

NEH Application Cover Sheet (FA-252104)

Fellowships for University Teachers

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INSTITUTION

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APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *Queen Elizabeth I, Robert earl of Essex and the politics of the English royal succession, 1598-1603*

Grant period: From 2017-08-15 to 2018-05-15

Project field(s): British History; Political History

Description of project: This project challenges the accepted understanding of how James VI of Scotland was able to succeed Elizabeth I on the English throne in 1603, thereby transforming Tudor England into Stuart Britain. Using an unprecedented range of original sources, it offers a radically new appraisal of the political significance of Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, and of the 'Essex Rising' which resulted in his execution in 1601. Building on this foundation, it outlines a new political narrative for the period 1598-1603, setting English events within a broader British context and revealing a 'secret history' of James's path to the English crown. Methodologically, this project breaks new ground in early modern British history by the quantity and richness of its archival sources, its commitment to reading all key documents in their original manuscript form, and its extensive use of literary sources. The project's chief outcome will be the completion of a large monograph entitled *The Hunted Hart*.

REFERENCE LETTERS

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NEH Supplemental Information for Individuals

This form should be used by applicants to the NEH Fellowships, Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan, Awards for Faculty, and Summer Stipends Programs.

Field of Project:

Field of Project #2:

Field of Project #3:

Project Director Field of Study:

The mailing address provided on the SF 424-Individual is for your work home

Institutional Affiliation

Are you affiliated with an institution? (If yes, provide information below.) Yes No

Institution Name:

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City:

County:

State:

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DUNS Number:

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Status: Senior Scholar Junior Scholar

Reference Letters

Reference 1

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Department Name:

Institution:

Reference 2

First Name:

Last Name:

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Nominating Official (Summer Stipends Applicants Only)

Are you exempt from nomination? If not, provide information below. Yes No

First Name:

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Queen Elizabeth I, Robert earl of Essex and the politics of the English royal succession, 1598-1603

The peaceful accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603 marked the end of Tudor England and inaugurated the union of crowns of England, Scotland and Ireland which constituted Stuart Britain. It was the first time in English history that one royal dynasty had replaced another without violence. James's accession in England was also consequence of Elizabeth I's famous failure to marry—the first adult English sovereign to do so since William II in the 11th century. Over a reign of almost 45 years, the Virgin Queen steadfastly refused even to name an heir, forcing her councillors and subjects to endure decades of uncertainty about the realm's political future. With several plausible claimants to the throne (including the king of Spain and his daughter), there was widespread expectation of civil war, even foreign invasion, over the succession. A peaceful succession seemed to be a very unlikely outcome.

The story of how James VI also became James I of England has been much studied over the centuries and seems well established. After years of being kept on tenterhooks by Elizabeth, James finally established a covert alliance in 1601 with Sir Robert Cecil, Elizabeth's principal secretary of state. This soon ensured that all of the queen's council secretly supported James's succession, even though the king's dynastic claim contravened Henry VIII's Third Succession Act of 1544. Rival contenders were quietly frozen out. Elizabeth herself perhaps facilitated the process by turning a blind eye to the 'secret correspondence' between Cecil and his allies and Scotland. When the queen fell ill in March 1603, Cecil served as Robert the kingmaker and was duly rewarded with offices and titles by a grateful king.

Histories both academic and popular underline Cecil's political virtuosity in 1601-3 by contrasting his conduct with the alleged 'rashness' of James's previous secret ally in England, Robert Devereux, 2nd earl of Essex. According to this view, Essex was 'brilliant', much favored by Elizabeth, adored by the masses, but 'unstable', 'paranoid' enough to see Cecil as an enemy and ultimately self-destructive. Above all, Essex's failings are deemed to be proven beyond any doubt by the so-called Essex Rising of 8 February 1601, when he and a few dozen followers blundered through the streets of London for several hours before being proclaimed as rebels, chased back to his Thames-side mansion and forced to surrender at cannon-point. Essex was swiftly condemned as a traitor and beheaded on 25 February. In the wake of Essex's 'madcap' rebellion, James supposedly heaved a sigh of relief that he had not trusted Essex too far and wisely transferred his political hopes into Cecil's capable hands.

My project challenges this accepted narrative. I argue that the standard account of James's succession in 1603 is strikingly incomplete and wrong in many details. Even the latest and best treatment of the Elizabethan succession, a superb collection of essays edited by Doran and Kewes, bears an obvious Essex-shaped hole in its account of the subject. Recent publications on Essex himself, which build upon my own earlier work, also fail to grasp the true nature and broader significance of his political defeat.

At its core, my project offers a radically new interpretation of the Essex Rising and the arraignments which followed. This, in turn, compels a much broader re-consideration of the politics of Elizabeth's final years and James's accession, resulting in a detailed new political narrative for 1598-1603. This project begins by questioning basic assumptions about the end of Elizabeth's reign, such as the idea that Essex was inevitably doomed to failure and that Elizabeth allowed emotion to cloud her judgement by permitting him sustained political influence. This approach echoes that adopted in my own earlier work which overturned the old verities about Essex and reshaped scholarship on Elizabethan politics and political culture 1585-1597. My new project also consciously expands the geographical focus beyond England to argue that the interplay of events in England, Scotland and Ireland constituted a genuinely 'British' politics in these years. It recognizes that 'British' politics also occurred within a wider European political context—the Spanish, French and Dutch were key players in these events. The project also reflects a radical expansion in the quantity and nature of contemporary sources used for the study of Elizabethan history. In addition to using an unprecedented range of original archival materials, I draw upon numerous literary works from these years. This reflects the fact that Elizabeth's ban on the public discussion of the succession forced her subjects to grapple with this subject indirectly, through poems, plays and histories. Verse written by Essex himself (edited by Steven May) and works by writers such as Spenser, Hayward, Harington, Jonson, Daniel, Davison and, above all, Shakespeare are integrated into my

narrative. I demonstrated how this can be done in my 2008 article about how friends of Essex hired Shakespeare's company to perform *Richard II* on what turned out to be the day before the Essex Rising.

In his superb long article on Elizabeth I in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), Patrick Collinson exemplifies the current understanding of the Essex Rising by terming it 'an almost farcical putsch'. Public declarations by Elizabeth's regime in the wake of the Rising certainly asserted that Essex had attempted a rebellion. Yet the Rising was not a bungled coup. In fact, it was a hastily improvised response to reports that enemies of Essex were about to launch an armed assault on his house. Essex went into London to seek protection from the City authorities and carried a petition for the lord mayor to present to the queen on his behalf. Indeed, he went on foot and only lightly armed purposely to allay fears about his intentions. However, the report which triggered the chaotic events of the Rising was a 'trick' (as Sir Walter Raleigh later admitted) concocted by the earl's enemies at Court. These same rivals subsequently deployed the machinery of government against Essex and framed his actions in terms of rebellion and treason. They also pressured Elizabeth to proceed with his execution—a decision which she later bitterly regretted.

Essex's fate demonstrates the power of deliberate misinformation in politics. This is a phenomenon which scholars of early modern British history are only beginning to assimilate, as seen in the new book by Bellany and Cogswell on the alleged 'murder of James I'. Unlike in this latter case, however, the misinformation targeted against Essex emanated from within the royal Court itself. Essex's loss of control over his own public image after 1598 and the propaganda surrounding his trial also speak to larger issues about the manipulation of political information, both for various domestic and foreign 'publics' and for Elizabeth herself. This is a topic on which Peter Lake has done outstanding work, most recently in *Bad Queen Bess?*, which traces 'secret histories' in the nexus of religion and the 'politics of publicity' in Elizabeth's reign before 1595. My reinterpretation of the Essex Rising opens up a very different 'secret history' for the final years of the reign, albeit one which clearly connects to Lake's work.

The destruction of Essex in early 1601 was the climax of a barely disguised political struggle within Elizabeth's Court which extended back to at least 1598. The overt object of this conflict was to dominate the queen's favor and secure influence over royal policy (especially the vexed question of peace with Spain). The underlying cause, however, was the great unmentionable issue of the succession. Essex's semi-secret alliance with James VI meant the earl's rivals felt threatened by his expected role as England's future kingmaker and responded both by cultivating other potential claimants to the throne and by seeking to undermine Essex's ties with James. In 1599, such insinuations about Essex's potential kingmaker status helped to cripple his military expedition to Ireland and poisoned his relationship with Elizabeth. By 1601, Essex was determined to strike back. In alliance with James, he planned to present Elizabeth with evidence of treason against his enemies. Materials drawn from both English and Scottish archives show that James was far more committed to this plan than has previously been recognized. James's tardiness, however, prompted Essex to begin preparing a coup for mid-February. Evidence about these plans was subsequently used by the crown's lawyers to mischaracterize the events of 8 February, masking all mention of James to ensure that his claim was not legally debarred by the 1584 Act for the Safety of the Queen. Essex's death ensured James had to cooperate with the earl's former rivals. Nevertheless, when James became king of England in 1603, there was a reckoning for what had happened to Essex. Within months of his accession, three of Essex's most prominent enemies were charged for treason, with Cecil (the most likely perpetrator of the 'trick') overseeing the condemnation of his former allies. Remarkably, the means by which the latter were brought down precisely matched the blueprint for their destruction which Lord Henry Howard had secretly outlined to Cecil in 1602: Essex was not the only target of lethal political misinformation in these years.

This dramatically new narrative is based upon manuscripts drawn from 32 separate archives located in the UK, US and Europe. Instead of relying upon printed calendars of documents, as earlier scholars did, I committed myself to reading every significant document in its original form. Although it greatly increased my workload, this step-change from previous scholarly practice led me to re-date key documents, track scribal annotations, connect papers now held in different archives, and read what Essex and his contemporaries actually wrote, rather than summaries created by 19th or 20th century editors. I

also read many sources which earlier scholars ignored, such as the dozens of scribal copies of accounts of Essex's trial. Some of these apparently mundane documents turned out to be Essexian propaganda circulated in the guise of simple reportage, with Essex portrayed as a political martyr figure and his prosecutors cast as the 'real' traitors. Such documents emphasize that the political struggle of 1598-1603 was waged within what Peter Lake and Steve Pincus have defined as a nascent 'public sphere'.

If I am fortunate enough to win an NEH fellowship, I will complete the monograph which will be the major outcome of this project: *The Hunted Hart: Robert Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth I and the Politics of Treason in Shakespeare's Britain*. The book's title is taken from Essex's heraldic badge, the stag or hart, and is intended to signpost the strongly allusive nature of Elizabethan political culture. Although Essex and his enemies were invoked in many different guises, writers of this period most frequently alluded to the earl as a h(e)art or the classical figure of Actaeon—the mortal who was turned into a stag and torn to pieces by his own hounds (in Ovid's version) for accidentally glimpsing the nakedness of the virgin goddess Diana. The latter's association with Elizabeth will be obvious.

The book has eight chapters, in addition to a Preface, Introduction and Conclusion. The Preface opens with Essex walking to his execution, before breaking off to describe an official sermon which denounced him in scathing terms on the Sunday following his death. This is contrasted with a copy of the same sermon contained in a remarkable and previously unknown Cambridge manuscript, where the preacher's criticisms of Essex are repeatedly condemned in marginal comments by the copyist. This alerts readers to the intense contemporary debate about Essex's fate, which the crown sought to suppress and current scholarship has almost entirely ignored. The Introduction briefly surveys English politics in the mid-1590s, drawing upon my 1999 book, which discusses this period in great detail. The Introduction also explores the hostile dedication to Essex of a notorious Catholic tract on the succession, the 'Doleman' book. This made Essex a political target—the hunted hart—by openly declaring him to be England's natural kingmaker. The book also predicted that Elizabeth's refusal to address the succession *must* result in violence: 'this affair cannot possibly be ended...without some war' (Book II, 197). This expectation of civil strife forms the background for the narrative of events between 1598 and the end of 1603 which are detailed in the book's eight substantive chapters. These chapters run chronologically, as follows: One (1598-March 1599), Two (March-Oct. 1599), Three (Oct. 1599-Aug. 1600), Four (Aug-Dec. 1600), Five (Jan 1601), Six (the Rising), Seven (9 Feb-March 1601) and Eight (April 1601-Dec 1603).

Although simple, this chronological approach is purposeful and powerful because it supports a detailed and strikingly new narrative for the closing years of Elizabeth's reign. It also brings together many events which have not previously been connected by scholars. The academic stove-piping of English and Irish history, for example, means scholars have failed to recognize that Elizabethan England almost stumbled into open civil war in August 1599! Despite the impressive work of H. G. Stafford in the 1930s, there also remains a surprising lack of scholarly attention to the interconnectedness of events in England and Scotland. My narrative directly addresses these failings, while also acknowledging Scottish ties to Ireland and the involvement of Continental powers in these 'British politics'.

Thanks to residential library fellowships in 2006-7 and 2013-14, all of my research for this project is completed. I currently have the equivalent of two chapters of *The Hunted Hart* in draft (all of Chapter Five and parts of several other chapters). I plan to draft Chapters Six and Seven over the coming summer, ensuring that I will be able to finish the whole book within the term of a fellowship.

I believe this book will interest general readers as well as students and fellow scholars. For the general reader, the book offers radically new perspectives on iconic figures in a famous period of British history, especially Elizabeth I and Shakespeare. For scholars of English Renaissance literature, my work illuminates the political resonances of specific texts. More importantly, my detailed new account of political events, and the political culture which they reflect, opens the way for nothing less than a major re-contextualization of literature in this period. For historians of early modern Britain, *The Hunted Hart* raises the bar for intensive archival study, while also integrating a substantial body of literary source materials and offering a case study in 'secret histories' and overtly 'British' politics. In short, my aim is to write this book in a way which honors the extraordinary richness of my material and which fully reveals, for the first time, why the events of 1598-1603 were so consequential for British history.

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Resumé: Paul Hammer NEH 2016

Employment:

Aug. 2008- Professor of History, University of Colorado at Boulder

Past Employment:

Jan. 2003-Aug. 2008: Lecturer (later Senior Lecturer) in History, University of St Andrews, Scotland

June 1999-Dec. 2002: Australian Research Council Australian Research Fellow, University of Adelaide, Australia

Feb. 1992-June 1999: Lecturer (later Senior Lecturer) in History, University of New England, Australia

Education:

PhD, University of Cambridge, UK, 1991 (dissertation advisor: Sir Geoffrey Elton)

MA (First Class Hons), University of Auckland, New Zealand, 1987

BA, University of Auckland, New Zealand, 1985

Languages: reading ability in French and Latin; rudimentary reading ability in Spanish

Awards and Honors (selected):

Aug. 2013-May 2014: Fletcher Jones Foundation Fellow, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA

April 2009: Thirty-Fifth Savage Memorial Lecturer, University of Mississippi

Sept. 2006-June 2007: Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Research Fellow, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC

1998: Roma Gill Prize for the best scholarly work on Christopher Marlowe, 1996-97, awarded by the Marlowe Society of America for 'A reckoning reframed' (1996)

1997: Elected Fellow of Royal Historical Society, UK

Jan-Oct. 1997: Leverhulme Trust Visiting Fellowship in History, Birkbeck College, London

1995: Australian Academy of the Humanities Travelling Fellowship

Publications (selected items):

Books:

2003: *Elizabeth's wars: society, government and society in Tudor England, 1544-1604*, Palgrave Macmillan Press, xiv+310pp.

1999: *The polarisation of Elizabethan politics: the political career of Robert Devereux, 2nd earl of Essex, 1585-1597*, Cambridge University Press, xviii+446pp. [paperback edition 2005]

Edited Books:

2007: *Warfare in Early Modern Europe, 1450-1660*, edited volume for Ashgate Publishing, xxxix+466pp.; 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, pp. xi-xxxix

Textual Editing:

2014: Materials relating to the earl of Essex for *Court and Culture in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Critical Edition of John Nichols' The Progresses of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Archer, Elizabeth Clarke, Elizabeth Goldring, Oxford University Press, 5 vols.

vol. 3: 862-77; vol. 4: 70-8, 82-7, 90, 117-20, 151-61.

2005: 'Section A: Essex, Raleigh and late-Elizabethan politics' for *Early Stuart Libels* online (<http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/index.html>).

2003: 'Letters from Sir Robert Cecil to Sir Christopher Hatton, 1590-91' in *Religion, politics, and society in sixteenth-century England*, ed. Ian W. Archer et al., Cambridge University Press, (Camden Society, 5th series, vol. 22: Camden Miscellany XXXVI), 197-267.

Articles and Essays:

2016: 'The earl of Essex', in *The Oxford Companion to the Age of Shakespeare*, ed. Malcolm Smuts, Oxford University Press, forthcoming (8000 words)

2016: 'Lord Henry Howard, William Temple and the earl of Essex', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 79:1, 41-62.

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- 2004:** 15 articles, totalling over 26,000 words for *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, including 'Devereux, Robert, 2nd earl of Essex (1565-1601)' (15,500 words).
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- 1997:** 'Myth-making: politics, propaganda and the capture of Cadiz in 1596', *Historical Journal*, 40:3, 621-42.
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