GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

History without historiography is a contradiction in terms. The study of the past cannot be separated from a linked investigation of its practitioners and intermediaries. No historian writes in isolation from the work of his or her predecessors, nor can the commentator – however clinically objective or professional – stand aloof from the insistent pressures, priorities and demands of the ever-changing present. In truth there are no self-contained, impregnable, academic ‘ivory towers’. Historians are porous beings. Their writings are an extension of who they are and where they are placed. Though historians address the past as their subject they always do so in ways that are shaped – consciously or unconsciously as the case may be – by the society, cultural ethos, politics and systems of their own day, and they communicate their findings in ways which are specifically intelligible and relevant to a present-minded reading public consisting initially of their own contemporaries. For these reasons the study of history is concerned most fundamentally not with dead facts and sterile, permanent verdicts but with highly charged dialogues, disagreements, controversies and shifting centres of interest among its presenters, with the changing methodologies and discourse of the subject over time and with audience reception. *Issues in Historiography* is a series designed to explore such issues by means of case studies of key moments in world history and the interpretations, reinterpretations, debates and disagreements they have engendered.

Rosemary O'Day's subject is a neat fit for this series since the sixteenth-century English Reformation and its break with Rome, by definition, was grounded in controversy from the outset. Religion and politics, too, from the start were inextricably blended and continued to be so once a new Protestant state church came into being as a result of successive improvisations. The Reformation, moreover, was at one and the same time both a rejection of the past – or at least a particular version of the past – and stridently historical in its own new self-fashioning. John Foxe's bold, assertive and resoundingly successful *Acts and Monuments*, first published in English in 1563 and many times reprinted and enlarged, claimed to put the record straight and

achieved quasi-biblical status in its own right. It rapidly established itself as a landmark text which did much to define the confident ethos of the new nation-state. In different ways Peter Heylyn and Thomas Fuller contributed significantly, if less monumentally, in the seventeenth century to the growing Protestant historiography of the English Reformation. So, later, in the eighteenth century did Bishop Gilbert Burnet and John Strype. However, in this field, as in others, the nineteenth century had a particular importance as concerns about the Reformation past became bound up with contemporary debates on Catholic Emancipation and the Oxford Movement. Though this was an age in which the uncompromisingly Protestant Whig Interpretation of History ruled the roost, influential Roman Catholic historians like John Milner and John Lingard also had their say. Nor, as O'Day makes clear, did the development of a more secure academic foundation for the study of history in the universities towards the end of the century automatically lead to objectivity, calm and consensus. Bound up as it was with national identity, the relationship between religion and politics, and with continuities and discontinuities, the English Reformation was a subject which still mattered to different generations of contemporaries; the battleground simply shifted site. A.F. Pollard, A.G. Dickens, G.R. Elton, Patrick Collinson, Christopher Haigh, Eamon Duffy and others took up different positions, brought new perspectives to bear and re-examined the chronology of the English Reformation. Reflecting changes in the academy itself the debate on the English Reformation also moved into new areas – social history and local history, for example. Nor, in recent times as in earlier ones, did historians practise their subject in a hermetically sealed compartment. Postmodernism, feminism and reception theory now impacted on Reformation studies from the outside. Revealingly also, just as the axe-grinding, journalistic William Cobbett in the early nineteenth century had demonstrated that there was a popular market for English Reformation history, so in the second half of the twentieth century, as O'Day's Chapter 9 makes clear, this has proved to be a subject which has exercised an apparently unending fascination for biographers, novelists, film-makers and television producers.

Appropriately for this *Issues* series, which is predicated on the

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belief that the study of history is anything but dry, dead and dusty, O'Day's fascinating survey is brought right up to date. It is a long overdue, and much needed, revised edition of a text first published in 1986. It shows that without doubt the long debate on the English Reformation still loudly resonates today in both academic and wider, cultural contexts, not to mention in current discussions of the Anglican Church and, even, of this country's place in the European community. Students and those who teach them are bound to welcome this informative and cogent guide to its complexities.

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