of quarrelling; and for God's glory of swearing. All which oft times sea company makes men subject unto... In the name of God let us go on board'. Perhaps that was conventional enough, but there was another homily when they safely disembarked at Archangel. Now they had to avoid the vices to which their hosts were all too prone. 'Drunkenness is rather here a custom than a vice; yet themselves hate it in other. Be then conquerors.... Also whoring in this country is so common a sin as their eyes can soon observe it in strangers... abhor it as the most unnatural wickedness'.<sup>50</sup>

Smythe's support for the evangelical agenda is evident in the pattern of the charities he set up. He strengthened his grandfather's foundation at Tonbridge, by providing endowments to top up the salaries of the master and usher, to maintain 'the good education of the scholars of the said school in the fear of God and knowledge of good learning', and he provided £60 pa in six university scholarships, to given to pupils who had been at the school for at least three years who were most 'towardly and capable of learning', and 'whose parents of their own estates shall not be able to

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<sup>48</sup> TNA, PROB11/147, fos. 37v-42.

<sup>49</sup> Tyacke, 'Fortunes of English Puritanism', pp. 113-15.

<sup>50</sup> *Smithes Voiage*.

afford a competent yearly maintenance to their children'. The scholarships were to be held for seven years, provided that they remained resident in the university, and 'demean themselves civilly and honestly not misspending their time, but shall diligently apply themselves to their studies and principally to the study of divinity'. He expected high standards of the recipients of his bread charity. They were to be 'the poorest and most honest in their opinions' and none 'shall be made partakers of the said gift of bread but such as shall usually frequent the church to hear divine service and the preaching of God's word and shall receive the blessed sacrament of the Lords supper as the laws of this land do and shall appoint'. Smythe displayed the moralists' concern for the proper choreography of charitable largesse: the 24 recipients drawn from the parishes of Bidborough, Spelhurst, and Tonbridge were to present themselves at the parish church of Tonbridge before the Governors on their annual visitation in may, 'to praise God and to give thanks to the said Company of Skinners for their care and pains taken in the distribution of these my bequests amongst them. The recipients of his scholarships once ordained were expected to give thanks to God in their prayers before or after their sermons 'for his mercy towards them in the contribution of their benefactor for their maintenance, that thereby others may be excited and stirred up to do good and charitable works'.<sup>51</sup>

So, it looks as if the Smythes were part of that critical Calvinist leaven that remained within the Established church, but was uneasy about its ceremonial excesses, and determined to support a forward evangelical position. But religious arguments could also be used to foster the commercial enterprise. The most tireless advocate of overseas exploration and colonisation was Richard Hakluyt, son of a skinner, and ordained minister whose studies were supported by the Clothworkers' Company and who gathered together travellers' accounts in the vast compendium the *Principal Navigations*, first published in 1589 and revised in a much expanded format in 1598-1600.<sup>52</sup> In the *Discourse of Western Planting* he prepared in 1584, Hakluyt provided the ideological case for colonisation. He began with the claim that 'western discovery' would increase the number of protestants. Rather optimistically he asserted

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<sup>51</sup> TNA, PROB11/147, fos. 37v-42. For the context of charitable giving in London at this time, see I.W. Archer, 'The Charity of Early Modern Londoners', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 12 (2002), 223-44.

<sup>52</sup> Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise*.

that once the language had been mastered, one could ‘with discretion and mildness distil into their purged minds the sweet and lively lines of the gospel’. If the hordes of idolatrous mass priests sent by the Spanish had been able to achieve so much in the way of conversion, ‘what may we hope for in our true and sincere religion’, once a proper evangelisation programme was launched. There were commercial arguments for colonisation, but these too were linked to religion, for if English trades had become ‘beggarly or dangerous’ it was because they had been harassed by the catholic powers, who had forced the English overseas ‘to fling their bibles and prayer books into the sea’. The solution lay in developing colonies in North America, for between 30 and 34 degrees latitude the English would find everything they wanted. ‘I may well and truly conclude with reason and authority that all the commodities of our old decayed and dangerous trades in all Europe, Africa, and Asia’ could be obtained in America – but only if we moved fast.<sup>53</sup>

We have direct evidence from Hakluyt’s later years of his affinity for Smythe, for in 1614 the publicist dedicated his parallel text translation into English of Malayan dialogues to the merchant. Smythe was thanked for the lectures on navigation he had funded (possibly a reference to the lectures in applied mathematics that had begun in the house in Gracious Street in 1588, though these are usually associated with his father), for the ‘better instruction of our mariners in that most needful art’, and he was congratulated for his contribution to the organization of the East India trade, and his employment of ‘skilful mathematicians and geographers in the south and north parts of the world’.<sup>54</sup> But their association must predate 1614. Hakluyt, ‘the historiographer of the voyages of the East Indies’ had for example been called upon for advice by the

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<sup>53</sup> R. Hakluyt, *A Particular Discourse Concerninge the Greate Necessitie and Manifoldde Commodityes that are Lyke to Growe to this Realme of Englande by the Western Discoveries Lately Attempted*, ed. D.B. Quinn and A.M. Quinn, Hakluyt Society, extra series, 45 (London 1993), pp. 8-18, 23; Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise*, pp. 139-55.

<sup>54</sup> *Dialogues in the English and Malaian Languages: Or Certaine Common Formes of Speech, First Written in Latin, Malaian and Madagascar Tongues by Gotardus Arthurius* (London, 1614), sig. Q a r-v; Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise*, ch. 11. For the mathematical lectures, see *A Copie of the Speache Made by the Mathematicall Lecturer unto the Worshipfull Companye Present at the House of the Worshipfull Mr Thomas Smith Dwelling in Gracious Street, the 4 of November 1588* (1589); H. K. Higton, ‘Hood, Thomas (bap. 1556, d. 1620)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13680>, accessed 24 Sept 2008].

East India Company (of which Smythe was governor) on 29 January 1601 soon after its foundation, and there he read out of his notes and books ‘divers instructions for provision of jewels’.<sup>55</sup>

Hakluyt’s influence can also be seen in the harnessing of the protestant militants to the cause of Virginia. The Company commissioned a series of sermons which tied the project into England’s providential destiny. Those who refused to back the project were typical of the moral backsliders who merely encouraged God’s wrath to fall upon the English. The programme of evangelising the Indians justified the English presence: ‘our intrusion into their land shall tend to their great good’. The Indians were ripe for conversion, resembling the English before their own conversion. We cannot be certain that Smythe was the instigator of this preaching campaign, but it is consistent with pattern of his religious patronage we have identified. Among the bequests in his will was £100 for the building of churches in Bermuda and Virginia.<sup>56</sup>

But for all the heady optimism with which it was promoted, the colony signally failed to realise the hopes of its early investors. Probably £50,000 had been invested by 1616, but there was as yet no return. It was also an enormous consumer of human materiel. From 1609 to 1616 about 1,500 settlers had been sent out from England, but only 351 were left, ‘a small number’ as John Rolfe ruefully admitted ‘to advance so great a work’.<sup>57</sup> Londoners became increasingly cynical about the colony’s prospects. The ever sneering John Chamberlain noted in 1616 that ‘I hear not of any other riches or matter of worth, but only some quantity of sassafras, tobacco, pitch, and clapboard, things of no great value unless there were more plenty and nearer hand.... All I can learn of it is that the country is good to live in if it were stored of people, and might in time become commodious, but there is no present profit to be expected’.<sup>58</sup> And as for the task of evangelisation, Pocahontas’ conversion, although seen by the English as a

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<sup>55</sup> *The Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts*, ed. E.G.R. Taylor, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, second series, 76-77 (London, 1935), II.476-82; Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise*, pp. 237-43.

<sup>56</sup> R. Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London, 1609); A. Fitzmaurice, ‘The Civic Solution to the Crisis of English Colonization, 1609-1625’, *Historical Journal*, 42:1 (1999), 25-51; idem, ‘Every Man that Prints Adventures: the Rhetoric of the Virginia Company Sermons’, in *The English Sermon Revised*, pp. 24-42.

<sup>57</sup> Horn, *A Land as God Made it*, pp. 234-6.

<sup>58</sup> *Chamberlain Letters*, II. 12.

major vindication of their enterprise and a sign of a reconfiguration of relations with the natives, was in actual fact misinterpreted by them. The natives still remained deeply suspicious of the new settlers who they wanted to keep at arm's length, and rightly so.<sup>59</sup>

But how far was Smythe to blame for this state of affairs? He was rightly described as the 'primus moter' in the Virginia Company.<sup>60</sup> It was indeed his energy which lay behind the successive fund raising schemes, including the joint stock subscriptions at the relatively affordable £12.10s a share, and the later lotteries. Subscribers were invited to pay in their shares at his house in Philpott Lane; when new settlers with key skills were sought in 1609 they were told to report to Smythe's house, where they would be registered as adventurers.<sup>61</sup> It seems to have been Smythe's idea to sweep the streets of London clear of idle youths and ship them off to Virginia at a cost of £500.<sup>62</sup> He was closely involved in all the schemes for governance reform, including the revised charter arrangements of 1609 which allowed for the nomination of the governor in London, but reduced the power of the privy council over the council responsible for Virginia affairs. He was also, as his critics alleged, behind the new disciplinary code of 1612 which brought about conditions of near martial law in the colony.<sup>63</sup>

As we have seen criticism of him was vociferous. The lack of returns on their investment produced a great deal of resentment among the smaller investors, many of them lesser gentry from the provinces, who increasingly chafed at the dominance of the London tycoons. Others felt that the Company was not taking a sufficiently forward policy against Spain. Smythe's critics found spokesmen in Sir Edwin Sandys, a long standing member of the Jacobean awkward squad, and the earl of

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<sup>59</sup> Horn, *A Land as God Made it*, pp. 249-78; K.O. Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2007), pp. 261-71.

<sup>60</sup> *Records of The Virginia Company*, II.259.

<sup>61</sup> *By the Counsell of Virginea* (London, 1611); Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, pp. 242-3, 257, 259-60; Horn, *A Land as God Made it*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>62</sup> *Records of the Virginia Company*, I.270-1, 304-6; P.W. Coldham, *Emigrants in Chains. A Social History of Forced Emigration to the Americas* (Baltimore, Md., 1992), pp. 41-7.

<sup>63</sup> Horn, *A Land as God Made it*, pp. 134-6, 143, 196-7.

Southampton.<sup>64</sup> They demanded an audit of his accounts, and as it became clear that the process was going to be interminable, whether because of the complexity of the accounts, or blocking tactics by Smythe, in 1619 they executed the coup by which Smythe was eased from the treasurership and replaced by Sandys.<sup>65</sup> As the resolution of the accounts issue proved ever more elusive, and as the Sandys group themselves ran into difficulties, so the anti-Smythe rhetoric was cranked up to reach fever pitch in 1624, when it looked as if the government might hand control back to Smythe and his cronies.<sup>66</sup>

But what of the specific charges against him? It seems pretty clear that his standards of book-keeping were not up to scratch, and his critics may not have been wide of the mark when they suggested that he simply had too much on his plate. Smythe maintained an air of injured innocence throughout the lengthy audit, saying that if his critics could demonstrate where the short-fall lay, he would gladly pay up. He eventually agreed to settle for £800, but one suspects that had Sandys' group not been so doggedly uncompromising, a settlement might have been more quickly achieved.<sup>67</sup>

There is no doubt that the Company's expectations of the early colony were out of touch with reality. Captain John Smith, returning to England in 1609, almost immediately criticised the foolish assumptions that easy profits could be made. This was to be no cake walk. In what was perhaps palpable hit at Smythe whose early experience was with the Russia trades, Smith explained that 'though your factors there [in Russia] can buy as much in a week as will fraught you a ship, or as much as you may please; you must not expect from us any such matter, which are but a many of ignorant miserable souls. That are scare able to get wherewithal to live, and defend ourselves against the inconstant savages: finding here and there a tree fit for the purpose, and want all things else the Russians have'.<sup>68</sup> An air of unreality pervades so many of the exchanges, particularly as the London company developed all kinds of

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<sup>64</sup> Craven, *Dissolution*, pp. 25-28, 127-35; T.K. Rabb, *Jacobean Gentleman: Sir Edwin Sandys, 1561-1629* (Princeton, 1998)

<sup>65</sup> Craven, *Dissolution*, pp. 41-4, 81-8.

<sup>66</sup> Craven, *Dissolution*, pp. 105-12; *Sir Thomas Smith's Misgovernment*.

<sup>67</sup> *Records of the Virginia Company*, II.506-7; Craven, *Dissolution*, pp. 106-12.

<sup>68</sup> *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. P.L. Barbour (3 vols., Chapel Hill 1986), I. 143-77.

implausible schemes for fostering manufactures in Virginia. Karen Kupperman has recently commented that ‘the transatlantic correspondence has the quality of people shouting past each other’.<sup>69</sup> Or, to quote John Smith reflecting on the experience of the colony towards the end of his life: the company thought ‘an egg shell had been sufficient against such enemies’.<sup>70</sup>

The main reason for exonerating Smythe from the charges against him is that it is not clear that in the early years there really were any alternative policies. Planting was tough, and casualties were inevitable; Hakluyt knew that. The capital raised probably was insufficient to the task: the £50000 invested between 1609 and 1616 compares with the £70000 subscribed for the first East India Company voyage, but Smythe seems to have been pretty inventive in securing investment, not least through the sustained propaganda campaign.<sup>71</sup> Securing emigrants for such a clearly struggling enterprise was bound to be difficult, but if the colonists were struggling it was because of the environmental crisis the whole region was undergoing. Recent work has tended to stress the very serious food shortages being faced by the whole eastern American seaboard in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, probably by the onslaught of a little ice age, global cooling. It is not insignificant that the first colonists complained of a miserable winter in 1608-9 at the same time that River Thames froze over. The early colonists were dependent on food supplies from the Algonquin, but they lacked the required surpluses, and conflict over resources was inevitable from the beginning. There is no more telling demonstration of the significance of food to relations between the two clashing cultures than the stories that when the natives had killed English settlers they stuffed their mouths full of bread. The English had come to seek gold; their fate was that in the end they were more desperate for bread.<sup>72</sup>

Smythe was indeed responsible for the martial law regime that developed under Sir Tomas Dale in 1611-12, but it seems to have been widely supported. Ralph Hamor wrote that only strict enforcement could have saved the colony. ‘So Sir Thomas Dale

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<sup>69</sup> Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, p. 302.

<sup>70</sup> *Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, III.271.

<sup>71</sup> Horn, *A Land as God Made it*, p. 232.

<sup>72</sup> Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, pp. 159-82, 223-5.

hath not been tyrannous or severe at all'.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, there is little sign that Smythe disagreed with the reforms in government that were instituted in 1618 while he was still treasurer. As the situation stabilised, so it was possible to offer the colonists more say over their own affairs in the form of the general assembly. Differences of personality rather than disagreements over the constitution lay at the heart of the clashes between Sandys and Smythe.<sup>74</sup>

It is true that the foundations for the economic future of the colony were being laid even as Sandys and Smythe slugged it out in the company courts in London. Tobacco cultivation was rapidly expanding, so that 60000 lbs were exported in 1622. The colonists had been critical of the company for its insistence on all kinds of impractical economic schemes, and its reluctance to endorse tobacco cultivation. But if this was a blind spot for Smythe, so too was it for the Sandys group. Criticism of concentration on tobacco and neglect of other industries had ironically been a major plank of their policy.<sup>75</sup>

Smythe must have derived a grim satisfaction from the difficulties that the Sandys group got into. There was a huge drive to increase the flow of migrants: possibly 4000 arrived in the late 1610s and early 1620s, but in 1624 the population still stuck at 1000.<sup>76</sup> Relations with the Algonquin had deteriorated to the extent that there was a major massacre of the settlers in 1622. But the response of the Company leadership, that it had been brought on by God as a punishment for their immoderate apparel, shows that Sandys' men could be just as remote from the situation on the ground as Smythe had ever been.<sup>77</sup> Governor Wyatt commented on the 'antipathy' between the company's 'vast commands and our grumbling obedience'.<sup>78</sup> Nathaniel Butler visiting the colony in 1622 on behalf of his patron the earl of Warwick wrote a damning

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<sup>73</sup> R. Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia* (London, 1615), pp. 27-8; Horn, *A Land as God Made it*, pp. 196-7, 210-11; Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, pp. 257-60.

<sup>74</sup> Craven, *Dissolution*, 66-9.

<sup>75</sup> Horn, *A land as God Made it*, pp. 232-4, 246-7, 280, 283-4; Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, p. 297.

<sup>76</sup> Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, pp. 310-11.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 304-10.

<sup>78</sup> *Records of the Virginia Company*, II.236-8.

report, 'The Unmasked Face of our Colony in Virginia' which exposed the hollow claims of Sandys and his allies.<sup>79</sup> It was another of the delicious ironies of this conflict that the temporary alliance between Warwick and Sandys which had leveraged Smythe's removal in 1619, collapsed almost immediately as Sandys clashed with Warwick over his desire to use Virginia as a base for privateering operations against the Spanish. The result was a renversement des alliances which pitched Smythe and the big London merchants against Sandys. Meanwhile the company rank and file were horrified by the revelation that Sandys and his deputy John Ferrar had awarded themselves huge salaries out of company funds for the administration of the tobacco contract. The recriminations between the competing groups positively invited royal intervention, and the result was the dissolution of the Company and the defeat of Sandys in May 1624.<sup>80</sup>

Smythe was dead less than two years later. Like most biographically orientated accounts, this one has run the risk of over-identification with its subject. London merchant figures in this period are an elusive quarry. It is striking that Smythe's adversary Sandys has a full length biography, but Smythe does not, although the materials are probably there to write one. I have concentrated on Smythe as the pioneer of a global network of trade centred on London, but there are other angles one could pursue. Smythe's place in the intellectual life of early modern London is worth thinking about. He can be seen as a patron of applied science. Not only did he sponsor Hood's mathematical lectures, but he was also the dedicatee of John Woodhall's treatise on naval surgery.<sup>81</sup> Just what kind of house did he preside over? By the 1610s his mansion in Philpot Lane was thronged with the investors in the Virginia Company and prospective colonists, who would also have seen the city tycoons who ran the trading companies whose boards met under his roof. What did they make of the exotica of international travel, like the Inuit canoe suspended from the ceiling of the great hall? And what kind of colonial encounters took place in the exchanges between the English visitors, and the Hottentot and native Americans receiving instruction? We can but speculate, but the evidence puts Smythe among London's thirsters for knowledge and seekers after curiosity.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., II.374-6.

<sup>80</sup> Craven, *Dissolution*, chs. 9-10; *Sir Thomas Smith's Misgovernment*, pp. xviii-xx.

<sup>81</sup> J. Woodhall, *The Surgion's Mate* (London, 1617); *A Copie of a Speache*.

